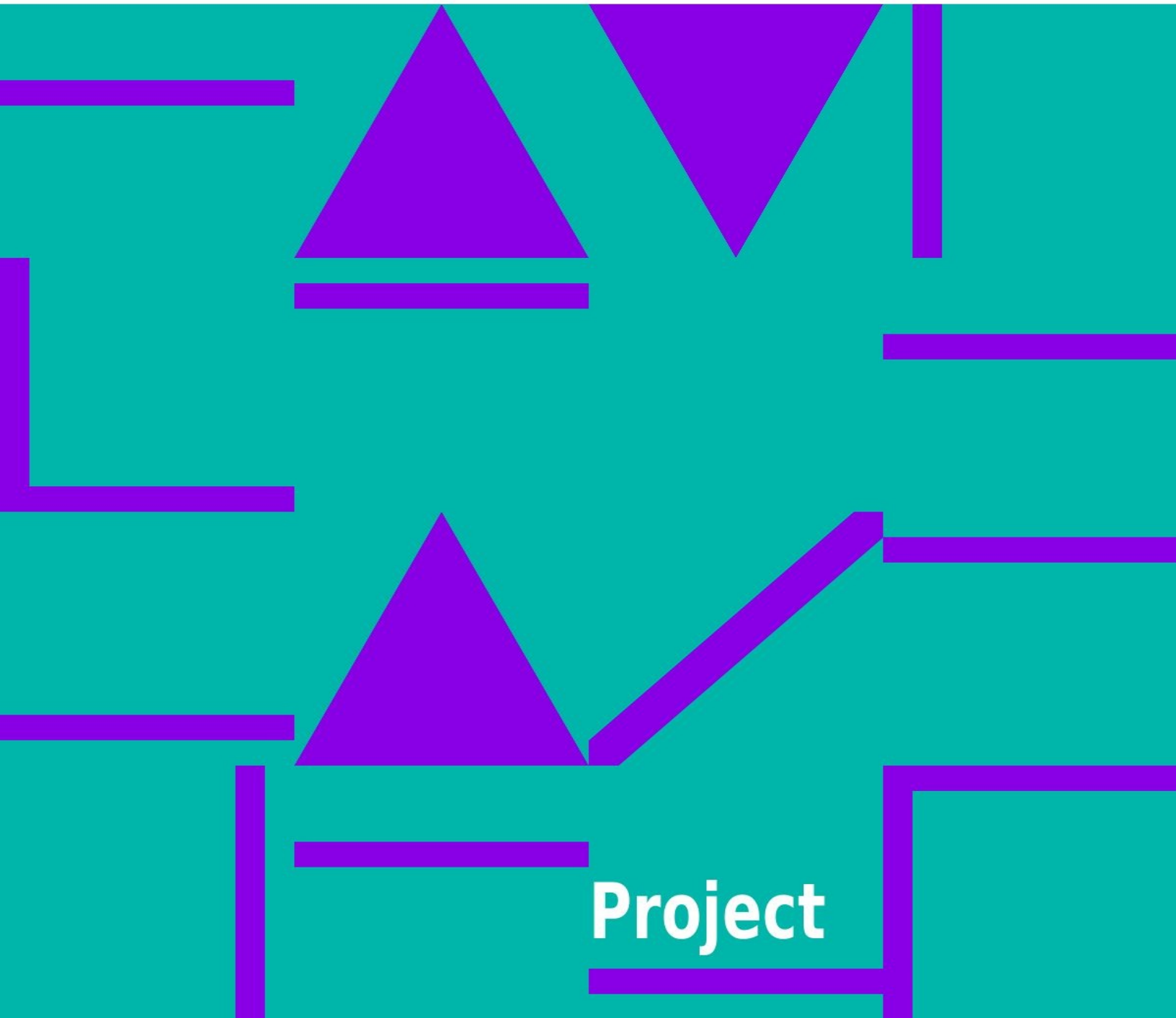
Castle Craneycrow

George Barr McCutcheon



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By George Barr McCutcheon

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I. THE TAKING OF TURK

It was characteristic of Mr. Philip Quentin that he first lectured his servant on the superiority of mind over matter and then took him cheerfully by the throat and threw him into a far corner of the room. As the servant was not more than half the size of the master, his opposition was merely vocal, but it was nevertheless unmistakable. His early career had increased his vocabulary and his language was more picturesque than pretty. Yet of his loyalty and faithfulness, there could be no doubt. During the seven years of his service, he had been obliged to forget that he possessed such a name as Turkington or even James. He had been Turk from the beginning, and Turk he remained—and, in spite of occasional out breaks, he had proved his devotion to the young gentleman whose goods and chattels he guarded with more assiduity than he did his own soul or—what meant more to him—his personal comfort. His employment came about in an unusual way. Mr. Quentin had an apartment in a smart building uptown. One night he was awakened by a noise in his room. In the darkness he saw a man fumbling among his things, and in an instant he had seized his revolver from the stand at his bedside and covered the intruder. Then he calmly demanded: “Now, what are you doing here?”

“I'm lookin' for a boardin' house,” replied the other, sullenly.

“You're just a plain thief—that's all.”

“Well, it won't do me no good to say I'm a sleepwalker, will it?—er a missionary, er a dream? But, on d' dead, sport, I'm hungry, an' I wuz tryin' to git enough to buy a meal an' a bed. On d' dead, I wuz.”

“And a suit of clothes, and an overcoat, and a house and lot, I suppose, and please don't call me 'sport' again. Sit down—not oh the floor; on that chair over there. I'm going to search you. Maybe you've got something I need.” Mr. Quentin turned on the light and proceeded to disarm the man, piling his miserable effects on a chair. “Take off that mask. Lord! put it on again; you look much better. So, you're hungry, are you?”

“As a bear.”

Quentin never tried to explain his subsequent actions; perhaps he had had a stupid evening. He merely yawned and addressed the burglar with all possible respect. “Do you imagine I'll permit any guest of mine to go away hungry? If you'll wait till I dress, we'll stroll over to a restaurant in the next street and get

some supper.

“Police station, you mean.”

“Now, don't be unkind, Mr. Burglar. I mean supper for two. I'm hungry myself, but not a bit sleepy. Will you wait?”

“Oh, I'm in no particular hurry.”

Quentin dressed calmly. The burglar began whistling softly.

“Are you ready?” asked Philip, putting on his overcoat and hat.

“I haven't got me overcoat on yet,” replied the burglar, suggestively. Quentin saw he was dressed in the chilliest of rags. He opened a closet door and threw him a long coat.

“Ah, here is your coat. I must have taken it from the club by mistake. Pardon me.”

“T'anks; I never expected to git it back,” coolly replied the burglar, donning the best coat that had ever touched his person. “You didn't see anything of my gloves and hat in there, did you?” A hat and a pair of gloves were produced, not perfect in fit, but quite respectable.

Soberly they walked out into the street and off through the two-o'clock stillness. The mystified burglar was losing his equanimity. He could not understand the captor's motive, nor could he much longer curb his curiosity. In his mind he was fully satisfied that he was walking straight to the portals of the nearest station. In all his career as a housebreaker, he had never before been caught, and now to be captured in such a way and treated in such a way was far past comprehension. Ten minutes before he was looking at a stalwart figure with a leveled revolver, confidently expecting to drop with the bullet in his body from an agitated weapon. Indeed, he encountered conditions so strange that he felt a doubt of their reality. He had, for some peculiar and amazing reason, no desire to escape. There was something in the oddness of the proceeding that made him wish to see it to an end. Besides, he was quite sure the strapping young fellow would shoot if he attempted to bolt.

“This is a fairly good eating house,” observed the would-be victim as they came to an “all-nighter.” They entered and deliberately removed their coats, the thief watching his host with shifty, even twinkling eyes. “What shall it be, Mr. Robber? You are hungry, and you may order the entire bill, from soup to the date line, if you like. Pitch in.”

“Say, boss, what's your game?” demanded the crook, suddenly. His sharp, pinched face, with its week's growth of beard, wore a new expression—that of

admiration. “I ain't such a rube that I don't like a good t'ing even w'en it ain't comin' my way. You'se a dandy, dat's right, an' I t'ink we'd do well in de business togedder. Put me nex' to yer game.”

“Game? The bill of fare tells you all about that. Here's quail, squab, duck—see? That's the only game I'm interested in. Go on, and order.”

“S' 'elp me Gawd if you ain't a peach.”

For half an hour Mr. Burglar ate ravenously, Quentin watching him through half-closed, amused eyes. He had had a dull, monotonous week, and this was the novelty that lifted life out of the torpidity into which it had fallen.

The host at this queer feast was at that time little more than twenty-five years of age, a year out of Yale, and just back from a second tour of South America. He was an orphan, coming into a big fortune with his majority, and he had satiated an old desire to travel in lands not visited by all the world. Now he was back in New York to look after the investments his guardian had made, and he found them so ridiculously satisfactory that they cast a shadow of dullness across his mind, always hungry for activity.

“Have you a place to sleep?” he asked, at length.

“I live in Jersey City, but I suppose I can find a cheap lodgin' house down by d' river. Trouble is, I ain't got d' price.”

“Then come back home with me. You may sleep in Jackson's room. Jackson was my man till yesterday, when I dismissed him for stealing my cigars and drinking my drinks. I won't have anybody about me who steals. Come along.”

Then they walked swiftly back to Quentin's flat. The owner of the apartment directed his puzzled guest to a small room off his own, and told him to go to bed.

“By the way, what's your name?” he asked, before he closed the door.

“Turkington—James Turkington, sir,” answered the now respectful robber. And he wanted to say more, but the other interrupted.

“Well, Turk, when you get up in the morning, polish those shoes of mine over there. We'll talk it over after I've had my breakfast. Good-night.”

And that is how Turk, most faithful and loyal of servants, began his apparently endless employment with Mr. Philip Quentin, dabbler in stocks, bonds and hearts. Whatever his ugly past may have been, whatever his future may have promised, he was honest to a painful degree in these days with Quentin. Quick-witted, fiery, willful and as ugly as a little demon, Turk knew no law, no integrity except that which benefitted his employer. Beyond a doubt, if Quentin had instructed him to butcher a score of men, Turk would have proceeded to do so

and without argument. But Quentin instructed him to be honest, law-abiding and cautious. It would be perfectly safe to guess his age between forty and sixty, but it would not be wise to measure his strength by the size of his body. The little ex-burglar was like a piece of steel.

II. SOME RAIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

New York had never been so nasty and cold and disagreeable. For three weeks it had rained—a steady, chilling drizzle. Quentin stood it as long as he could, but the weather is a large factor in the life of a gentleman of leisure. He couldn't play Squash the entire time, and Bridge he always maintained was more of a profession than a pastime. So it was that one morning, as he looked out at the sheets of water blowing across the city, his mind was made up.

“We'll get out of this, Turk. I've had enough of it.”

“Where do we go, sir?” calmly asked the servant.

“Heaven knows! But be ready to start tomorrow. We'll go somewhere and dodge this blessed downpour. Call me a cab.”

As he drove to the club, he mentally tossed coppers as to his destination. People were already coming back from Aiken and Palm Beach, and those who had gone to the country were cooped up indoors and shivering about the fireplaces. Where could he go? As he entered the club a man hailed him from the front room.

“Quentin, you're just the man I'm looking for. Come in here.”

It was the Earl of Saxondale—familiarly “Lord Bob”—an old chum of Quentin's. “My missus sent me with an invitation for you, and I've come for your acceptance,” said the Englishman, when Quentin had joined him.

“Come home with us. We're sailing on the Lucania to-morrow, and there are going to be some doings in England this month which you mustn't miss. Dickey Savage is coming, and we want you.”

Quentin looked at him and laughed. Saxondale was perfectly serious. “We're going to have some people up for Goodwood, and later we shall have a house-boat for Henley. So you'd better come. It won't be bad sport.”

Quentin started to thank his friend and decline. Then he remembered that he wanted to get away—there was absolutely nothing to keep him at home, and, besides, he liked Lord Bob and his American wife.

Fashionable New York recalls the marriage of the Earl of Saxondale and Frances Thornow when the '90's were young, and everybody said it was a love match. To be sure, she was wealthy, but so was he. She had declined offers of a half-dozen other noblemen; therefore it was not ambition on her part. He could

have married any number of wealthier American girls; therefore it was not avarice on his part. He was a good-looking, stalwart chap with a very fetching drawl, infinite gentility, and a man despite his monocle, while she was beautiful, witty and womanly; therefore it is reasonable to suspect that it must have been love that made her Lady Saxondale.

Lord Bob and Lady Frances were frequent visitors to New York. He liked New York, and New Yorkers liked him. His wife was enough of a true American to love the home of her forefathers. “What my wife likes I seem to have a fondness for,” said he, complacently. He once remarked that were she to fall in love with another man he would feel in duty bound to like him.

Saxondale had money invested in American copper mines, and his wife had railroad stocks. When they came to New York, once or twice a year, they took a furnished apartment, entertained and were entertained for a month or so, rushed their luggage back to the steamer and sailed for home, perfectly satisfied with themselves and—the markets.

Quentin looked upon Lord Bob's invitation as a sporting proposition. This would not be the first time he had taken a steamer on twenty-four hours' notice. The one question was accommodation, and a long acquaintance with the agent helped him to get passage where others would have failed.

So it happened that the next morning Turk was unpacking things in Mr. Quentin's cabin and establishing relations with the bath steward.

III. PRINCE UGO

Several days out from New York found the weather fine and Lord Saxondale's party enjoying life thoroughly. Dickey and the capricious Lady Jane were bright or squally with charming uncertainty. Lady Jane, Lord Bob's sister, certainly was not in love with Mr. Savage, and he was too indolent to give his side of the case continuous thought. Dimly he realized, and once lugubriously admitted, that he was not quite heartwhole, but he had not reached a positive understanding with himself.

“How do they steer the ship at night when it is so cloudy they can't see the north star?” she asked, as they leaned over the rail one afternoon. Her pretty face was very serious, and there was a philosophical pucker on her brow.

“With a rudder,” he answered, laconically.

“How very odd!” she said, with a malicious gleam in her eyes. “You are as wonderfully well-informed concerning the sea as you are on all other subjects. How good it must seem to be so awfully intelligent.”

“It isn't often that I find anyone who asks really intelligent questions, you know, Lady Jane. Your profound quest for knowledge forced my dormant intellect into action, and I remembered that a ship invariably has a rudder or something like that.”

“I see it requires the weightiest of questions to arouse your intellect.” The wind was blowing the stray hairs ruthlessly across her face and she looked very, very pretty.

“Intellects are so very common nowadays that 'most anything will arouse them. Quentin says his man Turk has a brain, and if Turk has a brain I don't see how the rest of us can escape. I'd like to be a porpoise.”

“What an ambition! Why not a whale or a shark?”

“If I were a shark you'd be afraid of me, and if I were a whale I could not begin to get into your heart.”

“That's the best thing you've said since you were seasick,” she said, sweetly.

“I'm glad you didn't hear what I said when I was seasick.”

“Oh! I've heard brother Bob say things,” loftily.

“But nobody can say things quite so impressively as an American.”

“Pooh! You boasting Americans think you can do everything better than others. Now you claim that you can swear better. I won't listen to you,” and off she went toward the companionway. Dickey looked mildly surprised, but did not follow. Instead, he joined Lady Saxondale and Quentin in a stroll.

Four days later they were comfortably established with Saxondale in London. That night Quentin met, for the first time, the reigning society sensation, Prince Ugo Ravorelli, and his countrymen, Count Sallaconi and the Duke of Laselli. All London had gone mad over the prince.

There was something oddly familiar in the face and voice of the Italian. Quentin sat with him for an hour, listening with puzzled ears to the conversation that went on between him and Saxondale. On several occasions he detected a curious, searching look in the Italian's dark eyes, and was convinced that the prince also had the impression that they had met before. At last Quentin, unable to curb his curiosity, expressed his doubt. Ravorelli's gaze was penetrating as he replied, but it was perfectly frank.

“I have the feeling that your face is not strange to me, yet I cannot recall when or where I have seen you. Have you been in Paris of late?” he asked, his English almost perfect. It seemed to Quentin that there was a look of relief in his dark eyes, and there was a trace of satisfaction in the long breath that followed the question.

“No,” he replied; “I seem in some way to associate you with Brazil and the South American cities. Were you ever in Rio Janeiro?”

“I have never visited either of the Americas. We are doubtless misled by a strange resemblance to persons we know quite well, but who do not come to mind.”

“But isn't it rather odd that we should have the same feeling? And you have not been in New York?” persisted Phil.

“I have not been in America at all, you must remember,” replied the prince, coldly.

“I'd stake my soul on it,” thought Quentin to himself, more fully convinced than ever. “I've seen him before and more than once, too. He remembers me, even though I can't place him. It's devilish aggravating, but his face is as familiar as if I saw him yesterday.”

When they parted for the night Ravorelli's glance again impressed the American with a certainty that he, at least, was not in doubt as to where and when they had met.

“You are trying to recall where we have seen one another,” said the prince, smiling easily, his white teeth showing clearly between smooth lips. “My cousin visited America some years ago, and there is a strong family resemblance. Possibly you have our faces confused.”

“That may be the solution,” admitted Phil, but he was by no means satisfied by the hypothesis.

In the cab, later on, Lord Bob was startled from a bit of doze by hearing his thoughtful, abstracted companion exclaim:

“By thunder!”

“What's up? Forgot your hat, or left something at the club?” he demanded, sleepily.

“No; I remember something, that's all. Bob, I know where I've seen that Italian prince. He was in Rio Janeiro with a big Italian opera company just before I left there for New York.”

“What! But he said he'd never been in America,” exclaimed Saxondale, wide awake.

“Well, he lied, that's all. I am positive he's the man, and the best proof in the world is the certainty that he remembers me. Of course he denies it, but you know what he said when I first asked him if we had met. He was the tenor in Pagani's opera company, and he sang in several of the big South American cities. They were in Rio Janeiro for weeks, and we lived in the same hotel. There's no mistake about it, old man. This howling swell of to-day was Pagani's tenor, and he was a good one, too. Gad, what a Romeo he was! Imagine him in the part, Bob. Lord, how the women raved about him!”

“I say, Phil, don't be ass enough to tell anybody else about this, even if you're cocksure he's the man. He was doubtless driven to the stage for financial reasons, you know, and it wouldn't be quite right to bring it up now if he has a desire to suppress the truth. Since he has come into the title and estates it might be deuced awkward to have that sort of a past raked up.”

“I should say it would be awkward if that part of his past were raked up. He wasn't a Puritan, Bob.”

“They are a bit scarce at best.”

“He was known in those days as Giovanni Pavesi, and he wasn't in such dire financial straits, either. It was his money that backed the enterprise, and it was common property, undenied by him or anyone else, that the chief object in the speculation was the love of the prima donna, Carmenita Malban. And, Bob, she

was the most beautiful woman I ever saw. The story was that she was a countess or something of the sort. Poverty forced her to make use of a glorious voice, and the devil sent Pagani to young Pavesi, who was then a student with some ripping big master, in the hope that he would interest the young man in a scheme to tour South America. It seems that Signorita Malban's beauty set his heart on fire, and he promptly produced the coin to back the enterprise, the only condition being that he was to sing the tenor roles. All this came out in the trial, you know."

"The trial! What trial?"

"Giovanni's. Let me think a minute. She was killed on the 29th of March, and he was not arrested until they had virtually convicted one of the chorus men of the murder. Pagani and Pavesi quarrelled, and the former openly accused his 'angel' of the crime. This led to an arrest just as the tenor was getting away on a ship bound for Spain."

"Arrested him for the murder of the woman? On my life, Quentin, you make a serious blunder unless you can prove all this. When did it all happen?"

"Two years ago. Oh, I'm not mistaken about it; it is as clear as sunlight to me now. They took him back and tried him. Members of the troupe swore he had threatened on numerous occasions to kill her if she continued to repulse him. On the night of the murder—it was after the opera—he was heard to threaten her. She defied him, and one of the women in the company testified that he sought to intimidate Malban by placing the point of his stiletto against her white neck. But, in spite of all this, he was acquitted. I was in New York when the trial ended, but I read of the verdict in the press dispatches. Some one killed her, that is certain, and the nasty job was done in her room at the hotel. I heard some of the evidence, and I'll say that I believed he was the guilty man, but I considered him insane when he committed the crime. He loved her to the point of madness, and she would not yield to his passion. It was shown that she loved the chorus singer who was first charged with her murder."

"Ravorelli doesn't look like a murderer," said Lord Bob, stoutly.

"But he remembers seeing me in that courtroom, Bob."

IV. AND THE GIRL, TOO

“Now tell me all about our Italian friend,” said Quentin next morning to Lady Frances, who had not lost her frank Americanism when she married Lord Bob, The handsome face of the young prince had been in his thoughts the night before until sleep came, and then there were dreams in which the same face appeared vaguely sinister and foreboding. He had acted on the advice of Lord Bob and had said nothing of the Brazilian experiences.

“Prince Ugo? I supposed that every newspaper in New York had been devoting columns to him. He is to marry an American heiress, and some of the London journals say she is so rich that everybody else looks poor beside her.”

“Lucky dog, eh? Everybody admires him, too, it seems. Do you know him, Frances?”

“I've met him a number of times on the continent, but not often in London. He is seldom here, you know. Really, he is quite a charming fellow.”

“Yes,” laconically. “Are Italian princes as cheap as they used to be? Mary Carrolton got that nasty little one of hers for two hundred thousand, didn't she? This one looks as though he might come a little higher. He's good-looking enough.”

“Oh, Ugo is not like the Carrolton investment. You see, this one is vastly rich, and he's no end of a swell in sunny Italy. Really, the match is the best an American girl has made over here in—oh, in centuries, I may say.”

“Pocahontas made a fairly decent one, I believe, and so did Frances Thornow; but, to my limited knowledge, I think they are the only satisfactory matches that have been pulled off in the last few centuries. Strange, they both married Englishmen.”

“Thank you. You don't like Italian princes, then?”

“Oh, if I could buy a steady, well-broken, tractable one, I'd take him as an investment, perhaps, but I believe, on the whole, I'd rather put the money into a general menagerie like Barnum's or Forepaugh's. You get such a variety of beasts that way, you know.”

“Come, now, Phil, your sarcasm is unjust. Prince Ugo is very much of a gentleman, and Bob says he is very clever, too. Did you see much of him last night?”

“I saw him at the club and talked a bit with him. Then I saw him while I slept. He is much better in the club than he is in a dream.”

“You dreamed of him last night? He certainly made an impression, then,” she said.

“I dreamed I saw him abusing a harmless, overworked and underfed little monkey on the streets of New York.”

“How absurd!”

“The monkey wouldn't climb up to the window of my apartment to collect nickels for the vilest hand-organ music a man ever heard, even in a nightmare.”

“Phil Quentin, you are manufacturing that dream as you sit here. Wait till you know him better and you will like him.”

“His friends, too? One of those chaps looks as if he might throw a bomb with beautiful accuracy—the Laselli duke, I think. Come, now, Frances, you'll admit he's an ugly brute, won't you?”

“Yes, you are quite right, and I can't say that the count impresses me more favorably.”

“I'll stake my head the duke's ancestors were brigands or something equally appalling. A couple of poor, foolish American girls elevate them both to the position of money-spenders-in-chief though, I presume, and the newspapers will sizzle.”

At dinner that evening the discussion was resumed, all those at the table taking part. The tall young American was plainly prejudiced against the Italian, but his stand was a mystery to all save Lord Bob. Dickey Savage was laboriously non-committal until Lady Jane took sides unequivocally with Quentin. Then he vigorously defended the unlucky prince. Lady Saxondale and Sir James Graham, one of the guests, took pains to place the Italian in the best light possible before the critical American.

“I almost forgot to tell you, Phil,” suddenly cried Lady Saxondale, her pretty face beaming with excitement. “The girl he is to marry is an old flame of yours.”

“Quite impossible, Lady Frances. I never had a flame.”

“But she was, I'm sure.”

“Are you a theosophist?” asked Phil, gaily, but he listened nevertheless. Who could she be? It seemed for the moment, as his mind swept backward, that he had possessed a hundred sweethearts. “I've had no sweetheart since I began existence in the present form.”

“Good Lord!” ejaculated Dickey, solemnly and impressively.

“I'll bet my soul Frances is right,” drawled Lord Bob. “She always is, you know. My boy, if she says you had a sweetheart, you either had one or somebody owes you one. You've never collected, perhaps.”

“If he collected them he'd have a harem,” observed Mr. Savage, sagely. “He's had so many he can't count 'em.”

“I should think it disgusting to count them, Mr. Savage, even if he could,” said Lady Jane, severely.

“I can count mine backwards,” he said.

“Beginning at one?”

“Yes, Lady Jane; one in my teens, none at present. No task, at all, to count mine.”

“Won't you give me the name of that old sweetheart of mine, Lady Saxondale? Whom is the prince to marry?” asked Quentin.

“Dorothy Garrison. She lived in your block seven or eight years ago, up to the time she went to Brussels with her mother. Now, do you remember?”

“You don't mean it! Little Dorothy? By George, she was a pretty girl, too. Of course, I remember her. But that was ages ago. She was fourteen and I was nineteen. You are right, Lady Saxondale. I'll confess to having regarded her as the fairest creature the sun ever shone upon. For six solid, delicious months she was the foundation of every thought that touched my brain. And then—well, what happened then? Oh, yes; we quarrelled and forgot each other. So she's the girl who's to marry the prince, is she?” Quentin's face was serious for the moment; a far-off look of real concern came into his eyes. He was recalling a sweet, dainty face, a girlish figure, and the days gone by.

“How odd I did not think of it before. Really, you two were dreadful spoons in those days. Mamma used to worry for fear you'd carry out your threat to run away with her. And now she's to be a real live princess.” Lady Frances created a profound sensation when she resurrected Quentin's boyhood love affair with the one American girl that all Europe talked about at that moment. Lord Bob was excited, perhaps for the first time since he proposed to Frances Thornow.

“By Jove, old man, this is rare, devilish rare. No wonder you have such a deuced antipathy to the prince. Intuition must have told you that he was to marry one of the ladies of your past.”

“Why, Bob, we were children, and there was nothing to it. Truly, I had forgotten that pretty child—that's all she was—and I'll warrant she wouldn't remember my name if some one spoke it in her presence. Every boy and girl has

had that sort of an affair.”

“She's the most beautiful creature I ever saw,” cried Lady Jane, ecstatically. Dickey Savage looked sharply at her vivacious face. “When did you last see her, Mr. Quentin?”

“I can't recall, but I know it was when her hair hung down her back. She left New York before she was fifteen, I'm quite sure. I think I was in love with a young widow fourteen years my senior, at the time, and did not pay much heed to Dorothy's departure. She and her mother have been traveling since then?”

“They traveled for three years before Mrs. Garrison could make up her mind to settle down in Brussels. I believe she said it reminded her of Paris, only it was a little more so,” said Lord Bob. “We met them in Paris five years ago, on our wedding trip, and she was undecided until I told her she might take a house near the king's palace in Brussels, such as it is, and off she flew to be as close to the crown as possible. She struck me as a gory old party who couldn't live comfortably unless she were dabbling in blue blood. The girl was charming, though.”

“She's in London now,” ventured Sir James. “The papers say she came especially to see the boat races, but there is a pretty well established belief that she came because the prince is here. Despite their millions, I understand it is a love match.”

“I hope I may have a look at her while I'm here, just to see what time has done for her,” said Quentin.

“You may have the chance to ask if she remembers you,” said Dickey.

“And if she thinks you've grown older,” added Lord Bob.

“Will you tell her you are not married?” demanded Lady Jane.

“I'll do but one thing, judging from the way you describe the goddess. Just stand with open mouth and marvel at her magnificence. Somewhere among my traps I have a picture of her when she was fourteen, taken with me one afternoon at a tin-typer's. If I can find it, I'll show it to her, just to prove that we both lived ten years ago. She's doubtless lived so much since I saw her last that she'll deny an existence so far back as that.”

“You won't be so deuced sarcastic when you see her, even if she is to marry a prince. I tell you, Phil, she is something worth looking at forever,” said Lord Bob.

“I never saw such eyes, such a complexion, such hair, such a carriage,” cried Lady Frances.

“Has she any teeth?” asked Dickey, and was properly frowned upon by Lady Jane.

“You describe her as completely in that sentence, Lady Frances, as a novelist could in eight pages,” said Quentin.

“No novelist could describe her,” was the answer.

“It's to be hoped no novelist may attempt it,” said Quentin. “She is beautiful beyond description, she will be a princess, and she knew me when I didn't know enough to appreciate her. Her eyes were blue in the old days, and her hair was almost black. Colors still obtain? Then we have her description in advance. Now, let's go on with the romance.”

V. A SUNDAY ENCOUNTER

It was a sunny Sunday morning and the church parade was popular. Lady Frances and Quentin were walking together when Prince Ugo joined them. He looked hardly over twenty-five, his wavy black hair giving him a picturesque look. He wore no beard, and his dark skin was as clear as a girl's.

“By the way,” said Quentin, “Lady Saxondale tells me you are to marry a former acquaintance of mine.”

“Miss Garrison is an acquaintance?” cried the prince, lifting his dark eyes. An instant later his gaze roamed away into the horde of passing women, as if searching for the woman whose name brought light to his soul.

“Was an acquaintance, I think I said. I doubt if she remembers me now. She was a child when I knew her. Is she here this morning?” asked Phil, secretly amused by the anxious look in the Italian's eyes.

“She will be with Lady Marnham, Ah, I see them now.” The young prince was looking eagerly ahead.

Quentin saw Miss Garrison and gasped with astonishment. Could that stunning young woman be the little Dorothy of New York days? He could scarcely believe his eyes and ears, notwithstanding the introductions which followed.

“And here is an old New York friend. Miss Garrison, Mr. Philip Quentin. You surely remember him, Miss Garrison,” said Lady Frances, with a peculiar gleam in her eye. For a second the young lady at Quentin's side exhibited surprise; a faint flush swept into her cheek, and then, with a rare smile, she extended her hand to the American.

“Of course, I remember him. Phil and I were playmates in the old days. Dear me, it seems a century ago,” she said.

“I cannot tell you how well the century has treated you,” he said, gallantly. “It has not been so kind to me.”

“Years are never unkind to men,” she responded. She smiled upon the adoring prince and turned again to Quentin. “Tell me about New York, Phil. Tell me about yourself.”

“I can only say that New York has grown larger and better, and that I have grown older and worse. Mrs. Garrison may doubt that I could possibly grow

worse, but I have proof positive. I am dabbling in Wall street."

"I can imagine nothing more reprehensible," said Mrs. Garrison, amiably. Quentin swiftly renewed his opinion of the mother. That estimate coincided with the impression his youth had formed, and it was not far in the wrong. Here was the mother with a hope loftier than a soul. Purse-proud, ambitious, condescending to a degree—a woman who would achieve what she set out to do at all hazards. Less than fifty, still handsome, haughty and arrogant, descended through a long line of American aristocracy, calm, resourceful, heartless. For fifteen years a widow, with no other object than to live at the top and to marry her only child into a realm far beyond the dreams of other American mothers. Millions had she to flaunt in the faces of an astonished, marveling people. Clever, tactful, aggressive, capable of winning where others had failed, this American mother was respected, even admired, in the class to which she had climbed. Here was the woman who had won her way into continental society as have few of her countrywomen. To none save a cold, discerning man from her own land was she transparent. Lord Bob, however, had a faint conception of her aims, her capacity.

As they walked on, Quentin scarcely took his eyes from Miss Garrison's face. He was wearing down the surprise that the sweetheart of his boyhood had inspired, by deliberately seeking flaws in her beauty, her figure, her manner. After a time he felt her more wonderful than ever. Lord Bob joined the party, and Quentin stopped a second to speak to him. As he did so Prince Ugo was at Miss Garrison's side in an instant.

"So she is the girl that damned Italian is to elevate?" said Mr. Quentin to himself. "By George, it's a shame!" He did not see Lord Bob and his wife exchange a quick smile of significance.

As they all reached the corner, Quentin asked: "Are you in London for long, Dorothy?" Lady Frances thought his tone a trifle eager.

"For ten days or so. Will you come to see me?" Their eyes met and he felt certain that the invitation was sincerely given. "Lady Marnham is having some people in to-morrow afternoon. Perhaps you'll come then," she added, and Phil looked crestfallen.

"I'll come," he said. "I want to tell you the story of my past life. You didn't know I'd been prime minister of a South American republic, did you?"

She nodded and they separated. Prince Ugo heard the last words of the American, and a small, clear line appeared for an instant between his black eyebrows.

Lady Frances solemnly and secretively shook her finger at Quentin, and he laughed with the disdain of one who understands and denies without the use of words. Lord Bob had wanted to kick him when he mentioned South America, but he said nothing. Quentin was in wonderful spirits all the way home.

VI. DOROTHY GARRISON

Quentin was driving with Lady Saxondale to the home of Miss Garrison's hostess. Phil's fair, calculating companion said to herself that she had never seen a handsomer fellow than this stalwart American. There was about him that clean, strong, sweet look of the absolutely healthy man, the man who has buffeted the world and not been buffeted by the world. He was frank, bright, straightforward, and there was that always-to-be-feared yet ever-to-be-desired gleam of mastery in his eye. It may have been sometimes a wicked mastery, and more than one woman who admired him because she could not help herself had said, “There is a devil in his eyes.”

They found Lady Marnham's reception hall full of guests, few of whom Quentin had seen before. He was relieved to find that the prince was not present, and he made his way to Dorothy's side, with Lady Frances, coolly dropping into the chair which a young captain had momentarily abandoned. Lady Frances sat beside Miss Garrison on the divan.

“I am so glad you kept your promise, Phil, and came. It seems good to see you after all these years. You bring back the dear days at home,” said Dorothy, delight in her voice.

“From that I judge you sometimes long for them,” he said, simply. To Lady Frances it sounded daring.

“Often, oh, so very often. I have not been in New York for years. Lady Saxondale goes back so often that she doesn't have the chance to grow homesick.”

“I hear you are going over this fall,” said Quentin, with a fair show of interest.

“Who—who told you so?” she asked, in some surprise. He could not detect confusion.

“Prince Ravorelli. At least, he said he expected to make the trip this fall. Am I wrong in suspecting that he is not going alone?”

“We mean to spend much of the winter in the United States, chiefly in Florida. I shall depend on you, Phil, to be nice to him in New York. You can do so much to make it pleasant for him. He has never been in New York, you know.”

“It may depend on what he will consider pleasant. I don't believe he will enjoy all the things I like. But I'll try. I'll get Dickey Savage to give a dinner for him,

and if he can survive that, he's capable of having a good time anywhere. Dickey's dinners are the real test, you know. Americans stand them because they are rugged and accustomed to danger."

"You will find Prince Ugo rugged," she said, flushing slightly, and he imagined he could distinguish a softness in her tone.

"I am told he is an athlete, a great horseman, a marvelous swordsman," said Lady Frances.

"I am glad you have heard something about him that is true," said Dorothy, a trifle quickly. "Usually they say that princes are all that is detestable and unmanly. I am sure you will like him, Phil."

Mrs. Garrison came up at this moment with Lady Marnham, and Quentin arose to greet the former as warmly as he could under the smooth veil of hypocrisy. Again, just before Lady Frances signaled to him that it was time for them to leave, he found himself in conversation, over the teacups, with Dorothy Garrison. This time they were quite alone.

"It doesn't seem possible that you are the same Dorothy Garrison I used to know," he said, reflectively.

"Have I changed so much?" she asked, and there was in her manner an icy barrier that would have checked a less confident man than Philip Quentin.

"In every way. You were charming in those days."

"And not charming now, I infer."

"You are more than charming now. That is hardly a change, however, is it? Then, you were very pretty, now you are beautiful. Then, you were—"

"I don't like flattery, Phil," she said, hurt by what she felt to be an indifferent effort on his part to please her vanity.

"I am quite sure you remember me well enough to know that I never said nice things unless I meant them. But, now that I think of it, it is the height of impropriety to speak so plainly even to an old friend, and an old—er—chum."

"Won't you have a cup of tea?" she asked, as calmly as if he were the merest stranger and had never seen her till this hour.

"A dozen, if it pleases you," he said, laughingly, looking straight into the dark eyes she was striving so hard to keep cold and unfriendly.

"Then you must come another day," she answered, brightly.

"I cannot come to-morrow," he said.

"I did not say 'to-morrow.'"

“But I'll come on Friday,” he went on, decisively. She looked concerned for an instant and then smiled.

“Lady Marnham will give you tea on Friday. I shall not be at home,” she said.

“But I am going back to New York next week,” he said, confidently.

“Next week? Are you so busy?”

“I am not anxious to return, but my man Turk says he hates London. He says he'll leave me if I stay here a month. I can't afford to lose Turk.”

“And he can't afford to lose you. Stay, Phil; the Saxondales are such jolly people.”

“How about the tea on Friday?”

“Oh, that is no consideration.”

“But it is, you know. You used to give me tea every day in the week.” He saw at once that he had gone beyond the lines, and drew back wisely. “Let me come on Friday, and we'll have a good, sensible chat.”

“On that one condition,” she said, earnestly.

“Thank you. Good-bye. I see Lady Frances is ready to go. Evidently I have monopolized you to a somewhat thoughtless extent. Everybody is looking daggers at me, including the prince, who came in ten minutes ago.”

He arose and held her hand for a moment at parting. Her swift, abashed glance toward Prince Ugo, whose presence she had not observed, did not escape his eyes. She looked up and saw the peculiar smile on Quentin's lips, and there was deep meaning in her next remark to him:

“You will meet the prince here on Friday. I shall ask him to come early, that he may learn to know you better.”

“Thank you. I'd like to know him better. At what hour is he to come?”

“By 3:30, at least,” she said, pointedly. “Too early to be correct, you suspect?”

“I think not. You may expect me before three. I am not a stickler for form.”

“We shall not serve tea until four o'clock,” she said, coldly.

“That's my hour for tea—just my hour,” he said, blithely. She could not repress the smile that his old willfulness brought to her lips and eyes. “Thank you, for the smile. It was worth struggling for.”

He was gone before she could respond, but the smile lingered as her eyes followed his tall figure across the room. She saw him pause and speak to Prince Ugo, and then pass out with Lady Saxondale. Only Lady Saxondale observed the dark gleam in the Italian's eyes as he responded to the big American's

unconventional greeting. On the way home she found herself wondering if Dorothy had ever spoken to the prince of Philip Quentin and those tender, foolish days of girlhood.

“Has she lost any of the charm?” she asked.

“I am not quite sure. I'm to find out on Friday.”

“Are you going back on Friday?” in surprise.

“To drink tea, you know.”

“Did she ask you to come?”

“Can't remember, but I think I suggested it.”

“Be careful, Phil; I don't want you to turn Dorothy Garrison's head.”

“You compliment me by even suspecting that I could. Her head is set; it can't be turned. It is set for that beautiful, bejewelled thing they call a coronet. Besides, I don't want to turn it.”

“I think the prince could become very jealous,” she went on, earnestly.

“Which would mean stilettos for two, I presume.” After a moment's contemplative silence he said: “By Jove! she is beautiful, though.”

Quentin was always the man to rush headlong into the very thickest of whatever won his interest, whether it was the tender encounter of the drawing-room or the dangerous conflict of the field.

When he left Lady Marnham's house late on Friday afternoon he was more delighted than ever with the girl he had once loved. He was with her for nearly an hour before the prince arrived, and he had boldly dashed into the (he called them ridiculous) days when she had been his little sweetheart, the days when both had sworn with young fervor to be true till death. She did not take kindly at first to these references to that early, mistaken affection, but his persistence won. Before the prince arrived, the American had learned how she met him, how he had wooed and won, and how she had inspired jealousy in his hot Italian heart by speaking of the “big, handsome boy” over in New York.

He secured her permission to join her in the Row on Tuesday. There was resistance on her part at first, but he laughed it off.

“You should ask me to your wedding,” he said, as the prince came in.

“But you will not be here.”

“I've changed my mind,” he said, calmly, and then smiled into her puzzled eyes. “Brussels, isn't it?”

“Yes; the middle of September,” she said, dreamily.

“You'll ask me to come?”

“I should have asked you, anyway.”

The two men shook hands. “Sorry I can't stay for tea, Dorothy, but I promised Lord Saxondale I'd meet him at four o'clock.” He did a genuinely American thing as he walked up the street. He whistled a lively air.

VII. THE WOMAN FROM PARIS

For two weeks Phil Quentin did not allow Dorothy to forget the old association, and then came the day of her departure for Paris. Mrs. Garrison was by no means reluctant to leave London,—not that she disliked the place or the people, but that one Philip Quentin had unceremoniously, even gracefully, stepped into the circle of her contentment, rudely obliterating its symmetrical, well-drawn lines.

Mr. Quentin had much to overcome if he contemplated an assault upon the icy reserve with which Dorothy Garrison's mother regarded his genial advances. She recalled the days when her daughter and he were “silly, lovesick children,” and there was not much comfort to be derived from the knowledge that he had grown older and more attractive, and that he lost no opportunity to see the girl who once held his heart in leash. The mother was too diplomatic to express open displeasure or to offer the faintest objection to this renewal of friendship. If it were known that she opposed the visits of the handsome American, all London would wonder, speculate, and finally understand. Her disapproval could only be construed as an acknowledgment that she feared the consequences of association; it would not be long before the story would be afloat that all was not smooth in the love affairs of a certain prince, and that the fires of an old affection were burning brightly and merrily in the face of a wrathful parent's opposition.

In secret, Dorothy herself was troubled more than she cared to admit by the reappearance of one who could not but awaken memories of other days, fondly foolish though they were. He was still the same old Phil, grown older and handsomer, and he brought with him embarrassing recollections. He was nothing more to her now than an old-time friend, and she was nothing to him. She loved Ugo Ravorelli, and, until he appeared suddenly before her in London, Philip Quentin was dead to her thoughts. And yet she felt as if she were playing with a fire that would leave its scar—not on her heart or Quentin's, perhaps, but on that of the man she was to marry.

It required no great strength of vision to see that Ravorelli was jealous, and it was just as plain that Quentin saw and enjoyed the uneasiness he was causing. She could not know, of course, that the American had deliberately planned to play havoc with the peace and comfort of her lover, for she recognized no motive. How could she know that Giovanni Pavesi, the tenor, and Prince

Ravorelli were one and the same to Philip Quentin? How could she know that the beautiful Malban was slain in Rio Janeiro, and that Philip Quentin had seen a handsome, dark-eyed youth led to and from the murderer's dock in that far-away Brazilian city? How, then, could she understand the conflict that waged with herself as the battlefield?

As for Quentin, he was bound by no law or duty to respect the position of Prince Ravorelli. He was convinced that the sometime Romeo had the stain of blood on his delicate hands and that in his heart he concealed the secret of Carmenita Malban's death. In his mind, there was no mistake. Quentin's composure was shaken but once in the fortnight of pleasure preceding Dorothy's departure for Paris. That was when she indignantly, almost tearfully, called his attention to the squib in a London society journal which rather daringly prophesied a “break in the Ravorelli-Garrison match,” and referred plainly to the renewal of an “across-the-Atlantic affection.” When he wrathfully promised to thrash the editor of the paper, she shocked him by saying that he had created “enough of a sensation,” and he went home with the dazed feeling of one who has suffered an unexpected blow.

On the evening before the Garrisons crossed the channel, Lord and Lady Saxondale and Philip Quentin found themselves long after midnight in talk about the coming marriage. Quentin was rather silent. His thoughts seemed far from the room in which he sat, and there was the shadow of a new line about the corners of his mouth.

“I am going to Brussels next week,” he said, deliberately. The others stared at him in amazement.

“To Brussels? You mean New York,” said Lady Frances, faintly.

“New York won't see me for some time. I'm going to make a tour of the continent.

“This is going too far, old man,” cried Lord Bob. “You can't gain anything by following her, and you'll only raise the devil of a row all round. Dash it! stay in London.”

“Thanks for the invitation, Bob, but I've always had a desire to learn something about the miniature Paris. I shall spend some time in Paris, and then go up there to compare the places. Besides, there won't be any row.”

“But there will be, Phil,” cried Lady Saxondale. “You must keep out of this affair. Why, all Europe knows of the wedding, and even now the continent is quietly nursing the gossip of the past two weeks.” She dropped into a chair, perplexed and anxious.

“Let me tell you something, both of you. The events of the past two weeks are tame in comparison with those of the next two months,” said Quentin, a new light in his eye. His tall figure straightened and his nostrils expanded.

“Wha—what do you mean?” floundered Lord Bob.

“Just this: I love Dorothy Garrison, and I'm going to marry her.”

“Good heavens!” was the simultaneous gasp of Lord and Lady Saxondale. And they could not dissuade him. Not only did he convince them that he was in earnest, but before he left for Paris he had made them allies. Ugo's experience in Rio Janeiro shocked Lady Frances so seriously that she became a champion of the American's cause and agreed with Lord Bob that Dorothy should not be sacrificed if it were in their power to prevent. Of course Dickey Savage approved of Quentin's campaign and effectually disposed of Lady Jane's faint objections by saying:

“America for the Americans, Brussels for the Americans, England for the Americans, everything and everybody for the Americans, but nothing at all for these confounded foreigners. Let the Italian marry anybody he pleases, just so long as he doesn't interfere with an American. Let the American marry anybody he pleases, and to perdition with all interference. I'm for America against the world in love or in war.”

“Don't forget, Mr. Savage, that you are a foreigner when on British soil,” remonstrated the Lady Jane, vigorously.

“My dear Lady Jane, an American is at home anywhere in this world. If you could see some of the foreigners that land at Castle Garden you wouldn't blame an American for absolutely, irrevocably and eternally refusing to be called a foreigner, even on the shores of Madagascar. We are willing to be most anything, but I'll be hanged if we'll be foreigners.”

A week later Quentin was in Paris. Savage was to join him in Brussels about the middle of August, and Lord and Lady Saxondale promised faithfully to come to that city at a moment's notice. He went blithely away with the firm conviction in his heart that it was not to be a fool's errand. But he was reckoning without the woman in the case.

“If you do marry her, Quentin, I've got just the place for you to live in, for a while at least. I bought an old castle in Luxemburg a couple of years ago, just because the man who owned it was a friend and needed a few thousand pounds. Frances calls it Castle Craneycrow. It's a romantic place, and would be a great deal better than a cottage for love. You may have it whenever the time comes. Nobody lives there now but the caretaker and a lot of deuced traditions. We can

discharge the caretaker and you can make fresh traditions. Think it over, my boy, while you are dispatching the prince, the mamma and the fair victim's ambition to become a real live princess."

"Don't be sarcastic, Bob," exclaimed Quentin. "I'll not need your castle. We're going to live in the clouds."

"Beware of the prince," said Lady Frances. "He is pretty high himself, you know."

"Let the prince beware," laughed back the departing guest. "We can't both live in the same cloud, you know. I'll push him off."

On the day Quentin left Paris for Brussels he came face to face with Prince Ugo on one of the Parisian boulevards. The handsome Italian was driving with Count Sallaconi and two very attractive ladies. That the meeting was unexpected and undesired was made manifest by the anxious look which the prince shot over his shoulder after the carriage had passed.

When Quentin left Paris that night with Turk and his luggage, he was not the only passenger bound for Brussels. At the Gare du Nord two men, one suspiciously like the Duke Laselli, took a compartment in the coach just ahead of Quentin. The train was due to reach Brussels shortly after midnight, and the American had telegraphed for apartments at the Bellevue. There had been a drizzle of rain all the evening, and it was good to be inside the car, even if the seats were uncomfortable.

Turk and his master were the only passengers in the compartment. The watchful eyes of the former had seen several persons, men and women, pass through the aisle into which the section opened. One woman paused at the entrance as if about to enter. She was fair to look upon and Turk gallantly moved, presenting a roomy end of his seat to her. She passed on, however, and the little ex-burglar glanced sharply at his master as if to accuse him of frightening the fair one away. But Quentin was lying back, half-asleep, and there was nothing repellent about the untroubled expression on his face.

Before reaching Le Cateau the same lady passed the entrance and again glanced inside. Turk was now asleep, but his master was staring dreamily toward the aperture leading to the aisle. He saw the woman's face for an instant, and it gradually dawned upon him that there was something familiar about its beauty. Where had he seen her before? Like the curious American he was, he arose a few minutes later and deliberately walked into the aisle. He passed two compartments before he saw the young woman. She was alone and was leaning back, her eyes closed. Quentin observed that she was young and beautiful and

possessed the marks of fashion and refinement. As he stood for a moment looking upon the face of the dozing French woman, more certain than ever that he had seen her recently, she opened her eyes with an affrighted start.

He instantly and in some embarrassment turned to escape the eyes which had caught him in a rare bit of impertinence, but was surprised to hear her call softly:

“Monsieur!”

“Mademoiselle,” he replied, pausing, “can I be of service to you?”

“I must speak with you, M. Quentin. Come inside. I shall detain you but a moment, and it is so very important that you should hear me.” She was now sitting upright, visibly excited and confused, but very much in earnest.

“You know my name,” he said, entering and dropping to the seat beside her. “Where have we met? Your face is familiar, but I am ashamed to admit—”

“We have no time to talk of that. You have never met me, and would not know who I am if I told you. Had it not been for that horrid little man of yours I should have boldly addressed you sooner. I must leave the train at Le Cateau, for I cannot go on to Quevy or Mons. It would not be wise for me to leave France at this time. You do not know me, but I wish to befriend you.”

“Befriend me? I am sure one could not ask for a more charming friend,” said he, smiling gallantly, but now evincing a shade of interest.

“No flattery, Monsieur! It is purely a personal matter with me; this is by no means a pleasure trip. I am running a great risk, but it is for my own sake as much as for yours, so do not thank me. I came from Paris on this train because I could not speak to you at the Gare du Nord. You were watched too closely.”

“Watched? What do you mean?” almost gasped Quentin.

“I can only say that you are in danger and that you have incurred the displeasure of a man who brooks no interference.”

He stared at her for a moment, his mind in a whirl. The thought that she might be mad grew, but was instantly succeeded by another which came like a shock.

“Is this man of noble blood?”

“Yes,” she almost whispered, turning her eyes away.

“And he means to do me harm?”

“I am sure of it.”

“Because?”

“Because he fears your power.”

“In what direction?”

“You know without asking, M. Quentin.”

“And why do you take this interest in me? I am nothing to you.”

“It's because you are not to be treated fairly. Listen. On this train are two men who do not know that I am here, and who would be confounded if they were to see me. They are in one of the forward coaches, and they are emissaries sent on to watch your every movement and to report the progress of your—your business in Brussels. If you become too aggressive before the man who employs them can arrange to come to Brussels, you are to be dealt with in a manner effectual. What is to be done with you, I do not know, but I am certain you are in great danger unless you—” She paused, and a queer expression came into her wide eyes.

“Unless what? You interest me.”

“Unless you withdraw from the contest.”

“You assume that there is a contest of some sort. Well, admitting there is one, I'll say that you may go back to the prince and tell him his scheme doesn't work. This story of yours—pardon me, Mademoiselle is a clever one, and you have done your part well, but I am not in the least alarmed. Kindly return to the man who sent you and ask him to come in your stead if he wants to frighten me. I am not afraid of women, you know.”

“You wrong me, Monsieur; I am not his agent. I am acting purely on my own responsibility, for myself alone. I have a personal object in warning you, but that is neither here nor there. Let me add that I wish you success in the undertaking which now interests you. You must believe me, though, when I say that you are in danger. Forewarned is forearmed. I do not know what steps are to be taken against you; time will expose them. But I do know that you are not to win what you seek.”

“This is a very strange proceeding,” began he, half-convinced of her sincerity.

“We are nearing Le Cateau, and I must leave you. The men of whom I speak are the Duke Laselli and a detective called Courant. I know they are sent to watch you, and they mean you no good. Be careful, for God's sake, Monsieur, for I—I—want you to win!” She was standing now, and with trembling fingers was adjusting a thick veil over her face.

“Why are you so interested in me?” he asked, sharply. “Why do you want me to win—to win, well, to win the battle?”

“Because—” she began, but checked herself. A deep blush spread over her face just as she dropped the veil.

“The cad!” he said, understanding coming to him like a flash. “There is more than one heart at stake.”

“Good-bye and good luck, Monsieur,” she whispered. He held her hand for an instant as she passed him, then she was gone.

Mile after mile from Le Cateau to Quevy found him puzzling over the odd experience of the night. Suddenly he started and muttered, half aloud:

“By thunder, I remember now! It was she who sat beside him in the carriage this morning!”

VIII. THE FATE OF A LETTER

At Quevy the customs officers went through the train, and Quentin knew that he was in Belgium. For some time he had been weighing in his mind the advisability of searching the train for a glimpse of the duke and his companion, doubtful as to the sincerity of the beautiful and mysterious stranger. It was not until the train reached Mons that he caught sight of the duke. He had started out deliberately at last to hunt for the Italian, and the latter evidently had a similar design. They met on the platform and, though it was quite dark, each recognized the other. The American was on the point of addressing the duke when that gentleman abruptly turned and reentered the train, one coach ahead of that occupied by Quentin, who returned to his compartment and proceeded to awaken the snoring man-servant. Without reserve he confided to Turk the whole story of the night up to that point.

“I don't know what their game is, Turk, but we must not be caught napping. We have a friend in the pretty woman who got off in the rain at Le Cateau. She loves the prince, and that's why she's with us.”

“Say, did she look's if she had royal blood in her? Mebby she's a queen er somethin' like that. Blow me, if a feller c'n tell w'at sort of a swell he's goin' up ag'inst over here. Dukes and lords are as common as cabbies are in New York. Anyhow, this duke ain't got no bulge on us. We're nex' to him, all right, all right. Shall I crack him on the knot when we git to this town we're goin' to? A good jolt would put him out o' d' business fer a spell—”

“Now, look here, young man; don't let me hear of you making a move in this affair till I say the word. You are to keep your mouth closed and your hands behind you. What I want you to do is to watch, just as they are doing. Your early training ought to stand you well in hand for this game. I believe you once said you had eyes in the back of your head.”

“Eyes, nothin'! They is microscopes, Mr. Quentin.”

Quentin, during the remainder of the run to Brussels, turned the new situation over and over in his mind. That the prince was ready to acknowledge him as a dangerous rival gave him much satisfaction and inspired the hope that Miss Garrison had given her lover some cause for alarm. The decisive movement on the part of Prince Ugo to forestall any advantage he might acquire while near her in Brussels was a surprise and something of a shock to him. It was an admission,

despite his position and the pledge he had from the girl herself, that the Italian did not feel secure in the premises, and was willing to resort to trickery, if not villainy, to circumvent the American who knew him in other days. Phil felt positive that the move against him was the result of deliberate intent, else how should his fair friend of the early evening know that a plot was brewing? Unquestionably she had heard or learned of the prince's directions to the duke. Her own interest in the prince was, of course, the inspiration. To no one but herself could she entrust the delivery of the warning. Her agitated wish, openly expressed, that Quentin might win the contest had a much deeper meaning than would appear on the surface.

From the moment he received the warning the affair began to take on a new aspect. Aside from the primal fact that he was desperately in love with Dorothy Garrison, there was now the fresh incentive that he must needs win her against uncertain odds and in the face of surprising opposition. In this day and age of the world, in affairs of the heart, an American does not look for rivalry that bears the suggestion of medieval romance. The situation savored too much of the story-books that are born of the days when knights held sway, to appear natural in the eyes of an up-to-date, unromantic gentleman from New York, that city where love affairs adjust themselves without the aid of a novelist.

Quentin, of course, was loath to believe that Prince Ugo would resort to underhand means to checkmate a rival whose real purpose had not yet been announced. In six weeks the finest wedding in years was to occur in Brussels. St. Gudule, that historic cathedral, was to be the scene of a ceremony on which all European newspapers had the eye of comment. American papers had printed columns concerning the engagement of the beautiful Miss Garrison. Everywhere had been published the romantic story of this real love match. What, then, should the prince fear?

The train rumbled into the station at Brussels near midnight, and Turk sallied forth for a cab. This he obtained without the usual amount of haggling on his part, due to the disappointing fact that the Belgian driver could understand nothing more than the word Bellevue, while Turk could interpret nothing more than the word franc. As Quentin was crossing to the cab he encountered Duke Laselli. Both started, and, after a moment's pause, greeted each other.

“I thought I saw you at Mons,” said Phil, after the first expressions of surprise.

“Yes; I boarded the train there. Some business called me to Mons last week. And you, I presume, like most tourists, are visiting a dozen cities in half as many days,” said the duke, in his execrable English. They paused at the side of the Italian's conveyance, and Quentin mentally resolved that the dim light, as it

played upon the face of the speaker, was showing to him the most repellent countenance he had ever looked upon.

“Oh. no,” he answered, quickly, “I shall probably remain until after the marriage of my friend, Miss Garrison, and Prince Ugo. Are you to be here long?”

“I cannot say,” answered the other, his black eyes fastened on Quentin's, “My business here is of an uncertain nature.”

“Diplomatic, I infer?”

“It would not be diplomatic for me to say so. I suspect I shall see you again, Mr. Quentin.”

“Doubtless; I am to be at the Bellevue.”

“And I, also. We may see some of the town together.”

“You are very kind,” said Quentin, bowing deeply. “Do you travel alone?”

“The duchess is ill and is in Florence. I am so lonely without her.”

“It's beastly luck for business to carry one away from a sick wife. By the way, how is my dear friend, Prince Ugo?”

“Exceptionally well, thank you. He will be pleased to know you are here, for he is coming to Brussels next week. I think, if you will pardon me, he has taken quite a fancy to you.”

“I trust, after longer acquaintance, he may not find me a disappointment,” said Phil warmly, and a faint look of curiosity flashed into the duke's eyes. As they were saying good-night, Quentin looked about for the man who might be Courant, the detective. But the duke's companion was not to be seen.

The next morning Quentin proceeded in a very systematic and effective way to locate the home of the Garrisons. He was aware, in the beginning, that they lived in a huge, beautiful mansion somewhere in the Avenue Louise. He knew from his Baedeker that the upper town was the fashionable quarter, and that the Avenue Louise was one of the principal streets. An electric tramcar took him speedily through the Boulevards Regent and Waterloo to the Avenue Louise. A strange diffidence had prevented him from asking at the hotel for directions that would easily have discovered her home. Somehow he wanted to stroll along the avenue in the early morning and locate the home of Dorothy Garrison without other aid than the power which tells one when he is near the object of his adoration. He left the car at the head of the avenue and walked slowly along the street.

His mind was full of her. Every vehicle that passed attracted his gaze, for he

speculated that she might be in one of them. Not a well-dressed woman came within the range of his vision but she was subjected to a hurried inspection, even from a distance. He strode slowly along, looking intently at each house. None of them seemed to him to hold the object of his search. As his steps carried him farther and farther into the beautiful avenue he began to smile to himself and his plodding spirit wavered. After all, thought he, no one but a silly ass would attempt to find a person in a great city after the fashion he was pursuing. He was deciding to board a tramcar and return to the hotel when, at some distance ahead, he saw a young lady run hurriedly down the steps of an impressive looking house.

He recognized Dorothy Garrison, and with a thump of exultation his heart urged him across the street toward her. She evidently had not seen him; her eyes were on the ground and she seemed preoccupied. In her hand she held a letter. A gasp of astonishment, almost of alarm, came from her lips, her eyes opened wide in that sort of surprise which reveals something like terror, and then she crumpled the letter in her hand spasmodically.

“I thought you lived down here somewhere,” he exclaimed, joyfully, seizing her hand. “'I knew I could find you.”

“I—I am so glad to see you,” she stammered, with a brave effort to recover from the shock his appearance had created. “What are you doing here, Phil?”

“Looking for you, Dorothy. Shall I post your letter?”

She was still standing as if rooted to the spot, the letter in a sad plight.

“Oh, I'll not—not post it now. I should have sent the footman. Come with me and see mamma. I know she will be glad to have you here,” she hurried, in evident confusion. She bethought herself suddenly and made an effort to withdraw the letter from its rather conspicuous position. The hand containing it was drawn behind her back.

“That will be very nice of her. Better post the letter, though. Somebody's expecting it, you know. Hullo! That's not a nice way to treat a letter. Let me straighten it out for you."

“Never mind, Phil—really, I don't care about it. You surprised me so tremendously that I fear I've ruined it. Now I shall have to write another.”

“Fiddlesticks! Send it as it is. The prince will blame the postoffice people,” cried he.

“It is not for the prince,” she cried, quickly, and then became more confused than ever. “Come to the house, Phil. You must tell me how you happen to be

here.”

As they walked slowly to the Garrison home and mounted the steps, she religiously held the epistle where he could not regard it too closely should his curiosity overcome his prudence. They were ushered into the reception room, and she directed the footman to ask if Mrs. Garrison could see Mr. Quentin.

“Now, tell me all about it,” she said, taking a chair quite across the big room.

“There's nothing to tell,” he said. “I am in Brussels, and I thought I'd hunt you up.”

“But why didn't you write or wire me that you were coming? You haven't acted much like a friend,” she said, pointedly.

“Perhaps I wrote and never mailed the letter. Remember your experience just now. You still hold the unlucky note in your hand. Sometimes we think better of our intentions at the very instant when they are going into effect. It is very mysterious to me that you wouldn't mail that letter. I can only believe that you changed your mind when you saw me.”

“How absurd! As if seeing you could have anything to do with it!”

“You ought to tell me if my appearance here is liable to alter any plan that letter is intended to perfect. Don't let me be an inconvenience. You know I'd rather be anything than an inconvenience.”

“It doesn't matter in the least; really, it doesn't. Your coming—”

The footman appeared on the landing above at that instant and said something to her in a language Quentin could not understand. He afterward heard it was French. And he always had thought himself a pretty fair French scholar, too.

“Mamma has asked for me, Phil. Will you pardon me if I leave you alone for a moment?” she said, arising and starting toward the grand stairway. The letter, which she had forgotten for the moment, fell from her lap to the rug. In an instant he had stepped forward to pick it up. As he stooped she realized what had happened, and, with a frantic little cry, stooped also. Their heads were close together, but his hand was the first to touch the missive. It lay with the address upward, plain to the eye; he could not help seeing the name.

It was addressed to “Philip Quentin, Esq., care of the Earl of Saxondale, Park Lane, London, W. S.” Surprise stayed his fingers, and hers clutched the envelope ruthlessly. As they straightened themselves each was looking directly into the other's eyes. In hers there was shame, confusion, even guilt; in his, triumphant, tantalizing mirth.

“My letter, please,” he said, his voice trembling, he knew not why. His hand

was extended. She drew suddenly away and a wave of scarlet crossed her face.

“What a stupid I was to drop it,” she cried, almost tearfully. Then she laughed as the true humor of the situation made itself felt in spite of consequences. “Isn't it too funny for anything?”

“I can't see anything funny in tampering with the mails. You have my letter, and I hope it won't be necessary for me to call in the officers of the law.”

“You don't expect me to give it to you?” she cried, holding it behind her.

“Most assuredly. If you don't, I'll ask Mrs. Garrison to command you to do so,” he threatened, eagerly. He would have given his head to read the contents of the letter that caused her so much concern. All sorts of conjectures were racing through his brain.

“Oh, please don't do that!” she begged, and he saw real supplication in her eyes. “I wouldn't give you the letter for the world, and I—I—well, don't you see that I am embarrassed?”

“Give me the letter,” he commanded, Sternly.

“Do you wish me to hate you?” she blazed.

“'Heaven forbid!”

“Then forget that your name is on this—this detestable envelope,” she cried, tearing the missive into pieces. He looked on in wonder, chagrin, disappointment.

“By George, Dorothy, that's downright cruel. It was intended for me—”

“You should thank me. I have only saved you the trouble of destroying it,” she said, smiling.

“I would have kept it forever,” he said, fervently.

“Here's a small bit of the envelope which you may keep as a souvenir. See, it has your name—'Philip'—on it. You shall have that much of the letter.” He took it rather gracelessly and, deliberately opening his watch, placed it inside the case. “I'd give $10,000 to know what that letter had to say to me.”

“You can never know,” she said, defiantly, from the bottom of the steps, “for I have forgotten the contents myself.”

She laughed as she ran upstairs, but he detected confusion in the tone, and the faint flush was still on her cheek. He sat down and wondered whether the contents would have pleased or displeased him. Philosophically he resolved that as long as he was never to know he might just as well look at it from a cheerful point of view; he would be pleased.

IX. MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

It would be difficult to define the emotions that consumed Miss Garrison as she entered her mother's boudoir. She could not conceal from herself the sensation of jubilant delight because he had come to Brussels. At the same time, even though his visit was that of a mere friend, it promised complications which she was loath to face. She went into the presence of her mother with the presentiment that the first of the series was at hand.

“What is Philip Quentin doing here, Dorothy?” demanded Mrs. Garrison. She was standing in the center of the room, and her attitude was that of one who has experienced a very unpleasant surprise. The calm, cold tone was not far from accusing; her steely eyes were hard and uncompromising. The tall daughter stood before her, one hand still clutching the bits of white paper; on her face there was the imprint of demure concern.

“I haven't had time to ask him, mamma,” she said, lightly, “Would it be quite the proper thing to demand the reason for his presence here when it seems quite clear that he is paying us a brief morning call?”

“Do not be absurd! I mean, what is he doing in Brussels? Didn't he say he was to return to New York last week?” There was refined belligerence in her voice. Dorothy gave a brief thought to the cool, unabashed young man below and smiled inwardly as she contemplated the reception he was to receive from this austere interrogator.

“Don't ask me, mamma, I am as much puzzled as you over his sudden advent. It is barely possible he did not go to New York.”

“Well, why didn't he?” This was almost a threat.

“It is a mystery we have yet to unravel. Shall we send for Sherlock Holmes?”

“Dorothy, I am very serious. How can you make light of this unwarranted intrusion? He is—”

“Why do you call it intrusion, mamma? Has he not the right to come? Can we close the door in his face? Is he not a friend? Can we help ourselves if he knocks at our door and asks to see us?” Dorothy felt a smart tug of guilt as she looked back and saw herself trudging sheepishly up the front steps beside the intruder, who had not been permitted to knock at the door.

“A gentleman would not subject you to the comments of—of—well, I may

say the whole world. He certainly saw the paragraphs in those London papers, and he knows that we cannot permit them to be repeated over here. He has no right to thrust himself upon us under the circumstances. You must give him to understand at once, Dorothy, that his intentions—or visits, if you choose to call them such—are obnoxious to both of us.”

“Oh, mamma! we've talked all this over before. What can I do? I wouldn't offend him for the world, and I am sure he is incapable of any desire to have me talked about, He knows me and he likes me too well for that. Perhaps he will go away soon,” said Dorothy, despairing petulance in her voice, Secretly she was conscious of the justice in her mother's complaints.

“He shall go soon,” said Mrs. Garrison, with determination.

“You will not—will not drive him away?” said her daughter, quickly.

“I shall make him understand that you are not the foolish child he knew in New York. You are about to become a princess. He shall be forced to see the impregnable wall between himself and the Princess Ravorelli—for you are virtually the owner of that glorious title. A single step remains and then you are no longer Dorothy Garrison. Philip Quentin I have always disliked, even mistrusted. His reputation in New York was that of a man of the town, a rich roisterer, a 'breaker of hearts,' as your uncle has often called him. He is a daring notoriety seeker, and this is rare sport for him.” Mrs. Garrison's eyes were blazing, her hands were clenched, her bearing that of one who is both judge and executioner.

“I think you do him an injustice,” said Dorothy, slowly, a feeling of deep resentment asserting itself. “Philip is not what you call him. He is a gentleman.” Mother and daughter looked into each other's eyes squarely for a moment, neither flinching, both justifying themselves for the positions they were to take.

“You defend him?”

“As he would defend me.”

“You have another man to defend. Do you think of him?”

“You have yet to say that Ugo is no gentleman. It will then be time for defense, such as I am offering now.”

“We are keeping your friend waiting, Dorothy,” said Mrs. Garrison, with blasting irony. “Give him my compliments and say that we trust he may come every day. He affords us a subject for pleasant discussion, and I am sure Prince Ugo will be as charmed to meet him here as he was in London.”

“Don't be sarcastic, mamma. It doesn't help matters and—” began Dorothy,

almost plaintively.

“Mr. Quentin certainly does not help matters, my dear. Still, if you will enjoy the comment, the notoriety that he may be generous enough to share with you, I can say no more. When you are ready to dismiss him, you shall find me your ally.” She was triumphant because she had scored with sarcasm a point where reason must have fallen far short.

“I might tell Rudolf to throw him into the street,” said Dorothy, dolefully, “only I am quite positive Phil would refuse to be thrown by less than three Rudolfs. But he is expecting you downstairs, mamma. He asked for you.”

“I cannot see him to-day. Tell him I shall be only too glad to see him if he calls again,” and there was a deep, unmistaken meaning in the way she said it.

“You will not go down?” Dorothy's face flushed with something akin to humiliation. After all, he did not deserve to be treated like a dog.

“I am quite content upstairs,” replied Mrs. Garrison, sweetly.

Dorothy turned from her mother without another word, and as she went down the stairs there was rebellion in her soul; the fires of resistance showed their first tiny tongues in the hot wave that swept through her being. Quentin was stretched out comfortably in a big chair, his back toward the stairs, his eyes upon the busy avenue below. She paused for a moment at the foot of the stairs and there was a strange longing to pass her fingers over the thick dark hair. The thought passed instantaneously, but there was a new shyness in her manner as she approached.

“Hullo,” he said, arising as he heard her footfall. “Been watching the people drive by. Pretty smart traps, some of them, too. The old families that came over in the Ark with Moses—er, Noah, I should say.” There was deep concern in the remark, but she was confident that he vaguely understood why she was alone.

“Mamma trusts you will excuse her this morning. She says she will be glad to see you when you come again.” She seated herself on a divan near the window, a trifle out of the glaring light of the August sun. She held in her hand a fan and the bits of paper had disappeared. “Isn't it dreadfully warm?”

“Looks like rain, too,” said he, briefly. Then, with new animation: “Tell me, what was in that letter?”

“Nothing but nonsense,” she replied, smiling serenely, for she was again a diplomat.

“How dare you! How dare you write nonsense to me? But, really, I'd like to know what it was. You'll admit I have a right to be curious.”

“It pleases me to see you curious. I believe it is the first time I ever saw you

interested in anything. Quite novel, I assure you."

"Don't you mean to tell me?"

"Assuredly—not."

"Well, I think it's a roaring shame to write anything to a fellow that he can't be allowed to read. I wouldn't treat you that way."

"I know you wouldn't. You are too good, and too sensible, and too considerate, and all the other kind of too's, while I am just an unaccountable ninny. If you ever did anything crazy you wouldn't like to have it found out, would you?"

"By all means! Then I could take treatment for the malady. Lean forward, Dorothy, so that I can see your eyes. That's right! Now, look at me squarely. Will you tell me what was in that letter?" She returned his gaze steadily, almost mockingly.

"No."

"That's all I want to know. I can always tell by a girl's eyes whether she is stubborn."

"I am not stubborn."

"Well, I'll drop the matter for all time. Doubtless you were right when you said it was nonsense; you ought to know. Changing the subject, I think I'll like Brussels if I stay here long enough." He was again nonchalant, indifferent. Under her mask of unconcern she felt a trifle piqued that he did not persist in his endeavor to learn the contents of the unfortunate letter.

"How long do you expect—I mean purpose to stay?" she asked.

"It depends on conditions. I may be crazy enough to stay six weeks and I may be crazy enough to go away next week. You see, I'm not committing myself to any specified degree of insanity; it won't make so much difference when I am found out, as you say. At present, however, I contemplate staying until that affair at St. Gudule."

She could not hide the annoyance, the discomfiture, his assertion inspired. In a second she saw endless unpleasantries—some pleasantries, it is fair to say—and there seemed to be no gentle way of escape. At the same time, there came once more the queer flutter she had felt when she met him in the street, a half-hour before.

"You will find it rather dull here, I am afraid," she found courage to say. "Or do you know many people—the American minister, perhaps?"

"Don't know a soul here but you and Mrs. Garrison. It won't be dull—not in

the least. We'll ride and drive, go ballooning or anything you like—”

“But I can't, Phil. Do you forget that I am to be married in six weeks?” she cried, now frightened into an earnest appeal.

“That's it, precisely. After that you can't go ballooning with anybody but the prince, so for at least a month you can have a good time telling me what a jolly good fellow he is. That's what girls like, you know, and I don't mind in the least. If you want to talk about him by the hour, I won't utter an objection. Of course, I suppose you'll be pretty busy with your trousseau and so forth, and you'll have the house full of visitors, too, no doubt. But you can give me a little time.”

“I am sure mamma would not—”

“She never did approve, if that's what you were about to say. What is she afraid of? Does she imagine that I want to marry you? Good heavens!” So devout was his implied denial of such a project that she felt herself grow hot. “Doesn't she think the prince has you safely won? You are old enough to take care of yourself, I'm sure.”

“She knows that I love Prince Ugo, and that he is the only man I shall ever love. Her disapproval would arise from the needless exposure to comment. You remember what the London paper said about us.” If she thought that he was chilled by her bold opening assertion she was to find herself mistaken. He smiled complacently.

“I thought it was very nice of them. I am preserving the clipping,” he said, airily. “We can talk over this little difficulty with public opinion when we've had more time to think about it. You see, I've been here but ten hours, and I may be willing to leave tomorrow, that is, after I've seen more of the town. I may not like the king, and I'm quite sure the palace doesn't suit me. I'll come around to-morrow and we'll drive through one of these famous parks—”

“Oh, no, Phil! Really, you don't know how it embarrasses me—”

“I'll go away to-night, if you say you don't want to see me at all, Dorothy,” he said, seriously, rising and standing before her.

“I don't mean that. You know I want to see you—for old times' sake.”

“I shall go, nevertheless, if you merely hint that I am unwelcome.” She arose and suddenly gave him her hand.

“You are not unwelcome, and you are foolish to speak in that manner,” she said, seriously.

“And your mother?”

“She must endure what I endure.”

“Somewhere Baedeker says that the Bois de la Cambre is the finest park in Brussels,” said he, his eyes gleaming.

“I am quite sure Baedeker is reliable,” she agreed, with a smile.

“At three o'clock to-morrow afternoon, then, I will come for you. Will you remember me to your mother and tell her I am sorry not to see her to-day? Good-bye!”

She followed him to the door, and when he sped lightly down the steps there was a broad smile on the face of each. He turned and both laughed outright. “Where there's a will, there's a way,” she mused, as she went to her room upstairs. An hour later her daily letter to the prince was ready for the post. The only allusion to the visitor of the morning was: “Mr. Quentin—our New York friend, you will remember—made us a brief call this morning. He is quite undecided as to the length of his stay here, but I hope you will be here to see him.”

Then, dismissing Quentin from her mind, she sat down to dream of the one great event in her life—this wonderful, glorious wedding in old St. Gudule's. Already her trousseau was on a fair way to completion. She gave no thought to the fortune that these gowns were to cost, she considered not the glories she was to reap by becoming a real princess, she dwelt not on the future before her, for she knew she was to be happy with Ugo. Instead, she dreamed only of the “color scheme” that was to make memorable her wedding procession.

In her mind's eye she saw the great church thronged with the most brilliant, illustrious assemblage it had ever held (she was quite sure no previous gathering could have been more august), and a smile of pride came to her lips. The great chorus, the procession, the lights, the incomprehensible combination of colors, the chancel, the flowers, her wedding gown, and Ugo's dark, glowing face rushed in and out of her vision as she leaned back in her chair and—almost forgot to breathe. The thought of Ugo grew and grew; she closed her eyes and saw him at her side as they walked proudly from the altar with the good bishop's blessing and the song of the choir in their ears, the swelling of love in their souls. So vivid became the dream of his presence that she could almost feel his hand touching hers: she felt her eyes turn toward him, with all that great crowd watching, and her heart quivered with passion as his dark, happy eyes burnt through to her very soul. Somehow she heard distinctly the whisper, “My wife!”

Suddenly a strange chill came over this idle, happy dream, and she opened her eyes with a start, Ugo's face fading away like a flash. The thought had rushed in like a stab from a dagger. Would Philip Quentin be there, and would he care?

Would he care?

X. TWO IN A TRAP

“Th' juke sent his card up, sir,” said Turk, his master was once more in his rooms at the Bellevue. Turk was looking eminently respectable in a new suit of blue serge.

“When?” asked Phil, glancing at Laselli's card. He had forgotten the Italian, and the sight of his name recalled the plot unpleasantly.

“'Bout eleven o'clock. I watched him leave th' hotel an' go down that street over there—th' same one you took a little earlier.”

“Watching me, I suspect. Haven't seen that detective fellow, have you, Turk? You ought to be able to scent a detective three miles away.”

“I can't scent in this language, sir.”

Early in the evening, as Quentin was leaving the hotel for a short stroll, he met the duke. The Italian accosted him familiarly and asked if he were trying to find a cool spot.

“I thought a ride on the tramcars might cool me off a bit,'” said Phil.

“I know the city quite well, and I, too, am searching for relief from the heat. Do you object to company in your ride or stroll?”

“Happy to have you, I assure you. If you'll be good enough to wait here for a moment, till I find my stick, I'll be with you.” The duke bowed politely, and Phil hastened back to his rooms. He secured his stick, and did more. Like a wise young man, he bethought himself of a possible trap, and the quest of the stick gave him the opportunity to instruct Turk to follow him and the duke and to be where he was needed in case of an emergency.

The tall, fresh-faced American in his flannels, and the short, bearded Italian in his trim frock coat and silk hat strolled leisurely forth into the crowded Place du Palais.

“Shall we walk awhile and then find a cafe where we may have something to drink?” asked the duke, his English so imperfect that no writer could reproduce it.

“I am in your hands, and at your mercy,” said the other, clinging close to him as they merged into the crowd.

“May I ask if you have many friends in Brussels?” Under the politeness of the

inquiry Quentin, with amusement, saw the real interest. Looking calmly into the Italian's beady eyes, he said:

“I know but four persons here, and you are included in the list. My servant is another. Mrs. and Miss Garrison are old and particular friends, you know. In fact, my dear duke, I don't believe I should have come to Brussels at all were they not here.”

“They are most charming and agreeable,” murmured the duke. “This is such a frightful crowd Shall we not cross to the other side?”

“What's the use? I used to play football—you don't know what that is, I suppose—and I'll show you how to get through a mob. Get in front—that's right—and I'll bring up in the rear.” Laughing to himself, he brought his big frame up against the little man's back and surged forward. Sure enough, they went “through the mob,” but the duke was the volley end of the battering ram. Never in all his life had he made such hurried and seemingly unnecessary progress through a blockading crowd of roisterers. When they finally went lunging into the half-deserted Rue de la Madeleine, his silk hat was awry, his composure was ruffled, and he was very much out of breath. Phil, supremely at ease, heaved a sigh of satisfaction, drawing from the Italian a half-angry, half-admiring glance.

“Much easier than I thought,” said Quentin, puffing quietly at his cigar.

“We did it very nicely,” agreed the other, with a brave effort to equal the American's unconcern. Nevertheless, he said to himself many times before they reached the broad Boulevard Anspach, that never had he taken such “a stroll,” and never had he known how little difference there was between a steam and a human propeller. He almost forgot, as they sat at a small, table in front of a cafe, to institute his diplomatic search for the real object of the American's presence in Brussels.

It was twelve o'clock when they returned to the hotel, after a rather picturesque evening in the gay cafes.

Here is what the keen little Italian deduced: Quentin was to remain in Brussels until he took a notion to go somewhere else; Quentin had seen the prince driving on the Paris boulevards; the Bois de la Cambre offers every attraction to a man who enjoys driving; the American slept with a revolver near his pillow, and his manservant had killed six or seven men in the United States because of his marvellous skill with the pistol; Quentin was a most unsophisticated young man, with honesty and innocence in his frank eyes, although they sometimes grew rather searching; he could only be overcome by cunning; he was in love with Miss Garrison.

Quentin's conclusions: Laselli was a liar and an ass; Prince Ugo would be in Brussels within ten days; he was careless with the hearts of women and cruel with their love; French detectives are the best in the world, the most infallible; Miss Garrison loved the very ground the prince trod upon. He also discovered that the duke could drink wine as a fish drinks water, and that he seldom made overtures to pay for it until his companion had the money in hand, ready to do so.

Turk was waiting for him when he reached his rooms, and Turk was not amiable. A very attractive, innocent and demure young lady, who could not speak English except with her hands and eyes, had relieved him of a stickpin and his watch while he sat with her at a table not far from the man he was protecting with his vaunted “eagle eye.”

“An' she swiped 'em right under me nose, an' me eyes square on her, too. These people are too keen for me. They ain't a fairy in New York that could 'a' touched me without d' dope, lemme tell you. I t'ought I knowed a t'ing er two, but I don't know buttons from fishhooks. I'm d' easiest t'ing 'at ever went to Sunday school.”

It was with a flushed, rebellious face that Miss Garrison stepped into the victoria the next afternoon for the drive to the Bois de la Cambre. She had come from a rather trying tilt with her mother, and, as they drove off between the rows of trees, she felt that a pair of flaming eyes were levelled from a certain upstairs window in the Avenue Louise. The Biblical admonition to “honor thy father and thy mother” had not been entirely disregarded by this willful young lady, but it had been stretched to an unusual limit for the occasion. She felt that she was very much imposed upon by circumstances in the shape of an unreasonable mother and an inconvenient friend.

Mr. Quentin, more in love than ever, and more deeply inspired by the longing to win where reason told him he must fail, did not flatter himself into believing that Mrs. Garrison wholly approved of the drive. Instead, he surmised from the beginning that Dorothy's flushed cheeks were not from happiness, but from excitement, and that he was not altogether a shadowy cause. With rare tact he plunged at once to the bottom of the sea of uncertainty and began to struggle upward to the light, preferring such a course to the one where you start at the top, go down and then find yourself powerless to get back to the surface.

“Was your mother very much annoyed when you said you were coming out with me?” he asked. She started and a queer little tinge of embarrassment sprang into her eyes.

“How absurd!” she said, readily, however. “Isn't the avenue beautiful?”

“I don't know—yet,” he said, without looking at the avenue. “What did she say?” Miss Garrison did not reply, but looked straight ahead as if she had not heard him. “See here, Dorothy, I'm not a child and I'm not a lovesick fool. Just curious, that's all. Your mother has no cause to be afraid of me—”

“You flatter yourself by imagining such a thing as—”

“—because there isn't any more danger that I shall fall in love with you than there is of—of—well, of your falling in love with me; and you know how improbable—”

“I don't see any occasion to refer to love in any way,” she said, icily. “Mamma certainly does not expect me to do such an extraordinary thing. If you will talk sensibly, Phil, we may enjoy the drive, but if you persist in talking of affairs so ridiculous—”

“I can't say that I expect you to fall in love with me, so for once your mother and I agree. Nevertheless, she didn't want you to come with me,” he said, absolutely undisturbed.

“How do you know she didn't?” she demanded, womanlike. Then, before she was quite aware of it, they were in a deep and earnest discussion of Mrs. Garrison, and her not very complimentary views.

“And how do you feel about this confounded prospect, Dorothy? You are not afraid of what a few gossips—noble or otherwise—may say about a friendship that is entirely the business of two people and not the property of the general public? If you feel that I am in the way I'll gladly go, you know. Of course, I'd rather hate to miss seeing you once in a while, but I think I'd have the courage to —”

“Oh, it's not nice of you to be sarcastic,” she cried, wondering, however, whether he really meant “gladly” when he said it. Somehow she felt herself admitting that she was piqued by his apparent readiness to abdicate. She did not know that he was cocksure of his ground before making the foregoing and other observations equally as indifferent.

“I'm not sarcastic; quite the reverse. I'm very serious. You know how much I used to think of you—”

“But that was long ago, and you were such a foolish boy,” she cried, interrupting nervously.

“Yes, I know; a boy must have his foolish streaks. How a fellow changes as he gets older, and how he looks back and laughs at the fancies he had when a boy.

Same way with a girl, though, I suppose." He said it so calmly, so naturally that she took a sly peep at his face. It revealed nothing but blissful imperturbability.

"I'm glad you agree with me. You see, I've always thought you were horribly broken up when I—when I found that I also was indulging in a foolish streak. I believe I came to my senses before you did, though, and saw how ridiculous it all was. Children do such queer things, don't they?" It was his turn to take a sly peep, and his spirits went down a bit under the pressure of her undisguised frankness.

"How lucky it was we found it out before we ran away with each other, as we once had the nerve to contemplate. Gad, Dorothy, did you ever stop to think what a mistake it would have been?" She was bowing to some people in a brougham, and the question was never answered. After a while he went on, going back to the original subject. "I shall see Mrs. Garrison to-night and talk it over with her. Explain to her, you know, and convince her that I don't in the least care what the gossips say about me. I believe I can live it all down, if they do say I am madly, hopelessly in love with the very charming fiancee of an Italian prince."

"You have me to reckon with, Phil; I am the one to consider and the one to pass judgment. You may be able to appease mamma, but it is I who will determine whether it is to be or not to be. Let us drop the subject. For the present, we are having a charming drive. Is it not beautiful?"

To his amazement and to hers, when they returned late in the afternoon Mrs. Garrison asked him to come back and dine.

"I must be dreaming," he said to himself, as he drove away. "She's as shrewd as the deuce, and there's a motive in her sudden friendliness. I'm beginning to wonder how far I'll drop and how hard I'll hit when this affair explodes. Well, it's worth a mighty strenuous effort. If I win, I'm the luckiest fool on earth; if I lose, the surprise won't kill me." At eight he presented himself again at the Garrison house and found that he was not the only guest. He was introduced to a number of people, three of whom were Americans, the others French. These were Hon. and Mrs. Horace Knowlton and their daughter, Miss Knowlton, M. and Mme. de Cartier, Mile. Louise Gaudelet and Count Raoul de Vincent.

"Dorothy tells me you are to be in Brussels for several weeks, and I was sure you would be glad to know some of the people here. They can keep you from being lonesome, and they will not permit you to feel that you are a stranger in a strange land," said Mrs. Garrison. Quentin bowed deeply to her, flashed a glance of understanding at Dorothy, and then surveyed the strangers he was to meet.

Quick intelligence revealed her motive in inviting him to meet these people, and out of sheer respect for her shrewdness he felt like applauding. She was cleverly providing him with acquaintances that any man might wish to possess, and she was doing it so early that the diplomacy of her action was as plain as day to at least two people.

“Mamma is clever, isn't she?” Dorothy said to him, merrily, as they entered the dining-room. Neither was surprised to find that he had been chosen to take her out. It was in the game.

“She is very kind. I can't say how glad I am to meet these people. My stay here can't possibly be dull,” he said. “Mile. Gaudelet is stunning, isn't she?”

“Do you really think so?” she asked, and she did not see his smile.

The dinner was a rare one, the company brilliant, but there was to occur, before the laughter in the wine had spent itself, an incident in which Philip Quentin figured so conspicuously that his wit as a dinner guest ceased to be the topic of subdued side talk, and he took on a new personality.

XI. FROM THE POTS AND PLANTS

The broad veranda, which faced the avenue and terminated at the corner of the house in a huge circle, not unlike an open conservatory, afforded a secluded and comparatively cool retreat for the diners later in the evening. Banked along the rails were the rarest of tropical plants; shaded incandescent lamps sent their glow from somewhere among the palms, and there was a suggestion of fairy-land in the scene. If Quentin had a purpose in being particularly assiduous in his attentions to Mlle. Gaudelet, he did not suspect that he was making an implacable foe of Henri de Cartier, the husband of another very charming young woman. Unaccustomed to the intrigues of Paris, and certainly not aware that Brussels copied the fashions of her bigger sister across the border in more ways than one, he could not be expected to know that de Cartier loved not his wife and did love the pretty Louise. Nor could his pride have been convinced that the young woman at his side was enjoying the tete-a-tete chiefly because de Cartier was fiercely cursing the misfortune which had thrown this new element into conflict. It may be unnecessary to say that Mrs. Garrison was delighted with the unmistakable signs of admiration manifested by the two young people.

It was late when Quentin reluctantly arose to make his adieux. He had finished acknowledging the somewhat effusive invitations to the houses of his new acquaintances, and was standing near Dorothy, directly in front of a tall bank of palms. From one point of view this collection of plants looked like a dense jungle, so thickly were they placed on the porch at its darkest end. The light from a drawing-room window shone across the front of the green mass, but did not penetrate the recess near the porch rail. He was taking advantage of a very brief opportunity, while others were moving away, to tell her that Mile. Louise was fascinating, when her hand suddenly clasped his arm and she whispered:

“Phil, there is a man behind those palms.” His figure straightened, but he did not look around.

“Nonsense, Dorothy. How could a man get—” he began, in a very low tone.

“I saw the leaves move, and just now I saw a foot near the rail. Be careful, for heaven's sake, but look for yourself; he is near the window.”

Like statues they stood, she rigid under the strain, but brave enough and cool enough to maintain a remarkable composure. She felt the muscle of his forearm contract, and there swept over her a strange dread. His eyes sought the spot

indicated in a perfectly natural manner, and there was no evidence of perturbation in his gaze or posture. The foot of a man was dimly discernible in the shadow, protruding from behind a great earthen jar. Without a word he led her across the porch to where the others stood.

“Good-night, Mrs. Garrison,” he said, calmly, taking the hand she proffered. Dorothy, now trembling like a leaf, looked on in mute surprise. Did he mean to depart calmly, with the knowledge that they needed his protection? “Good-night, Miss Garrison. I trust I shall see you soon.” Then, in a lower tone: “Get the people around the corner here, and not a word to them.”

The ladies were quite well past the corner before he ventured to tell the men, whom he held back on some trifling pretext, that there was a man among the plants. The information might have caused a small panic had not his coolness dominated the nerves of the others.

“Call the gendarmes,” whispered de Cartier, panic stricken. “Call the servants.”

“We don't want the officers nor the servants,” said Philip, coolly. “Let the ladies get inside the house and we'll soon have a look at our fellow guest.”

“But he may be armed,” said the count, nervously.

“Doubtless he is. Burglars usually are. I had an experience with an armed burglar once on a time, and I still live. Perhaps a few palms will be damaged, but we'll be as considerate as possible. There is no time to lose, gentlemen. He may be trying to escape even now.”

Without another word he turned and walked straight toward the palms. Not another man followed, and he faced the unwelcome guest alone. Faced is the right word, for the owner of the telltale foot had taken advantage of their momentary absence from that end of the porch to make a hurried and reckless attempt to leave his cramped and dangerous hiding-place. He was crowding through the outer circle of huge leaves when Quentin swung into view. The light from the window was full in the face of the stranger, white, scared, dogged.

“Here he is!” cried Quentin, leaping forward. “Come on, gentlemen!”

With a frantic plunge the trapped stranger crashed through the plants, crying hoarsely in French as he met Quentin in the open:

“I don't want to kill you! Keep off!”

Quentin's arm shot out and the fellow went tumbling back among the pots and plants. He was up in an instant. As the American leaped upon him for the second blow, he drove his hand sharply, despairingly, toward that big breast. There came

the ripping of cloth, the tearing of flesh, and something hot gushed over Phil's shoulder and arm. His own blow landed, but not squarely, and, as he stumbled forward, his lithe, vicious antagonist sprang aside, making another wild but ineffectual sweep with the knife he held in his right hand. Before Quentin could recover, the fellow was dashing straight toward the petrified, speechless men at the end of the porch, where they had been joined by some of the women.

“Out of the way! Out of the way!” he shrieked, brandishing his knife. Through the huddled bunch he threw himself, unceremoniously toppling over one of them. The way was clear, and he was down the steps like a whirlwind. It was all over in an instant's time, but before the witnesses to the encounter could catch the second breath, the tall form of Philip Quentin was flying down the steps in close pursuit. Out into the Avenue Louise they raced, the fugitive with a clear lead.

“Come back, Phil!” cried a woman's voice, and he knew the tone because of the thrill it sent to his heart.

He heard others running behind him, and concluded that his fellow guests had regained their wits and were in the chase with him. If the pursued heard the sudden, convulsive laugh of the man behind him he must have wondered greatly. Phil could not restrain the wild desire to laugh when he pictured the sudden and precipitous halt his valiant followers would be compelled to make if the fugitive should decide to stop and show fight. One or more of them would doubtless be injured in the impossible effort to run backward while still going forward.

Blood was streaming down his arm and he was beginning to feel an excruciating pain. Pedestrians were few, and they made no effort to obstruct the flight of the fugitive. Instead, they gave him a wide berth. From far in the rear came hoarse cries, but Quentin was uttering no shout. He was grinding his teeth because the fellow had worsted him in the rather vainglorious encounter on the porch, and was doing all in his power to catch him and make things even. To his dismay the fellow was gaining on him and he was losing his own strength. Cursing the frightened men who allowed the thief to pass on unmolested and then joined in the chase, he raced panting onward. The flying fugitive suddenly darted into a narrow, dark street, fifty feet ahead of his pursuer, and the latter felt that he had lost him completely. There was no sign of him when Quentin turned into the cross street; he had disappeared as if absorbed by the earth.

For a few minutes Philip and the mob—quite large, inquisitive and eager by this time—searched for a trace of the man, but without avail. The count, de Cartier and the Honorable Mr. Knowlton, with several of Mrs. Garrison's servants, came puffing up and, to his amazement and rage, criticised him for

allowing the man to escape. They argued that a concerted attack on the recess amongst the palms would have overwhelmed the fellow and he would now be in the hands of the authorities instead of as free as air. Quentin endured the expostulations of his companions and the fast-enlarging mirth of the crowd for a few moments in dumb surprise. Then he turned suddenly to retrace his steps up the avenue, savagely saying:

“If I had waited till you screwed up nerve enough to make a combined attack, the man would not have been obliged to take this long and tiresome run. He might have called a cab and ridden away in peace and contentment.”

A laugh of derision came from the crowd and the two Frenchmen looked insulted. Mr. Knowlton flushed with shame and hurried after his tall countryman.

“You are right, Quentin, you're right,” he wheezed. “We did not support you, and we are to blame. You did the brave and proper thing, and we stood by like a lot of noodles—”

“Well, it's all over, Knowlton, and we all did the best we could,” responded Philip, with intense sarcasm which was lost on Mr. Knowlton. Just then a sturdy little figure bumped against him and he looked down as the newcomer grasped his arm tightly.

“Hello, Turk! It's about time you were showing up. Where the devil have you been?” exclaimed he, wrathfully.

“I'll tell y' all about it w'en I gits me tires pumped full agin. Come on, come on; it's private—strictly private, an' nobody's nex' but me.” When there was a chance to talk without being overheard by the three discomfited gentlemen in the rear, Turk managed to give his master a bit of surprising news.

“That guy was Courant, that's who he was. He's been right on your heels since yesterday, an' I just gits nex' to it. He follers you up to th' house back yonder an' there's w'ere I loses him. Seems like he hung aroun' the porch er porticker, er whatever it is over here, watchin' you w'en you wuz inside. I don't know his game, but he's th' guy. An' I know w'ere he is now.”

“The dickens you do! You infernal little scoundrel, take me there at once. Good Lord, Turk, I've got to catch him. These people will laugh at me for a month if I don't. Are you sure he is Courant? How do you know? Where is he?” cried Phil, excited and impatient.

“You ain't near bein' keen. He doubled on you, that's w'at he done. W'en you chased him off on that side street he just leaps over th' garden wall an' back he comes into a yard. I comes up, late as usual, just in time t' see him calmly prance up some doorsteps an' ring th' bell. Wile th' gang an' you wuz lookin' fer him in

th' gutters an' waste paper boxes, he stan's up there an' grins complackently. Then th' door opens an' he slides in like a fox."

"Where is the house? We must search it from top to bottom."

"Can't do that, Mr. Quentin. How are you goin' to search that house without a warrant? An' w'at are you goin' to find w'en you do search it? He's no common thief. He's in a game that we don't know nothin' about, an' he's got cards up his sleeve clear to th' elbow. Th' people in that house is his friends, an' he's safe, so w'at's th' use? I've got th' joint spotted an' he don't know I am nex'. It's a point in our favor. There wuz a woman opened the door, so she's in th' game, too. Let's lay low, Mr. Quentin, an' take it cool."

"But what in thunder was he doing behind those palms? That wasn't a very sensible bit of detective work, was it?"

"Most detectives is asses. He was hidin' there just to earn his money. To-morrow he could go to th' juke an' tell him how slick he'd been in hearin' w'at you said to th' young lady w'en you thought nobody was listenin'. Was he hid near a window?'

"Just below one—almost against the casing."

"Easy sailin'. He figgered out that some time durin' th' night you an' her would set in that window an' there you are. See? But I wonder w'at he'll say to th' juke to-morrow?"

"I hate to give this job up," growled Phil. "But I must get back to the hotel. The villain cut me with a knife."

By this time they were in front of the Garrison home, and in an undertone he bade Turk walk on and wait for him at the corner below.

"Did he escape?" cried Dorothy from the steps.

"He gave us the slip, confound him, Dorothy."

"I'm glad, really I am. What could we have done with him if he had been caught? But are you not coming in?"

"Oh, not to-night, thank you. Can't you have some one bring out my hat and coat?" He was beginning to feel faint and sick, and purposely kept the bloody arm from the light.

"You shall not have them unless you come in for them. Besides, we want you to tell us what happened. We are crazy with excitement. Madame de Cartier fainted, and mamma is almost worried to death."

"Are you not coming up, Mr. Quentin?" called Mrs. Garrison, from the veranda.

“You must come in,” said de Cartier, coming up at that moment with the count and Mr. Knowlton.

“Really, I must go to the hotel, I am a little faint after that wretched run. Let me go, please; don't insist on my coming in,” he said.

“Mon dieu!” exclaimed the count. “It is blood, Monsieur! You are hurt!”

“Oh, not in the least—merely a—”

“Phil!” cried Dorothy, standing in front of him, her wide eyes looking intently into his. “Are you hurt? Tell me!”

“Just a little cut in the arm or shoulder, I think. Doesn't amount to anything, I assure—”

“Come in the house at once, Philip Quentin!” she exclaimed. “Mr. Knowlton, will you ask Franz to telephone for Dr. Berier?” Then she saw the blood-stained hand and shuddered, turning her face away. “Oh, Phil!” she whispered.

“That pays for this cut and more, if necessary,” he said, in a low voice, as he walked at her side up the steps.

“Lean on me, Phil,” she said. “You must be faint.” He laughed merrily, and his eyes sparkled with something not akin to pain.

Dr. Berier came and closed the gash in his shoulder. An hour later he came downstairs, to find Mrs. Garrison and Dorothy alone.

“You were very brave, Mr. Quentin, but very foolhardy,” said Mrs. Garrison. “I hope from my heart the wound will give you little trouble.”

His good right hand closed over hers for an instant and then clasped Dorothy's warmly, lingeringly.

“You must let us hear from you to-morrow,” said she, softly.

“Expect me to fetch the message in person,” said he, and he was off down the steps. He did not look back, or he might have seen her standing on the veranda, her eyes following him till he was joined by another man at the corner below.

XII. HE CLAIMED A DAY

The strange experience of the evening brought Quentin sharply to a sense of realization. It proved to him that he was feared, else why the unusual method of campaign? To what extent the conspirators would carry their seemingly unnecessary warfare he was now, for the first time, able to form some sort of opinion. The remarkable boldness of the spy at the Garrison home left room for considerable speculation as to his motive. What was his design and what would have been the ending to his sinister vigil? Before Quentin slept that night he came to the drowsy conclusion that luck had really been with him, despite his wound and Courant's escape, and that the sudden exposure of the spy destroyed the foundation for an important move in the powderless conflict.

In the morning his shoulder was so sore that the surgeon informed him he could not use the arm for several days. Turk philosophically bore the brunt of his master's ire. Like a little Napoleon he endured the savage assaults from Quentin's vocal batteries, taking them as lamentations instead of imprecations. The morning newspapers mentioned the attempt to rob Mrs. Garrison's house and soundly deplored the unstrategic and ill-advised attempt of “an American named Canton” to capture the desperado. “The police department is severe in its criticism of the childish act which allowed the wretch to escape detection without leaving the faintest clew behind. Officers were close at hand, and the slightest warning would have had them at the Garrison home. The capture of this man would have meant much to the department, as he is undoubtedly one of the diamond robbers who are working havoc in Brussels at this time. He was, it is stated positively by the police, not alone in his operations last night. His duty, it is believed, was to obtain the lay of the land and to give the signal at the proper moment for a careful and systematic raid of the wealthy woman's house. The police now fear that the robbers, whose daring exploits have shocked and alarmed all Brussels, are on their guard and a well-defined plan to effect their capture is ruined. A prominent attache of the department is of the opinion that an attempt was to have been made by the band to relieve all of Mrs. Garrison's guests of their jewels in a sensational game of 'stand and deliver.'”

“The miserable asses!” exploded Phil, when 'he read the foregoing. “That is the worst rot I ever read. This police department couldn't catch a thief if he were tied to a tree. Turk, if they were so near at hand why the devil didn't they get into

the chase with me and run that fellow down?”

“Th' chances are they was in th' chase, Mr. Quentin, but they didn't get th' proper direction. They thought he was bein' chased th' other way, an' I wouldn't be surprised if some of 'em run five or six miles before they stopped t' reflect.”

“If there is a gang of diamond robbers or comic opera bandits in this city I'll bet my hand they could steal the sidewalks without being detected, much less captured. A scheme to rob all of Mrs. Garrison's guests! The asses!”

“Don't get excited, sir. You'll burst a blood vessel, an' that's a good sight worse than a cut,” cautioned Turk.

“Turk, in all your burglarious years, did you ever go about robbing a house in that manner?”

“Not in a million years.”

“Well, what are we to do next?” demanded Quentin, reflectively, ignoring his former question and Turk's specific answer. “Shall we give the police all the information we have and land Mr. Courant in jail?”

“This is our game, sir, not th' police's. For th' Lord's sake, don't give anything up to th' cops. They'll raise particular thunder in their sleep, an' we gets th' rough ha! ha! from our frien's, th' enemy. We pipes this little game ourself, an' we wins, too, if we succeed in keepin' th' police from gettin' nex' to anything they'd mistake for a clue.”

Phil thought long and hard before sitting down at noon to write to Dickey Savage. He disliked calling for help in the contest, but with a bandaged arm and the odds against him, he finally resolved that he needed the young New Yorker at his side. Dickey was deliberation itself, and he was brave and loyal. So the afternoon's post carried a letter to Savage, who was still in London, asking him to come to Brussels at once, if he could do so conveniently. The same post carried a letter to Lord Bob, and in it the writer admitted that he might need reinforcements before the campaign closed. He also inclosed the clipping from the newspaper, but added a choice and caustic opinion of the efficiency of the Brussels police. He did not allude specifically to Courant, the duke, or to the queer beginning of the prince's campaign.

Early in the afternoon Mrs. Garrison sent to inquire as to his wound. In reply he calmly prepared for an appearance in person. Turk accompanied him, about four o'clock, in a cab to the house in Avenue Louise. There were guests, and Phil was forced to endure a rather effusive series of feminine exclamations and several polite expressions from men who sincerely believed they could have done better had they been in his place. Mrs. Garrison was a trifle distant at first,

but as she saw Quentin elevated to the pedestal of a god for feminine worship she thawed diplomatically, and, with rare tact, assumed a sort of proprietorship. Dorothy remained in the background, but he caught anxious glances at his arm, and, once or twice, a serious contemplation of his half-turned face.

“I'll let her think the fellow was one of the diamond robbers for the present,” thought he. “She wouldn't believe me if I told her he was in the employ of the prince, and the chances are she'd ruin everything by writing to him about it.”

When at last he found the opportunity to speak with her alone he asked how she had slept.

“Not at all, not a wink, not a blink. I imagined I heard robbers in every part of the house. Are you speaking the truth when you tell all these people it is a mere scratch? I am sure it is much worse, and I want you to tell me the truth,” she said, earnestly.

“I've had deeper cuts that didn't bleed a drop,” said he. “If you must have the truth, Dorothy, I'll confess the fellow gave me a rather nasty slash, and I don't blame him, He had to do it, and he's just as lucky as I am, perhaps, that it was no worse. I wish to compliment your Brussels police, too, on being veritable bloodhounds. I observed as I came in that they have at last scented the blood on the pavement in front of the house and have washed away the stain fairly well.”

“Wasn't the story in the morning paper ridiculous? You were very brave. I almost cried when I saw how the horrid detectives criticised you.”

“I'm glad to hear you say that, because I was afraid you'd think like the rest—that I was a blundering idiot.”

“You did not fear anything of the kind. Do you really think he was one of those awful diamond robbers who are terrorizing the town? I could not sleep another wink if I thought so. Why, last spring a rich merchant and his wife were drugged in one of the cafes, taken by carriage to Watermael, where they were stripped of their valuables and left by the roadside.”

“Did you see an account of the affair in your morning paper?”

“Yes—there were columns about it.”

“Then I think eight-tenths of the crime was committed at a city editor's desk. It's my opinion these diamond thieves are a set of ordinary pickpockets and petty porch climbers. A couple of New York policemen could catch the whole lot in a week.”

“But, really, Phil, they are very bold and they are not at all ordinary. You don't know how thankful we are that this one was discovered before he got into the

house. Didn't he have a knife? Well, wasn't it to kill us with if we made an outcry?" She was nervous and excited, and he had it on the tip of his tongue to allay her fears by telling what he thought to be the true object of the man's visit.

"Well, no matter what he intended to do, he didn't do it, and he'll never come back to try it again. He will steer clear of this house," he said, reassuringly.

A week, two weeks went by without a change in the situation. Dickey Savage replied that he would come to Brussels as soon as his heart trouble would permit him to leave London, and that would probably be about the twentieth of August. In parentheses he said he hoped to be out of danger by that time. The duke was persistent in his friendliness, and Courant had, to all intents and purposes, disappeared completely. Prince Ugo was expected daily, and Mrs. Garrison was beginning to breathe easily again. The police had given up the effort to find the Garrison robber, and Turk had learned everything that was to be known concerning the house in which Courant found shelter after eluding his pursuers on the night of the affray. Quentin's shoulder was almost entirely healed, and he was beginning to feel himself again. The two weeks had found him a constant and persistent visitor at Miss Garrison's home, but he was compelled to admit that he had made no progress in his crusade against her heart. She baffled him at every turn, and he was beginning to lose his confident hopes. At no time during their tete-a-tetes, their walks, their drives, their visits to the art galleries, did she give him the slightest ground for encouragement. And, to further disturb his sense of contentment, she was delighted—positively delighted—over the coming of Prince Ugo. For a week she had talked of little save the day when he was to arrive. Quentin endured these rapturous assaults nobly, but he was slowly beginning to realize that they were battering down the only defense he had—the inward belief that she cared for him in spite of all.

Frequently he met the Duke Laselli at the Garrisons'. He also saw a great deal of the de Cartiers and Mile. Gaudelet. When, one day, he boldly intimated to Dorothy that de Cartier was in love with Louise and she with him, that young lady essayed to look shocked and displeased, but he was sure he saw a quick gleam of satisfaction in her eyes. And he was positive the catch in her breath was not so much of horror as it was of joy. Mrs. Garrison did all in her power to bring him and the pretty French girl together, and her insistence amused him.

One day her plans, if she had any, went racing skyward, and she, as well as all Brussels society, was stunned by the news that de Cartier had deserted his wife to elope with the fair Gaudelet! When Quentin laconically, perhaps maliciously, observed that he had long suspected the nature of their regard for one another, Mrs. Garrison gave him a withering look and subsided into a chilling

unresponsiveness that boded ill for the perceiving young man. The inconsiderate transgression of de Cartier and the unkindness of the Gaudelet upset her plans cruelly, and she found that she had wasted time irreparably in trying to bring the meddling American to the feet of the French woman. Quentin revelled in her discomfiture, and Dorothy in secret enjoyed the unexpected turn of affairs.

She had seen through her mother's design, and she had known all along how ineffectual it would prove in the end. Philip puzzled her and piqued her more than she cared to admit. That she did not care for him, except as a friend, she was positive, but that he should persistently betray signs of nothing more than the most ordinary friendship was far from pleasing to her vanity. The truth is, she had expected him to go on his knees to her, an event which would have simplified matters exceedingly. It would have given her the opportunity to tell him plainly she could be no more than a friend, and it would have served to alter his course in what she believed to be a stubborn love chase. But he had disappointed her; he had been the amusing companion, the ready friend, the same sunny spirit, and she was perplexed to observe that he gave forth no indication of hoping or even desiring to be more. She could not, of course, know that this apparently indifferent young gentleman was wiser, far wiser, than the rest of his kind. He saw the folly of a rash, hasty leap in the dark, and bided his time like the cunning general who from afar sees the hopelessness of an attack against a strong and watchful adversary, and waits for the inevitable hour when the vigil is relaxed.

There was no denying the fact that with all his confidence his colors were sinking, while hers remained as gallantly fluttering as when the struggle began. He was becoming confused and nervous; a feeling of impotence began slyly, devilishly to assail him, and he frequently found himself far out at sea. The strange inactivity of the prince's cohorts, the significant friendliness of the duke, the everlasting fear that a sudden move might catch him unawares began to tell on his peace of mind. Both he and Turk watched like cats for the slightest move that might betray the intentions of the foe, but there was nothing, absolutely nothing. The house in which Courant found safety was watched, but it gave forth no secrets. The duke's every movement appeared to be as open, as fair, as unsuspicious as man's could be, and yet there was ever present the feeling that some day something would snap and a crisis would rush upon them. Late one afternoon he drove up to the house in Avenue Louise, and when Dorothy came downstairs for the drive her face was beaming.

“Ugo comes to-morrow,” she said, as they crossed to the carriage.

“Which means that I am to be relegated to the dark,” he said, dolefully.

“Oh, no! Ugo likes you and I like you, you know. Why, are we not to be the same good friends as now?” she asked, suddenly, with a pretty show of surprise.

“Oh, I suppose so,” he said, looking straight ahead. They were driving rapidly toward the Bois de la Cambre. “But, of course, I'll not rob the prince of moments that belong to him by right of conquest. You may expect to see me driving disconsolately along the avenue—alone.”

“Mr. Savage will be here,” she said, sweetly, enjoying his first show of misery.

“But he's in love, and he'll not be thinking of me. I'm the only one in all Christendom, it seems to me, who is not in love with somebody, and it's an awful hardship.”

“You will fall really in love some day, never fear,” she volunteered, after a somewhat convulsive twist of the head in his direction.

“Unquestionably,” he said, “and I shall be just as happy and as foolish as the rest of you, I presume.”

“I should enjoy seeing you really and truly in love with some girl. It would be so entertaining.”

“A perfect comedy, I am sure. I must say, however, that I'd feel sorry for the girl I loved if she didn't happen to love me.”

“And why, pray?”

“Because,” he said, turning abruptly and looking straight into her eyes, “she'd have the trouble and distinction of surrendering in the end.”

“You vain, conceited thing!” she exclaimed, a trifle disconcerted. “You overestimate your power.”

“Do you think I overestimate it?” he demanded, quickly.

“I don t—don't know. How should I know?” she cried, in complete rout. In deep chagrin she realized that he had driven her sharply into unaccountable confusion, and that her wits were scattering hopelessly at the very moment when she needed them most.

“Then why do you say I overestimate it?” he asked, relentlessly.

“Because you do,” she exclaimed, at bay.

“Are you a competent judge?”

“What do you mean?” she asked, grasping for time.

“I mean, have you the right to question my power, as you call it? Have I attempted to exert it over you?”

“You are talking nonsense, Phil,” she said, spiritedly.

“I said I'd feel sorry for the girl if she didn't happen to love me, you know. Well, I couldn't force her to love me if she didn't love me, could I?”

“Certainly not. That is what I meant,” she cried, immensely relieved.

“But my point is that she might love me without knowing it and would simply have to be brought to the realization.”

“Oh,” she said, “that is different.”

“You take back what you said, then?” he asked, maliciously.

“If she loved you and did not know it, she'd be a fool and you could exert any kind of power over her. You see, we didn't quite understand each other, did we?”

“That is for you to say,” he said, smiling significantly. “I think I understand perfectly.”

By this time they were opposite the Rue Lesbroussart, and he drove toward the Place Ste. Croix. As they made the turn she gave a start and peered excitedly up the Avenue Louise, first in front of her companion, then behind.

“Oh, Phil, there is Ugo!” she cried, clasping his arm. “See! In the trap, coming toward us.” He looked quickly, but the trees and houses now hid the other trap from view.

“Are you sure it is he?”

“Oh, I am positive. He has come to surprise me. Is there no way we can reach the house first? By the rear—anyway,” she cried, excitedly. Her face was flushed, and her eyes were sparkling.

“Was he alone?” asked he, his jaw setting suddenly.

“That has nothing to do with it. We must hurry home. Turn back, Phil; we may be able to overtake him on the avenue.”

“I wanted to take you to the Park, Dorothy.”

“Well?”

“That's all,” he went on, calmly. “The prince can leave his card and call later in the—well, this evening.”

“What—you don't mean—Philip Quentin, take me home instantly,” she blazed.

“Not for all the princes in the universe,” he said. “This is my afternoon, and I will not give up a minute of it.”

“But I command, sir!”

“And I refuse to obey.”

“Oh—oh, this is outrageous——” she began, frantically.

Suddenly his gloved left hand dropped from the reins and closed over one of hers. The feverish clasp and the command in his eyes compelled her to look up into his face quickly. There she saw the look she feared, admired, deserved.

“There was a time when you wanted to be with me and with no other. I have not forgotten those days, nor have you. They were the sweetest days of your life and of mine. It is no age since I held this hand in mine, and you would have gone to the end of the world with me. It is no age since you kissed me and called me a king. It is no age since you looked into my eyes with an expression far different from the one you now have. You remember, you remember, Dorothy.”

She was too surprised to answer, too overcome by the suddenness of his assault to resist. The power she had undertaken to estimate was in his eyes, strong, plain, relentless.

“And because you remember I can see the hardness going from your eyes, the tenderness replacing it. The flush in your cheek is not so much of anger as it was, your heart is not beating in rebellion as it was, and all because you cannot forget—you will not forget.”

“This is madness,” she cried, shivering as with a mighty chill.

“Madness it may be, Dorothy, but—well, because we have not forgotten the days when we were sweethearts, I am claiming this day of you and you must give it to me for the same reason. You must say to me that you give it willingly,” he half whispered, intensely. She could only look helplessly into his eyes.

From the rumble Turk saw nothing, neither did he hear.

XIII. SOME UGLY LOOKING MEN

Prince Ugo Ravorelli was not, that day, the only one whose coming to Brussels was of interest to Quentin. Dickey Savage came in from Ostend and was waiting at the Bellevue when he walked in soon after six o'clock. Mr. Savage found a warm welcome from the tall young man who had boldly confiscated several hours that belonged properly to the noble bridegroom, and it was not long until, dinner over, he was lolling back in a chair in Quentin's room, his feet cocked on the window sill, listening with a fair and increasing show of interest to the confidences his friend was pouring forth.

“So you deliberately drove off and left the prince, eh? And she didn't sulk or call you a nasty, horrid beast? I don't know what the devil you want me here for if you've got such a start as that. Seems to me I'll be in the way, more or less,” said Dickey, when the story reached a point where, to him, finis was the only appropriate word.

“That's the deuce of it, Dickey. I can't say that I've got a safe start at all, even with her, and I've certainly got some distance to go before I can put the prince out of the running. You may think this is a nice, easy, straightaway race, but it isn't. It's going to be a steeplechase, and I don't know the course. I'm looking for a wide ditch at any turn, and I may get a nasty fall. You see, I've some chance of getting my neck broken before I get to the stretch.”

“And some noted genius will be grinding out that Lohengrin two-step just about the time you get within hearing distance, too. You won't be two-stepping down the aisle at St. Gudule, but you'll agree that it's a very pretty party. That will be all, my boy—really all. I don't want to discourage you and I'm willing to stay by you till that well-known place freezes over, but I think an ocean voyage would be very good for you if you can arrange to start to-morrow.”

“If you're going into this thing with that sort of spirit, you'll be a dead weight and I'll be left at the post,” said Quentin, ruefully.

“Was the prince at the house when you returned from the drive?”

“No; and Mrs. Garrison almost glared a hole through me. There were icicles on every word when she told poor Dorothy he had been there and would return this evening.”

“Was she satisfied to finish the drive with you after she had seen the prince?”

Quentin had not told him of the conversation which followed her demand to be taken home.

“She was very sensible about it,” he admitted, carefully. “You see, she had an engagement with me, and as a lady she could not well break it. We got along very nicely, all things considered, but I'm afraid she won't go out again with me.”

“She won't slam the door in your face if you go to the house, will she?”

“Hardly,” said the other, smiling. “She has asked me to come. The prince likes me, it seems.”

“But he likes to be alone with her, I should say. Well, don't interfere when he is there. My boy, give him a chance,” said Dickey, with a twinkle.

The duke headed off the two Americans as they left the hotel half an hour later. He was evidently watching for them, and his purpose was clear. It was his duty to prevent Quentin from going to the Garrison home, if possible. After shaking hands with Savage, the little man suggested a visit to a dance house in the lower end, promising an evening of rare sport. He and Count Sallaconi, who came up from Paris with the prince, had planned a little excursion into unusual haunts, and he hoped the Americans had a few dull hours that needed brightening. Phil savagely admitted to himself that he anticipated a good many dull hours, but they could not be banished by the vulgarity of a dance hall. The long, bony, fierce-mustached count came up at this moment and joined in imploring the young men to go with them to the “gayest place in all Brussels.”

“Let's go, Phil, just to see how much worse our New York places are than theirs,” said Dickey.

“But I have a—er—sort of an engagement,” remonstrated Quentin, reluctantly. The duke gave him a sharp look.

“Do not be afraid,” he said, laughing easily. “We will not permit the dancing girls to harm you.”

“He's not afraid of girls,” interposed Dickey. “Girls are his long suit. You didn't tell me you had an engagement?” Quentin gave him a withering look.

“I have one, just the same,” he said, harshly.

“You will not accompany us, then?” said the count, the line between his eyebrows growing deeper.

“I have to thank you, gentlemen, and to plead a previous engagement. May we not go some other night?”

“I am afraid we shall not again be in the same mood for pleasure,” said the duke, shifting his eyes nervously. “The count and I have but little time to give to

frivolity. We are disappointed that you will not join us on this one night of frolic."

"I regret it exceedingly, but if you knew what I have to do to-night you would not insist," said Phil, purposely throwing a cloak of mystery about his intentions for the mere satisfaction of arousing their curiosity.

"Very well, mes Americains; we will not implore you longer," responded the count, carelessly. "May your evening be as pleasant as ours." The two Italians bowed deeply, linked arms and strolled away.

"Say, those fellows know you haven't an engagement," exclaimed Savage, wrathfully. "What sort of an ass are you?"

"See here, Dickey, you've still got something to learn in this world. Don't imagine you know everything. You don't, you know. Do you think I am going to walk into one of their traps with my eyes open?"

"Traps? You don't mean to say this dance hall business is a trap?" exclaimed Dickey, his eyes opening wide with an interest entirely foreign to his placid nature.

"I don't know, and that's why I am keeping out of it. Now, let's take our walk, a nice cool drink or two and go to bed where we can dream about what might have happened to us at the dance hall."

"Where does she live?" asked Savage, as they left the rotunda.

"Avenue Louise," was the laconic answer.

"Why don't you say Belgium or Europe, if you're bound to be explicit," growled Dickey.

A dapper-looking young man came from the hotel a few paces behind them and followed, swinging his light cane leisurely. Across the place, in the shadow of a tall building, the two Italian noblemen saw the Americans depart, noting the direction they took. It was toward the Avenue Louise. A smile of satisfaction came to their faces when the dapper stranger made his appearance. A few moments later they were speeding in a cab toward the avenue.

"That is her house," said Phil, later on, as the two strolled slowly down the Avenue Louise. They were across the street from the Garrison home, and the shadowy-trees hid them. The tall lover knew, however, that the Italian was with her and that his willfulness of the afternoon had availed him naught. Nor could he recall a single atom of hope and encouragement his bold act had produced other than the simple fact that she had submitted as gracefully as possible to the inevitable and had made the best of it.

“Ugo has the center of the stage, and everybody else is in the orchestra, playing fiddles of secondary importance, while Miss Dorothy is the lone and only audience,” reflected Dickey.

“I wish you'd confine your miserable speculations to the weather, Dickey,” said the other, testily.

“With pleasure. To-morrow will be a delightful day for a drive or a stroll. You and I, having nothing else to do, can take an all-day drive into the country and get acquainted with the Belgian birds and bees—and the hares, too.”

“Don't be an ass! What sort of a game do you think those Italians were up to this evening? I'm as nervous as the devil. It's time for the game to come to a head, and we may as well expect something sudden.”

“I think it depends on the prince. If he finds that you haven't torn down his fences while you had full sway, he'll not be obliged to go on with the game. He was merely protecting interests that absence endangered. Now that he's here, and if all is smooth and undisturbed—or, in other words, if you have failed in your merciless design to put a few permanent and unhealable dents in the fair lady's heart—he will certainly discharge his cohorts and enjoy very smooth seas for the rest of the trip. If you have disfigured her tender heart by trying to break into it, as a safe-blower gets into those large, steel things we call safety deposit vaults—where other men keep things they don't care to lose—I must say that his satanic majesty will be to pay. Do you think you have made any perceptible dents, or do you think the safe is as strong and as impregnable as it was when you began using chisels and dynamite on it six weeks ago?”

“I can't say that I enjoy the simile, but I'm conceited enough to think it is not as free from dents as it was when I began. I'm not quite sure about it, but I believe with a little more time and security against interference I might have—er—have—"

“Got away with the swag, as Turk would say. Well, it's this way. If the prince investigates and finds that you were frightened away just in time to prevent wholesale looting, you'll have to do some expert dodging to escape the consequences of the crime. He'll have the duke and the count and a few others do nothing but get up surprise parties for you.”

“That's it, Dickey. That's what I'm afraid of—the surprise parties. He's afraid of me, or he wouldn't have gone to the trouble of having me watched. They've got something brewing or they wouldn't have been so quiet for the past two weeks. Courant is gone and—”

“How do you know Courant isn't here?”

“Turk says he has disappeared.”

“Turk doesn't know everything. That fellow may have a score of disguises. These French detectives are great on false whiskers and dramatic possibilities. The chances are that he has been watching you night and day, and I'll bet my head, if he has, he's been able to tell Ugo more about your affair with Miss Garrison than you know yourself, my boy.”

They turned to retrace their steps, Phil gloomily surveying the big, partially-lighted house across the way. A man met them and made room for them to pass on the narrow walk. He was a jaunty, well-dressed young fellow and the others would have observed nothing peculiar about him had they not caught him looking intently toward the house which was of such interest to them. As he passed them he peered closely at their faces and so strange was his manner that both involuntarily turned their heads to look after him. As is usually the case, he also turned to look at them.

“I saw that fello\v in the hotel,” said Savage.

Five minutes later they met Turk and, before they could utter a word of protest, he was leading them into the Rue du Prince Royal.

“There's a guy follerin' you,” he explained. “An' th' two swells is drivin' aroun' in a cab like as if they wuz expectin' fun. They just passed you on th' avenoo, an' now they's comin' back. That's their rig—cuttin' across there. See? I tell you, they's somethin' in the air, an' it looks as though it ain't goin' to pan out as they wanted it to.”

“What's the matter with you? The duke and the count went to a dance hall,” expostulated Quentin.

“To make a night of it,” added Savage

“Didn't you see a nice lookin' feller up there in th' avenoo, an' didn't he size you up purty close? That's him—that's Courant, th' fly cop. Git inside this doorway an' you'll see him pass yere in a couple of seconds. He's not a block behind us.”

Sure enough the dapper stranger passed by the three men in shadow, looking uneasily, nervously up and across the street.

“He's lost th' trail,” whispered Turk, after Courant was beyond hearing.

“The same fellow, I'll be blowed,” said Dickey, in amazement. “Now, what do you suppose the game is?”

“My idea is that w'en you turned 'em down on th' dance hall job they was afraid you'd go to th' young lady's house and cut in on th' prince's cinch, so they

had to git a move on to head you off. You was wise w'en you kicked out of th' dance hall racket. Th' chances are you'd 'a' got into all kinds o' hell if you'd fell into th' trap. Say, I'm dead sure o' one er two t'ings. In th' first place, they've got four or five more ringers than we know about. I seen Courant talkin' mighty secret-like to two waiters in th' hall this evenin, an' th' driver o' that cab o' theirn was a baggage hustler at th' Bellyvoo as late as yesterday."

"By thunder, I believe their game was to mix us up in a big free-for-all fight when they got us into that dance dive. That shows Dickey, how wise I was to decline the invitation," said Quentin, seriously. By this time they were some distance behind Turk, following in the path of the puzzled detective. They saw him look curiously at the lighted windows of the houses, and overtook him at the intersection of the Boulevard Waterloo. Just as they came up from behind, Courant stopped for an instant's conversation with two men. Their talk was brief and the trio turned to go back over the path just traversed by Courant The two sets of men met fairly and were compelled to make room for each other to pass. Courant came to a full stop involuntarily, but recovered himself and followed his friends quickly.

"The plot thickens," observed Phil. "It looks as though they are rounding up their forces after the miscarriage of the original plan. Gad, they are hunting us down like rats to-night."

"The hotel is the safest place for us, and the quicker we get there the better," said Dickey. "I'm not armed, are you?"

"Of course not. I hadn't thought of such a thing, but from now on I'll carry a revolver. Those fellows didn't look especially dainty, did they?"

"I can't believe that they intend to murder you or anything like that. They wouldn't dare do such a thing."

"That's th' game, Mr. Savage; I'm dead sure of it. This was th' night an' it was to ha' been done in th' dance hall, riot, stampede, everybody fightin' wild an' then a jab in th' back. Nobody any th' wiser, see?" The two paled a trifle under Turk's blunt way of putting it.

When they entered the hotel a short time later the first man they saw was Prince Ugo. With his dark eyes glowing, his lips parted in a fine smile, he came to meet them, his hand extended heartily.

"I have asked for you, gentlemen, and you were out. You return just as I am ready to give up in despair. And now, let me say how happy I am to see you," he said, warmly. The Americans shook hands with him, confusion filling their brains. Why was he not with the Garrisons?

“I knew you were here, Prince Ugo, and would have inquired for you but that I suspected you would be closely engaged,” said Quentin, after a moment.

“Earlier in the evening I was engaged, but I am here now as the bearer of a message to you, Mr. Quentin. Miss Garrison has asked me to deliver into your hands this missive.” With that he drew from his pocket a sealed envelope and passed it to Quentin. “I was commanded to give it you to-night, so perhaps you will read it now.”

“Thank you,” muttered the other, nervously tearing open the envelope as the prince turned to Dickey Savage. At that moment the duke and the count strolled into the rotunda, jauntily, easily, as if they had been no farther than the block just beyond, instead of racing about in a bounding cab. They approached the group as Phil turned away to read the note which had come so strangely into his hands. Dorothy wrote:

“Dear Phil: I trust you to say nothing to Prince Ugo. I mean, do not intimate that I saw him yesterday when I went to drive with you. He would consider it an affront. I know it is not necessary to caution you, but I feel safe in doing so. You will pardon me, I am sure. My conduct, as well as yours, when we look at it calmly in an afterlight, was quite extraordinary. So fully do I trust him and so well does he love me that I know this note comes to you inviolate.

“D.”

Phil's brain was in a whirl. He glanced at the handsome face of Dorothy's noble lover and then at his swarthy fellow countrymen. Could they be plotters? Could he be hand-in-hand with those evil-looking men? He had delivered the note, and yet he so feared its recipient that he was employing questionable means to dispose of him. There could be no doubt as to the genuineness of the note. It was from Dorothy, and the prince had borne it to him direct from her hand.

“An invitation to dinner?” asked the prince, laughing easily. “Miss Garrison is alarmingly fond of Mr. Quentin, and I begin to feel the first symptoms of jealousy. Pardon me, I should not speak of her here, even in jest.” So sincere was his manner that the Americans felt a strange respect for him. The same thought flashed through the minds of both: “He is not a blackguard, whatever else he may be.” But up again came the swift thought of Courant and his ugly companions, and the indisputable evidence that the first named, at least, was a paid agent of the man who stood before them, now the prince, once the singer in far away Brazil.

“The mention of dinner recalls me to affairs of my own,” continued Ugo. “To-morrow night I expect a few friends here to dine, and I have the honor to ask you all to be among my guests. We shall sit down at nine o'clock, and I only exact a promise that the end may come within a week thereafter.”

The Americans could do naught but accept, but there was an oppressive sense of misgiving in their hearts. Mayhap the signal failure to carry out the plans of one night was leading swiftly and resolutely up to the success of another. For more than an hour Quentin and his friend sat silently, soberly in the former's room, voicing only after long intervals the opinions and conjectures their puzzled minds begot, only to sink back into fresh fields for thought.

“I can't understand it,” said Dickey, at last, starting to bed.

“I believe I understand it perfectly. They are on a new tack. It occurs to me that they fear we suspect something and the dinner is a sort of peace offering.”

“We may be getting into a nest of masculine Lucretia Borgias, my boy.”

“Pleasant dreams, then. Good-night!”

XIV. A DINNER AND A DUEL

At nine o'clock the next evening Quentin and Savage found themselves in the rooms occupied by the prince, the former experiencing a distinct sense of wariness and caution.

If Quentin suspected some form of treachery at the outset, he was soon obliged to ridicule his fears. There were nearly a score of men there, and a single glance revealed to him the gratifying fact that no treachery could be practiced in such an assemblage. Among their fellow guests there was an English lord, an Austrian duke, a Russian prince, a German baron, besides others from France, Belgium and Germany.

Prince Ugo greeted them warmly, and they were at their ease in an instant under the magnetism of his manner. Duke Laselli and Count Diego were more profuse in their greetings to the young men, and it devolved upon the latter to introduce them to the distinguished strangers. There was but one other American there, a millionaire whose name is a household word in the states and whose money was at that time just beginning to assert itself as a menace to the great commercial interests of the old world. He welcomed his fellow New Yorkers with no small show of delight. The expression of relief on his face plainly exposed a previous fear that he was unspeakably alone in this assemblage of continental aristocrats.

At the table, Quentin sat between an Austrian duke and a German named Von Kragg. He was but two seats removed from Prince Ugo, while Savage was on the other side of the table, almost opposite Quentin. On Dickey's right sat the Duke Laselli, and next to that individual was the American millionaire. Directly across the broad table from Quentin was the tall rakish-looking Count Diego Sallaconi.

“Ob, nobde gap sansan wobble wibble raggle dully pang rubby dub, bob,” said the baron, in his best French, addressing the statuesque American with the broad shoulders and the intense countenance.

“With all my heart,” responded Mr. Quentin, with rare composure and equal confidence. He had no more conception of what the baron intended to say than he would have had if the planet Mars had wigwagged a signal to him, but he was polite enough to do anything for the sake of conversation. The baron smiled gladly, even approvingly; it was plain that he understood Phil's English fully as

well as that gentleman understood his French. Quentin heard his name uttered by Prince Ugo and turned from the baron.

“Mr. Quentin, Prince Kapolski tells me he saw our friends, the Saxondales, in London last week. They were preparing to go to their place in the country. You have been there, have you not?” Prince Ugo turned his gleaming eyes and engaging smile upon the man addressed.

“On several occasions,” responded the other. “Saxondale is a famous hunter and he gave me some rare sport. When do they leave London?” he asked, indifferently.

“They were to have started this week,” said the Russian prince, “and there is to be quite a large party, I hear. A young American who was with them was called away suddenly last week, and, as the trip was arranged for his special amusement—by the Lady Jane, I was told—his departure upset the plans a trifle.” Quentin and Savage, who had heard the remarks glanced at one another in surprise.

“I should enjoy being with them,” said the former, warmly. “My friend, Mr. Savage, was invited, I think,” he added, and Dickey studiously consulted the salad. He had not been invited and the announcement that the Saxondales were off for the north of England was news to him.

“Oh, certainly,” exclaimed Ugo; “he was their guest. And the Lady Jane arranged it, you say, Kapolski? Draft horses could not have been strong enough to pull me away from London had she planned for my pleasure. You must discover the fault in him, my dear Quentin, and hold him to account for a very reprehensible act.” Ugo knew that Dickey was listening, and the first point in a beautiful game was scored.

“Mr. Savage does not care for shooting,” said Phil, flushing slightly. The Russian prince had been looking at him intently; a peculiar flash came into his eye when Quentin made the defensive remark.

“But there is game to be had without resorting to the gun,” he said, smiling blandly.

“One doesn't have to go to a shooting box to bag it, though,” said Sallaconi, mischievously.

“I think the hunter uses bow and arrow exclusively,” added Ugo, and there was a general laugh, which sent a streak of red up Dickey's cheeks. If the Russian's news was true he had been purposely slighted by the Saxondales. And yet it was not altogether humiliation or wounded pride that brought the red to his cheek. He and the Lady Jane had quarrelled just before he left her, and while he

hated her and she hated him and all that, still he did not care to hear her name bandied about by the wine sippers at this delectable table.

“What are they talking about?” asked the American millionaire of Dickey, his curiosity aroused by the laughter of a moment before.

“About as nasty as they can,” growled Dickey. “That's their style, you know.”

“Whew! You don't have much of an opinion of nobility. Beware of the prince,” said the other, in a low tone.

“You couldn't insult some of them with a deliberate and well-aimed kick,” remarked the younger man, sourly. The Duke Laselli's ears turned a shade pinker under his oily, swarthy skin, for the words penetrated them in spite of the speaker's caution.

“A toast,” said the Russian prince, arising from his seat beside Ravorelli. The guests arose and glasses almost met in a long line above the center of the table. Ugo alone remained seated as if divining that they were to drink to him. For the first time Quentin closely observed the Russian. He was tall and of a powerful frame, middle-aged and the possessor of a strong, handsome face on which years of dissipation had left few weakening marks. His eyes were narrow and as blue as the sky, his hair light and bushy, his beard coarse and suggestive of the fierceness of the wild boar. His voice was clear and cutting, and his French almost perfect. “We drink to the undying happiness of our host, the luckiest prince in all the world. May he always know the bliss of a lover and never the cares of a husband; may his wedded state be an endless love story without a prosaic passage; may life with the new Princess of Ravorelli be a poem, a song, a jub late, with never a dirge between its morn and its midnight.”

“And a long life to him,” added Quentin, clearly. As they drank the eyes of Prince Ugo were upon the last speaker, and there was a puzzled expression in them. Count Sallaconi's black eyebrows shot up at the outer ends and a curious grimness fastened itself about his mouth and nose.

“I thank you, gentlemen,” responded Ugo, arising. “Will you divide the toast with me in proposing the happiness of the one who is to bring all these good things into my life?” The half-emptied glasses were drained. Dickey Savage's eyes met Quentin's in a long look of perplexity. At last an almost imperceptible twinkle, suggestive of either mirth or skepticism, manifested itself in his friend's eyes and the puzzled observer was satisfied.

When, in the end, the diners pushed their chairs back from the table and passed into another room, it was far past midnight, and the real revelry of the night was at hand. Reckless, voluptuous women from the vaudeville houses and

dance halls appeared, and for hours the wine-soaked scions of nobility reeked in those exhibitions which shock the sensibilities of true men. Four men there were who tried to conceal their disgust while the others roared out the applause of degenerates.

“I am not a saint, but this is more than I can stand. It is sickening,” said Quentin.

“And these miserable specimens of European manhood delight in it,” said Savage, his face aflame with shame and disgust. “It is too vile for a man who has a breath of manhood in him to encourage, and yet these bounders go crazy with rapture. Gad, don't ask what kind of women they are. Ask how it is the world has ever called these fellows men.”

“Did I understand you correctly, sir?” asked a cold voice at his side, and Dickey turned to look into the flaming eyes of Prince Kapolski. Count Sallaconi was clutching the left arm of the big Russian, and there was a look of dismay in his face. He flashed a glance of fierce disappointment at Quentin, and then one of helplessness across the room at Prince Ugo.

“If you understand English you probably did,” said Dickey, pale but defiant.

“Come, prince,” began the agitated count, but Kapolski shook him off.

“You must apologize for your comments, sir,” said the prince, in excellent English.

“I can't apologize, you know. I meant what I said,” said Dickey, drawing himself up to the limit of his five feet ten. The Russian's open hand came violently in contact with the young fellow's cheek, driving the tears to the surface of his eyes They were tears of anger, pain and mortification, not of submission or fear.

His clenched right hand shot outward and upward, and before the Russian knew what had happened a crashing blow caught him full in the jaw, and he would have gone sprawling to the floor had not Diego Sallaconi caught him in his arms. Quentin grasped Dickey and pulled him away, while others rushed in and held the roaring, sputtering victim.

All was confusion and excitement in an instant. Quentin and the millionaire drew their lithe countryman away from the gathering crowd, one cheek white as a sheet, the other a bright pink, and Phil hoarsely whispered to him:

“I don't know what we're in for, Dickey, so for heaven's sake let's get out of here. We don't want any more of it. You gave him a good punch and that's enough.”

“You broke up the show all right enough,” exclaimed the millionaire, excitedly. “The fairies ran over each other trying to get out of the room. You're as game as a fighting cock, too.”

“Let me alone, Phil!” panted Dickey. “You don't suppose I'm going to run from that big duffer, do you? Let go!”

“Don't be a fool, Dickey,” said his friend, earnestly. Just then a pale-faced, sickly-looking waiter came up from behind and hoarsely whispered in Quentin's ear:

“Get out, quick! The big prince made a mistake. He was to have quarrelled with you, Monsieur.” He was gone before he could be questioned.

“See!” exclaimed Dickey. “It was a job, after all, and the dago is at the bottom of it!”

“Sh! Here he comes with the Russian and the whole pack behind them. It's too late; we can't run now,” said Phil, despairingly. As Ugo and Kapolski crossed the room, the former, whose face was white with suppressed passion, hissed under his breath into the ear of the raging Russian:

“You fool, it was the other one—the tall one! You have quarrelled with the wrong man. The big one is Quentin, Kapolski. How could you have made such a mistake?”

“Mistake or no mistake, he has struck me, and he shall pay for it. The other can come later,” growled the Russian, savagely.

“Gentlemen, this is no place to fight. Let us have explanations—” began Ugo, addressing Quentin more than Savage, but the latter interrupted:

“Call off your dogs and we will talk it over,” he said.

“Dickey!” cautioned his friend.

“I do not understand you, Mr. Savage. My dogs? Oh, I see, Mr. Quentin; he is mad with anger,” said the prince, deprecatingly.

“There can be no explanations,” snarled Kapolski. “My card, Monsieur,” and he threw the pasteboard in the young American's face.

“Damn your impudence,” exploded Quentin, now ready to take the fight off the hands of the one on whom it had been forced through error. “You ought to be kicked downstairs for that.”

“You will have that to recall, Monsieur, but not until after I have disposed of your valiant friend,” exclaimed Kapolski.

“We are not in the habit of waiting for a chance to dispose of such affairs,”

said Quentin, coolly. “We fight when we have a cause and on the spot.”

“Do you expect civilized men to carry arms into drawing-rooms?” sneered Kapolski. Ugo's face was lighting up with pleasure and satisfaction and Sallaconi was breathing easier.

“I'm speaking of hands, not arms,” said Phil, glaring at the other.

“I'll fight him in a second,” cried Dickey.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen! Be calm! Let this affair be arranged by your seconds and in the regular manner,” expostulated Ugo. “This is very unusual, and I must beg of you to remember that you are in my rooms.”

“That is the rub, Prince Ravorelli. It has happened in your rooms, and I want to say to you that if evil befalls my friend, I shall hold you to account for it,” said Quentin, turning on him suddenly.

“What do you mean, sir?”

“You know what I mean. I can and am ready to fight my own battles.”

“This outrageous brawl is none of my affair, Mr. Quentin, and I do not like your threat. You and I should do all in our power to prevent it from going farther. Your friend was too free with his words, I am told. If he did not like my entertainment, he should have left the room.”

“Well, I didn't like it, if you want to know,” said Dickey. “And I don't care a continental who heard what I said.”

“Does he still want to fight with his hands?” demanded Kapolski, now cool and ironical. There was an infuriating attempt on his part to speak as if he were addressing a small, pouting child.

“Anything—anything! The only point is, you'll have to fight to-night—right now. I've two or three friends here who'll see that I get fair play.” said Dickey, discretion flying to the wind.

“You shall fight and here!” exclaimed the Russian. “But you shall fight like a gentleman for once in your life. I will not claw and scratch with you, like the women do, but with any weapon you name.”

Dickey's valor did not fade, but his discretion came to the surface with a suddenness that took his breath away. He turned to speak to Quentin and the millionaire. Phil's face was deathly white, and there was a pleading look in his eyes. The millionaire was trembling like a leaf.

“I guess I'll take pistols,” said Dickey, slowly. “I can't hit the side of a barn, but he can't bluff me, damn him.”

“Great Scott, Dickey! Don't do it, don't do it!” whispered Quentin. “This is my fight, you know it is, and I won't let you—”

“You can't help it, old boy. He'll probably get me, but I may be lucky enough to have a bullet land in him. My only chance is to aim anywhere but at him, shut my eyes, and trust to luck.” Then turning to Kapolski he said, deliberately: “Pistols, and here, if the prince does not object.”

“Cannot this affair be postponed—” began Ugo, desperately.

“Not unless your friend forgets that I punched his head. It is now or never with me,” said Dickey.

“I insist that it is my right to fight this man!” exclaimed Quentin, standing forth. “I first expressed the opinion which Mr. Savage merely echoed and to which Prince Kapolski took exception.”

“But you did not strike me. In any event, you shall come next, Mr. Quentin; I shall take you on immediately after I have disposed of your cockadoodle friend,” said Kapolski, throwing aside his coat. “You have pistols here, Prince Ravorelli?”

“This is murder,” cried the millionaire, “and I shall take it before the United States government.”

“Dickey! Dickey!” cried Phil, helplessly, as Savage began to remove his coat.

“I have weapons, if you insist, gentlemen,” said Ugo. At his words intense excitement prevailed, for now there could be no doubt as to the result of the quarrel. Count Sallaconi hurried away for the pistols, smiling significantly as he passed his prince. His smile said that Kapolski would kill two men that night.

“For God's sake, Dickey, be careful, if you must fight. Take deliberate aim and don't lose your nerve,” cried Quentin, grasping him by the arms. “You are as cold as ice.”

“I haven't fired a pistol more than a dozen times in my life,” said Dickey, smiling faintly.

“Then shoot low,” said the millionaire.

“Your second, Monsieur?” said the Austrian duke, coming to Savage's side.

“Mr. Quentin will act, Monsieur le Duc. We may need a surgeon.”

“Dr. Gassbeck is here.”

It was hurriedly agreed that the men should stand at opposite ends of the room, nearly twenty feet apart, back to back. At the word given by Prince Ugo, they were to turn and fire.

Sallaconi came in with the pistol case and the seconds examined the weapons carefully. A moment later the room was cleared except for the adversaries, the seconds, and Prince Ugo.

There was the stillness of death. On the face of the Russian there was an easy smile, for was not he a noted shot? Had he ever missed an adversary in a duel? Dickey was pale, but he did not tremble as he took the pistol in his hand.

“Good-bye, Phil,” was all he said. Poor Quentin turned his face away as he clasped his hand, and he could only murmur:

“If he hits you, I'll kill him.”

A moment later the word “fire” came and the two men whirled into position. Dickey's arm went up like a flash, the other's more cruelly deliberate. Two loud reports followed in quick succession, the slim American's nervous finger pressed the trigger first. He had not taken aim. He had located his man's position before turning away, and the whole force of his will was bent on driving the bullet directly toward the spot he had in mind. Kapolski's bullet struck the wall above Dickey's head, his deadly aim spoiled by the quick, reckless shot from the other end of the room.

He lunged forward. Dickey's bullet had blown away part of the big Russian's chin and jaw, burying itself in the wall beyond.

XV. APPROACH OF THE CRISIS

Prince Ugo's face was livid, and his black eyes bulged with horrified amazement. The unscrupulous, daring, infallible duelist whom he had induced to try conclusions with Quentin in a regular and effective way, had been overthrown at the outset by a most peculiar transaction of fate. He had assured the Russian that Quentin was no match for him with the weapons common to dueling, and he had led him to believe that he was in little danger of injury, much less death. Kapolski, reckless, a despiser of all things American, eagerly consented to the plan, and Ugo saw a way to rid himself of a dangerous rival without the taint of suspicion besmirching his cloak. Sallaconi was an accomplished swordsman, but it would have been unwise to send him against Quentin. Ugo himself was a splendid shot and an expert with the blade, and it was not cowardice that kept him from taking the affair in his own hands. It was wisdom, cunning wisdom, that urged him to stand aloof and to go up to his wedding day with no scandal at his back. But the unexpected, the miraculous had happened. His friend, his brother prince, his unwitting tool, had gone down like a log, his vaunted skill surpassed by the marksmanship and courage of an accursed American.

To his credit be it said that he did all in his power to preserve the life of Prince Kapolski. More than that, he did all that was possible to keep the story of the encounter from reaching the world. So powerful, so successful was his influence that the world at large knew nothing of the fight, the police were bribed, and the newspapers were thrown completely off the scent.

Ugo's first thought after the fall of Kapolski was to prevent his opponent from leaving the room alive, but common sense came to his relief a second later, and he saw the folly of taking a stand against the victor. He rushed to Kapolski's side and helped to support the moaning man's body. The surgeon was there an instant later, and Dickey, as white as a ghost, started mechanically toward the fallen foe. Ouentin stood like a man of stone, stunned by relief and surprise. One glance at the bloody, lacerated face and the rolling eyes caused Savage to flee as if pursued by devils.

For hours Quentin and Turk sought to comfort and to quiet him; the millionaire, who refused to desert them, sat up all night to manage the information bureau, as he called it. He personally inquired at Ugo's rooms, and

always brought back reassuring news, which Quentin doubted and Dickey utterly disbelieved At four o'clock Prince Ugo himself, with Duke Laselli, came to Quentin's rooms with the word that Kapolski was to be taken to a hospital, and that Dr. Gassbeck pronounced his chance for recovery excellent. The prince assured Mr. Savage that secrecy would be preserved, but advised him to leave Brussels at the earliest possible moment. Kapolski's death, if it came, would command an investigation, and it would be better if he were where the law could not find him.

Quentin with difficulty restrained from openly accusing the prince of duplicity. Afterthought told him how impotent his accusation would have been, for how could he prove that the Russian was acting as an agent?

Just before daylight Turk saw them take Prince Kapolski from the hotel in an ambulance, and, considering it his duty, promptly followed in a cab. The destination of the ambulance was the side street entrance to one of the big hospitals in the upper part of the town, and the men who accompanied the prince were strangers to the little observer. Prince Ugo was not of the party, nor were Laselli and Sallaconi. On his return to the Bellevue he had a fresh task on his hands. He was obliged to carry a man from Quentin's apartments and put him to bed in the millionaire's room, farther down the hall. The millionaire—for it was he—slept all day and had a headache until the thirtieth of the month. Turk put him to bed on the twenty-seventh.

During the forenoon Prince Ugo and Count Sallaconi called at Quentin's rooms. They found that gentleman and Mr. Savage dressed and ready for the street.

“Good morning,” said Dickey, pleasantly, for the two Americans had determined to suppress, for diplomatic reasons, any show of hostility toward the Italians. The visitors may not have exposed their true feelings, but they were very much astounded and not a little shocked to find the duelist and his friend in the best of spirits.

“And how did you sleep?” asked Ugo, after he had expressed his sorrow over the little unpleasantry of the night before, deploring the tragic ending to the night of pleasure.

“Like a top,” lied Dickey, cheerfully.

“I was afraid the excitement might have caused you great uneasiness and—ah—dread,” said the prince. The count was industriously engaged in piercing with his glittering eyes the tapestry in a far corner of the room. Mr. Savage possessed the manner of a man who shoots someone every morning before breakfast.

“Not in the least; did it, Quentin?”

“He slept like a baby.”

“By the way, before I forget it, Prince Ugo, how is the gentleman I shot last night—ah, what was his name?” asked Dickey, slapping his leg carelessly with his walking stick.

“Prince Kapolski is in the hospital, and I fear he cannot recover,” said the prince. “I came to tell you this that you may act accordingly and with all the haste possible.”

“O, I don't know why I should run away. Everybody there will testify that the fight was forced upon me. You will swear to that, yourself, Prince Ugo, and so will the count. I had to fight, you know.”

“It seems to me, Mr. Savage, that you were rather eager to fight. I cannot vouch for your safety if the prince dies,” said Ugo, coolly.

“But he isn't going to die. I did not shoot to kill and the ball hit him just where I intended it should—on the chin. He'll be well in a couple of weeks. True, he may not feel like eating tough beefsteak with that jaw for some time, but I knew a fellow once who was able to eat very comfortably after six weeks. That was as good a shot as I ever made, Phil,” said Dickey, reflectively.

“I think Buckner's nose was a cleaner shot. It wasn't nearly so disgusting,” said Phil.

“Do you mean to say you are able to hit a man just where you please?” demanded the count.

“Provided he does not hit me first,” said Mr. Savage. “Gentlemen, let me order up a quiet little drink. I am afraid the unfortunate affair of last night has twisted your nerves a bit. It was rather ghastly, wasn't it?”

When the four parted company in front of the hotel, a quarter of an hour later, the two Italians sat down to reflect. They wondered whether Mr. Savage usually carried a pistol in his pocket, and they agreed that if he did have one of his own he would be much more accurate with it than with a strange one, such as he had used the night before. The two Americans were not jubilant as they strolled up the street. They had put on a very bold front but they were saying to themselves that Kapolski's death would be a very disastrous calamity. Cold perspiration stood on Dickey's brow and he devoutly prayed that his victim would recover.

“I'd feel like a butcher to the last day of my life,” he groaned.

“The big brute got what he deserved, Dickey, but that isn't going to relieve us if he should die. Prince Ugo would use it as an excuse to drive you out of Europe

and, of course, I would not desert you. It was my affair and you were unlucky enough to get into it. There is one thing that puzzles me. I directly insulted Ravorelli last night. Why does he not challenge me? He must be positive that I recognize him as Pavesi and can ruin him with a word. I am told he is a remarkable shot and swordsman, and I don't believe he is a coward."

"Why should he risk his head or his heart if he can induce other men to fight for him?"

"But it seems that he has traitors in his camp. I wonder who that waiter was?"

After a long silence Dickey dolefully asked: "Say, do you believe the Saxondales turned me down on that shooting box party?"

"I can't believe it. All is well between you and Lady Jane, of course?"

"As well as it can ever be," said the other, looking straight ahead, his jaws set.

"Oho! Is it all off?"

"Is what all off?" belligerently.

"O, if you don't know, I won't insist on an answer. I merely suspected a thickness."

"That we were getting thick, you mean? You were never more mistaken in your life. The chances are I'll never see her again. That's not very thick, is it?"

"I saw a letter just now for you, in my box at the hotel. Looked like a young woman's chirography, and it was from London—"

"Why the devil didn't you tell me it was there?" exploded Dickey.

"Does Lady Jane make an R that looks like a streak of lightning with all sorts of angles?"

"She makes a very fashionable—what do you mean by inspecting my mail? Are you establishing a censorship?" Dickey was guilty of an unheard of act—for him. He was blushing.

"My boy, I did not know it was your property until after I had carefully deciphered every letter in the name. I agree with you; she writes a very fashionable alphabet. The envelope looked thick, to say the least. It must contain a huge postscript."

"Or a collection of all the notes I have written to her. I'll go back, if you don't mind, however. I'm curious to know who it's from."

Dickey went back to read his voluminous letter, and Quentin seated himself on a bench in the park. A voice from behind brought him sharply from a long reverie.

“Mr. Quentin, last night, possibly in the heat of excitement, you inferred that I was in some way accountable for the controversy which led to the meeting between Prince Kapolski and your friend. I trust that I misunderstood you.”

Quentin was on his feet and facing Prince Ravorelli before the remark was fairly begun, and he was thinking with greater rapidity than he had ever thought before. He was surprised to find Ugo, suave and polite as ever, deliberately, coolly rushing affairs to a climax. His sudden decision to abandon the friendly spirit exhibited but half an hour before was as inexplicable as it was critical. What fresh inspiration had caused him to alter his position?

“We say many things when we are under stress of excitement,” said Phil, sparring for time and his wits. Count Sallaconi was standing deferentially beside the prince. Both gentlemen had their hats in their hands, and the air was pregnant with chill formality.

“Can you recall my words, Prince Ravorelli?”

“You said that you would hold him to account if your friend—” began the count, but Quentin turned upon him coolly.

“My quarrel, if there is one, is with the prince, Count Sallaconi. Will you kindly allow him to jog his own memory?”

“I do not like your tone, Mr. Quentin,” said the count, his eyes flashingly angrily. Phil's blood was up. He saw it was useless to temporize, and there was no necessity for disguising his true feelings. They had come to the point where all that had lain smothered and dormant was to be pricked into activity; the mask was to be thrown down with the gauntlet.

“So much the better; you are not in doubt as to what I meant. Now, Prince Ravorelli, may I ask you to speak plainly?”

“Your remark of last night was one that I believe I would be justified in resenting,” said the prince, flicking the ash from his cigarette, but not taking his burning eyes from Quentin's face. There was not a tinge of cowardice in his eyes.

“It is your privilege, sir, and I meant precisely what I said.”

“Then I have to demand of you an apology and a satisfctory explanation.”

“'I presume it would be travesty on politeness if I were to ask you to be seated, so we may stand up to each other and talk it over. In the first place, I have no apology to make. In the second place, I cannot give an explanation that would be satisfactory to you. Last night I said I would hold you to account if Mr. Savage was hurt. He was not hurt, so I will not carry out my threat, if you choose to call

it such.”

“You enlarge the insult, Mr. Quentin,” said Ugo, with a deadly tone in his voice.

“You may as well know, Prince Ravorelli, that I have long been acquainted with the fact that you bear me no good will. Frankly, you regard me as a man dangerous to your most cherished aspirations, and you know that I heard Giovanni Pavesi sing in days gone by. You have not been manly enough to meet me fairly, up to this instant. I am perfectly well aware that Prince Kapolski was your guest last night for no other purpose than to bring about an affray in which I was to have been the victim of his prowess and your cleverness.”

For a moment the two men glared at each other, immovably, unwaveringly. Prince Ugo's composure did not suffer the faintest relaxation under the direct charge of the American.

“My only reply to that assertion is that you lie,” he said, slowly.

“This is a public place, Prince Ugo. I will not knock you down here.”

“It is not necessary for me to give you my card. Count Sallaconi will arrange the details with any friend you may name. You shall give me satisfaction for the aspersion you have cast upon my honor.” He was turning away when Quentin stepped quickly in front of him.

“If you mean that you expect me to fight a duel with you, I must say you are to suffer disappointment. I do not believe in duelling, and I believe only in killing a man when there is no other alternative. To deliberately set about to shoot another man down is not our method of settling an issue. We either murder in cold blood or we fight it out like men, not like stage heroes.”

“I will add then, sir, that you are a coward.”

“I have been brave enough to refrain from hiring men to do my fighting. We will fight, Prince Ravorelli, but we will not fight with weapons made by man. You call me a coward and I call you a scoundrel. We have hands and arms and with them we shall fight.”

“Count Sallaconi is my second, I do not care to hear another word—”

“If Count Sallaconi comes to me with any ridiculous challenge from you, I'll knock him down and kick him across the street. My friend shot the face off of your poor tool last night. I do not care to repeat the tragedy. I shall not strike you here and now, because the act might mean my arrest and detention on no one knows what sort of a trumped-up charge. You need not bother me with any silly twaddle about swords and pistols I shall pay no attention to it. Ordinarily

Americans do not delay actual combat. We usually fight it out on the spot and the best man wins. I will, however, give you the chance to deliberate over my proposition to settle our differences with our hands."

Ravorelli calmly heard him to the end. Then he turned and strode away, smiling derisively.

"You are the only American coward I have ever seen. I trust you appreciate, the distinction," he said, his white teeth showing in malicious ridicule. "Your friend, the hero of last night, should be proud of you."

Quentin watched them until they were lost in the crowd near the Palace, his brain full of many emotions. As he walked into the hotel his only thought was of Dorothy and the effect the quarrel would have on their friendship.

"Which will she choose?" he mused, after narrating to Savage the episode of the park. For the first time Dickey noticed the pallor in his face, the despair in his eyes, the wistful lines about his lips.

"There's only one way to find out, old man," said he, and he did not succeed in disguising the hopelessness in his voice.

"Yes, I guess I'm up to the last trench. I'm right where I have to make the final stand, let the result be what it may," said the other, dejectedly.

"Don't give up, Phil. If you are to win, it will take more courage than you are showing now. A bold front will do more than anything else just at this stage. The result depends not entirely on how eager she is to become a princess, but how much she cares for the man who cannot make her a princess."

"There's the rub. Does she care enough for me?"

"Have you asked her how much she cares?"

"No."

"Then, don't ask. Merely go and tell her that you know how much she cares. Go this afternoon, old man. O, by the way, Lady Jane sends her love to you, and wants to know if you will come with me to Ostend to-morrow to meet her and Lady Saxondale."

XVI. THE COURAGE OF A COWARD

“Tell Mr. Quentin I cannot see him,” was Miss Garrison's response when his card was sent to her late that afternoon. The man who waited nervously in the hall was stunned by this brief, summary dismissal. If he was hurt, bewildered by the stinging rebuff, his wounds would have been healed instantly had he seen the sender of that cruel message. She sat, weak, pale and distressed, before her escritoire, striving to put her mind and her heart to the note she was writing to him whose card, by strange coincidence, had just come up. An hour ago he was in her thoughts so differently and he was in her heart, how deeply she had not realized, until there came the crash which shattered the ideal. He was a coward!

Prince Ugo had been out of her presence not more than ten minutes, leaving her stunned, horrified, crushed by the story he laughingly told, when Quentin was announced. What she heard from Ugo overwhelmed her. She had worshiped, unknown to herself, the very thing in Philip Quentin that had been destroyed almost before her eyes—his manliness, his courage, his strength. Ugo deliberately told of the duel in his rooms, of Savage's heroism in taking up the battles of his timorous friend, of his own challenge in the morning, and of Quentin's abject, cringing refusal to fight. How deliciously he painted the portrait of the coward without exposing his true motive in doing so, can only be appreciated when it is said that Dorothy Garrison came to despise the object of his ridicule.

She forgot his encounter with the porch visitor a fortnight previous; she forgot that the wound inflicted on that occasion was scarcely healed; she forgot all but his disgraceful behavior in the presence of that company of nobles and his cowardice when called to account by one brave man. And he an American, a man from her own land, from the side of the world on which, she had boasted, there lived none but the valorous. This man was the one to whom, a week ago, she had personally addressed an invitation to the wedding in St. Gudule—the envelope was doubtless in his pocket now, perhaps above his heart—and the writing of his name at that time had brought to her the deadly, sinking realization that he was more to her than she had thought.

“Tell Miss Garrison that, if it is at all possible, I must see her at once,” said Quentin to the bearer of the message. He was cold with apprehension, hot with humiliation.

“Miss Garrison cannot see you,” said the man, returning from his second visit to the room above. Even the servant spoke with a curtness that could not be mistaken. It meant dismissal, cold and decisive, with no explanation, no excuse.

He left the house with his ears burning, his nerves tingling, his brain whirling. What had caused this astonishing change? Why had she turned against him so suddenly, so strangely? Prince Ugo! The truth flashed into his mind with startling force, dispelling all uncertainty, all doubt. Her lover had forstalled him, had requested or demanded his banishment and she had acquiesced, with a heartlessness that was beyond belief. He had been mistaken as to the extent of her regard for him; he had misjudged the progress of his wooing; he awoke to the truth that her heart was impregnable and that he had not so much as approached the citadel of her love.

Dickey was pacing their rooms excitedly when Quentin entered. Turk stared gloomily from the open window, and there was a sort of savageness in his silent, sturdy back that bespoke volumes of restraint.

“Good Lord, Phil, everybody knows you have refused to fight the prince. The newspaper men have been here and they have tried to pump me dry. Turk says one of the men downstairs is telling everybody that you are afraid of Ravorelli. What are we going to do?” He stopped before the newcomer and there was reproach in his manner. Quentin dejectedly threw himself into a chair and stared at the floor in silence.

“Turk!” he called at last. “I want you to carry a note to Miss Garrison, and I want you to make sure that she reads it. I don't know how the devil you are to do it, but you must. Don't bother me, Dickey. I don't care a continental what the fellow downstairs says; I've got something else to think about.” He threw open the lid to one of his trunks and ruthlessly grabbed up some stationery. In a minute he was at the table, writing.

“Is Kapolski dead?” asked Dickey.

“I don't know and don't care. I'll explain in a minute. Sit down somewhere and don't stare, Dickey—for the Lord's sake, don't stare like a scared baby.” He completed the feverishly written note, sealed the envelope, and thrust it into Turk's hands. “Now, get that note to her, or don't come back to me. Be quick about it, too.”

Turk was off, full of fresh wonder and the importance of his mission. Quentin took a few turns up and down the room before he remembered that he owed some sort of an explanation to his companion.

“She wouldn't see me,” he said, briefly.

“What's the matter? Sick?”

“No explanation. Just wouldn't see me, that's all.”

“Which means it's all off, eh? The prince got there first and spiked your guns. Well? What have you written to her?”

“That I am going to see her to-night if I have to break into the house.”

“Bravely done! Good! And you'll awake in a dungeon cell to-morrow morning, clubbed to a pulp by the police. You may break into the house, but it will be just your luck to be unable to break out of jail in time for the wedding on the 16th. What you need is a guardian.”

“I'm in no humor for joking, Dickey.”

“It won't be a joke, my boy. Now, tell me just what you wrote to her. Gad, I never knew what trouble meant until I struck Brussels. The hot water here is scalding me to a creamy consistency.”

“I simply said that she had no right to treat me as she did to-day and that she shall listen to me. I ended the note by saying I would come to her to-night, and that I would not be driven away until I had seen her.”

“You can't see her if she refuses to receive you.”

“But she will see me. She's fair enough to give me a chance.”

“Do you want me to accompany you?”

“I intend to go alone.”

“You will find Ugo there, you know. It is bound to be rather trying, Phil. Besides, you are not sure that Turk can deliver the note.”

“I'd like to have Ravorelli hear everything I have to say to her, and if he's there he'll hear a few things he will not relish.”

“And he'll laugh at you, too.”

An hour later Turk returned. He was grinning broadly as he entered the room.

“Did you succeed?” demanded Quentin, leaping to his feet. For answer the little man daintily, gingerly dropped a small envelope into his hand.

“She says to give th' note to you an' to nobody else,” he said, triumphantly. Quentin hesitated an instant before tearing open the envelope, the contents of which meant so much to him. As he read, the gloom lifted from his face and his figure straightened to its full height. The old light came back to his eyes.

“She says I may come, Dickey. I knew she would,” he exclaimed, joyously.

“When?”

“At nine to-night.”

“Is that all she says?”

“Well—er—no. She says she will see me for the last time.”

“Not very comforting, I should say.”

“I'll risk it's being the last time. I tell you, Savage, I'm desperate. This damnable game has gone far enough. She'll know the truth about the man she's going to marry. If she wants to marry him after what I tell her, I'll—I'll—well, I'll give it up, that's all.”

“If she believes what you tell her, she won't care to marry him.”

“She knows I'm not a liar, Dickey, confound you.”

“Possibly; but she is hardly fool enough to break with the prince unless you produce something more substantial than your own accusation. Where is your proof?”

This led to an argument that lasted until the time came for him to go to her home When he left the hotel in a cab he was thoroughly unstrung, but more determined than ever. As if by magic, there came to life the forces of the prince. While Ugo sat calmly in his apartment, his patient agents were dogging the man he feared, dogging him with the persistence and glee of blood-hounds. Courant and his hirelings, two of them, garbed as city watchmen, were on the Avenue Louise almost as soon as the man they were watching. By virtue of fate and the obstinacy of one Dickey Savage, two of Quentin's supporters, in direct disobedience of his commands, were whirling toward the spot on which so many minds were centered. From a distance Savage and Turk saw him rush from the carriage and up the broad stone steps that led to the darkened veranda. From other points of view, Jules Courant and his men saw the same and the former knew that Turk's visit in the afternoon had resulted in the granting of an interview. No sooner had Quentin entered the house than a man was despatched swiftly to inform Prince Ugo that he had not been denied.

Mrs. Garrison met him in the hall alone. There was defiance in her manner, but he had not come thus far to be repulsed by such a trifle as her opposition. With rare cordiality he advanced and extended his hand.

“Good evening, Mrs. Garrison. I hardly expected to find you and Dorothy quite alone at this time of night.” She gave him her hand involuntarily. He had a way about him and she forgot her resolve under its influence. There was no smile on her cold face, however.

“We are usually engaged at this hour, Mr. Quentin, but to-night we are at

home to no one but you," she said, meaningly.

"It's very good of you. Perhaps I would better begin by ending your suspense. Dorothy refused to see me to-day and I suspect the cause. I am here for an explanation from her because I think it is due me. I came also to tell you that I love her and to ask her if she loves me. If she does not, I have but to retire, first apologizing for what you may call reprehensibility on my part in presuming to address her on such a matter when I know she is the promised wife of another. If she loves me, I shall have the honor to ask you for her hand, and to ask her to terminate an engagement with a man she does not love. I trust my mission here to-night is fully understood."

"It is very plain to me, Mr. Quentin, and I may be equally frank with you. It is useless."

"You will of course permit me to hear that from the one who has the right to decide," he said.

"My daughter consented to receive you only because I advised her to do so. I will not speak now of your unusual and unwarranted behavior during the past month, nor will I undertake to say how much annoyance and displeasure you have caused. She is the affianced wife of Prince Ravorelli and she marries him because she loves him. I have given you her decision." For a moment their eyes met like the clashing of swords.

"Has she commissioned you to say this to me?" he asked, his eyes penetrating like a knife.

"I am her mother, not her agent."

"Then I shall respectfully insist that she speak for herself." If a look could kill a man, hers would have been guilty of murder.

"She is coming now, Mr. Quentin. You have but a moment of doubt left. She despises you." For the first time his composure wavered, and his lips parted, as if to exclaim against such an assumption. But Dorothy was already at the foot of the stairs, pale, cold and unfriendly. She was the personification of a tragedy queen as she paused at the foot of the stairs, her nand on the newell post, the lights from above shining directly into a face so disdainful that he could hardly believe it was hers. There was no warmth in her voice when she spoke to him, who stood immovable, speechless, before her.

"What have you to say to me, Phil?"

"I have first to ask if you despise me," he found voice to say.

"I decline to answer that question."

“Your mother has said so.”

“She should not have done so.”

“Then she has misrepresented you?” he cried, taking several steps toward her.

“I did not say that she had.”

“Dorothy, what do you mean by this? What right have you to—” he began, fiercely.

“Mr. Quentin!” exclaimed Mrs. Garrison, haughtily.

“Well,” cried he, at bay and doggedly, “I must know the truth. Will you come to the veranda with me, Dorothy?”

“No,” she replied, without a quaver.

“I must talk with you alone. What I have to say is of the gravest importance. It is for your welfare, and I shall leave my own feelings out of it, if you like. But I must and will say what I came here to say.”

“There is nothing that I care to hear from you.”

“By all that's holy, you shall hear it, and alone, too,” he exclaimed so commandingly that both women started. He caught a quick flutter in Dorothy's eyes and saw the impulse that moved her lips almost to the point of parting. “I demand—yes, demand—to be heard! Come! Dorothy, for God's sake, come!”

He was at her side and, before she could prevent it, had grasped her hand in his own. All resistance was swept away like chaff before the whirlwind. The elder woman so far forgot her cold reserve as to blink her austere eyes, while Dorothy caught her breath, looked startled and suffered herself to be led to the door without a word of protest. There he paused and turned to Mrs. Garrison, whose thunderstruck countenance was afterward the subject of more or less amusement to him, and, if the truth were known, to her daughter.

“When I have said all that I have to say to her, Mrs. Garrison, I'll bring her back to you.”

Neither he nor Dorothy uttered a word until they stood before each other in the dark palm-surrounded nook where, on one memorable night, he had felt the first savage blow of the enemy.

“Dorothy, there can no longer be any dissembling. I love you. You have doubtless known it for weeks and weeks. It will avail you nothing to deny that you love me. I have seen—” he was charging, hastily, feverishly.

“I do deny it. How dare you make such an assertion?” she cried, hotly.

“I said it would avail you nothing to deny it, but I expected the denial. You

have not forgotten those dear days when we were boy and girl. We both thought they had gone from us forever, but we were mistaken. To-day I love you as a man loves, only as a man can love who has but one woman in his world. Sit here beside me, Dorothy."

"I will not!" she exclaimed, trembling in every fiber, but he gently, firmly took her arm and drew her to the wicker bench. "I hate you, Philip Quentin!" she half sobbed, the powerlessness to resist infuriating her beyond expression.

"Forget that I was rough or harsh, dear. Sit still," he cried, as at the word of endearment she attempted to rise.

"You forget yourself! You forget—" was all she could say.

"Why did you refuse to see me this afternoon?" he asked, heedlessly.

"Because I believed you to be what I now know you are," she said, turning on him quickly, a look of scorn in her eyes.

"Your adorer?" he half-whispered.

"A coward!" she said, slowly, distinctly.

"Coward?" he gasped, unwilling to believe his ears. "What—I know I may deserve the word now, but—but this afternoon? What do you mean?"

"Your memory is very short."

"Don't speak in riddles, Dorothy," he cried.

"You know how I loathe a coward, and I thought you were a brave man. When I heard—when I was told—O, it does not seem possible that you could be so craven."

"Tell me what you have heard," he said, calmly, divining the truth.

"Why did you let Dickey Savage fight for you last night? Where was your manhood? Why did you slink away from Prince Ravorelli this morning?" she said, intensely.

"Who has told you all this?" he demanded.

"No matter who has told me. You did play the part of a coward. What else can you call it?"

"I did not have the chance to fight last night; your informant's plans went wrong Dickey was my unintentional substitute. As for Ravorelli's challenge this morning, I did not refuse to meet him."

"That is untrue!"

"I declined to fight the duel with him, but I said I would fight as we do at home, with my hands. Would you have me meet him with deadly weapons?"

“I only know that you refused to do so, and that Brussels calls you a coward.”

“You would have had me accept his challenge? Answer!”

“You lost every vestige of my respect by refusing to do so.”

“Then you wanted me to meet and to kill him,” he said, accusingly.

“I—I—Oh, it would not have meant that,” she gasped.

“Did you want him to kill me?” he went on, relentlessly.

“They would have prevented the duel! It could not have gone so far as that,” she said, trembling and terrified.

“You know better than that, Dorothy. I would have killed him had we met. Do you understand? I would have killed the man you expect to marry. Have you thought of that?” She sank back in the seat and looked at him dumbly, horror in her face. “That is one reason why I laughed at his ridiculous challenge. How could I hope to claim the love of the woman whose affianced husband I had slain? I can win you with him alive, but I would have built an insurmountable barrier between us had he died by my hand. Could you have gone to the altar with him if he had killed me?”

“O, Phil,” she whispered.

“Another reason why I refused to accept his challenge was that I could not fight a cur.”

“Phil Quentin!” she cried, indignantly,

“I came here to tell you the truth about the man you have promised to marry. You shall hear me to the end, too. He is as black a coward, as mean a scoundrel as ever came into the world.”

Despite her protests, despite her angry denials, he told her the story of Ugo's plotting, from the hour when he received the mysterious warning to the moment when he entered her home that evening. As he proceeded hotly to paint the prince in colors ugly and revolting she grew calmer, colder. At the end she met his flaming gaze steadily.

“Do you expect me to believe this?” she asked.

“I mean that you shall,” he said, imperatively. “It is the truth.”

“If you have finished this vile story you may go. I cannot forgive myself for listening to you. How contemptible you are,” she said, arising and facing him with blazing eyes. He came to his feet and met the look of scorn with one which sent conviction to her soul.

“I have told you the truth, Dorothy,” he said simply. The light in her eyes

changed perceptibly. “You know I am not a liar, and you know I am not a coward. Every drop of blood in my veins sings out its love for you. Rather than see you marry this man I would kill him, as you advise, even though it cost me my happiness. You have heard me out, and you know in your heart that I have told the truth.”

“I cannot, I will not believe it! He is the noblest of men, and he loves me. You do not know how he loves me. I will not believe you,” she murmured, and he knew his story had found a home. She sank to the seat again and put her hand to her throat, as if choking. Her eyes were upon the strong face above her, and her heart raced back to the hour not far gone when it whispered to itself that she loved the sweetheart of other days.

“Dorothy, do you love me?” he whispered, dropping to her side, taking her hand in his. “Have you not loved me all these days and nights?”

“You must not ask—you must not ask,” she whispered.

“But I do ask. You love me?”

“No!” she cried, recovering herself with a mighty effort. “Listen! I did love you—yes, I loved you—until to-day. You filled me with your old self, you conquered and I was grieving myself to madness over it all. But, I do not love you now! You must go! I do not believe what you have said of him and I despise you! Go!”

“Dorothy!” he cried, as she sped past him. “Think what you are saying!”

“Good-by! Go! I hate you!” she cried, and was gone. For a moment he stood as if turned to stone. Then there came a rush of glad life to his heart and he could have shouted in his jubilance.

“God, she loves me! I was not too late! She shall be mine!” He dashed into the house, but the closing of a door upstairs told him she was beyond his reach. The hall was empty; Mrs. Garrison was nowhere to be seen. Filled with the new fire, the new courage, he clutched his hat from the chair on which he had thrown it and rushed forth into the night.

At the top of the steps he met Prince Ugo. The two men stopped stockstill, within a yard of each other, and neither spoke for the longest of minutes.

“You call rather late, prince,” said Phil, a double meaning in his words.

“Dog!” hissed the prince.

“Permit me to inform you that Miss Garrison has retired. It will save you the trouble of ringing. Good-night.”

He bowed, laughed sarcastically, and was off down the steps. Ravorelli's hand

stole to an inside pocket and a moment later the light from the window flashed on a shining thing in his fingers. He did not shoot, but Quentin never knew how near he was to death at the hand of the silent statue that stood there and watched him until he was lost in the shadows. Then the prince put his hand suddenly to his eyes, moaned as if in pain, and slowly descended the steps.

XVII. A FEW MEN AND A WOMAN

A stealthy figure joined his highness at the foot of the steps, coming from the darkness below the veranda. It was Courant. What he said to the prince when they were safely away from the house caused the Italian's face to pale and his hands to twitch with rage. The French detective had heard and understood the conversation of the man and woman on the porch, and he had formed conclusions that drove all doubt from the mind of the noble lover.

Quentin looked up and down the street for his cab. It was not in sight, but he remembered telling the man to drive to the corner below. The rainstorm that had been threatening dry and dusty Brussels all day was beginning to show itself in marked form. There were distant rumbles of thunder and faint flashes of lightning, and now and then the wind, its velocity increasing every minute, dashed a splattering raindrop in one's face. The storm for which the city had been crying was hurling itself along from the sea, and its full fury was almost ready to break. The few pedestrians were scurrying homeward, the tram cars were loaded and many cabs whirled by in the effort to land their fares at home before the rain fell in torrents. Phil drank in the cool, refreshing breeze and cared not if it rained until the streets were flooded. At the corner stood a cab, the driver softly swearing to himself. He swung down and savagely jerked open the door.

“Back to the Bellevue,” said the fare airily, as he climbed into the vehicle. The cab had started off into a cross-street, when Phil imagined he heard a shout in the distance. He looked forth but could see no one in the rushing darkness, The rattle of the cab, the growing roar of the night and toe swish of the rain, which was now falling quite heavily, drowned all other sounds and he leaned back contentedly.

Suddenly the cab came to a stop, loud voices were heard outside and he was about to throw open the door when a heavy body was flung against the side of the vehicle. The next instant the half-lowered glass in the door was shattered and a voice from the rainy night cried:

“Don't resist or you will be shot to pieces.”

“What the dev—” gasped Quentin, barely able to distinguish the form of a man at the door. Some strange influence told him that the point of a revolver was almost touching his breast and the word died in his mouth.

“No outcry, Monsieur. Your valuables without a struggle. Be quick! There are

many of us. You have no chance," came the hard voice, in good English.

"But I have no valuables—"

"Your diamond ring and your watch, at least, monsieur. The ring is in your vest pocket."

"Search me, you scoundrel! I have no ring, and my watch is in my room. I'm mighty slim picking for such noted gentlemen as you. I presume I have the honor of meeting the diamond collectors the town is talking so much about." He was now aware of the presence of another man in the opposite window, and there was the same uncanny feeling that a second revolver was levelled at his person.

"Step outside, Monsieur. It is cruel to force you into the rain, but we assure you it is very refreshing. It will make you grow. Whatever you choose to call us we are wet to the skin. This must not, therefore, be a fruitless job. Step forth, quickly, and do not resist."

Quentin hesitated for an instant, and then seeing resistance was useless, boldly set foot upon the curbing. A flash of lightning revealed four or five men in the group. One of them had the driver covered with a pistol, and two of them were ready to seize the passenger. He observed, with amazement, that one of the men was a policeman in full uniform.

"Officer!" he exclaimed. "Don't you see what they are doing?"

"O, Monsieur," said the spokesman, pleasantly, "you may tell the police of Brussels that they cannot hunt us down until they hunt themselves down. What's that? A carriage? Quick! Your watch, your ring!"

Far down the street could be seen the lamps of an approaching cab, and Quentin's heart took a bound. He had not feared injury, for he was willing to submit to the searching without resistance, but now he thrilled with the excitement of possible conflict. A second flash in the sky revealed altered conditions in the setting of the tragic scene. The driver was on his box and the policeman was climbing up beside him. A short man, masked to the chin, had pushed aside the man with the revolver and a harsh voice cried as the darkness shut out the vivid picture:

"Short work of him! The knife!" "The club, Carl! Hell! Into the cab with him!" shouted another voice, and Phil began to strike out with his fists. But the attack was too sharp, the odds too great. Something crashed down upon his head, he felt himself lunge backward into the open cab door, and then a heavy body hurled itself upon his half-prostrate form. Another stinging blow caught him over the ear, and, as he lost consciousness, a tremendous force seemed to be crushing the breath from his body.

A revolver cracked, but he did not hear it, nor did he know that friends were at hand. Before the miscreants could hurl his body into the cab a vehicle whirled up, the feeble glare from its lanterns throwing light upon the scene. The man who had fired from the door of the second cab leaped to the ground, followed by a companion, and in a moment they were among the scuffling robbers. Whatever might have been the original intentions of Quentin's assailants, they were not prepared to offer battle. Their aim was to escape, not to fight. A couple of shots were fired, a rush of feet ensued and the earth seemed to swallow all but the two newcomers and the limp figure that lay half inside the cab.

In an instant Quentin was drawn from the cab by the taller of the two, the smaller having made a short dash in pursuit of the bandits. Blood rushed from the head of the unconscious man and he was a dead weight in the arms of his rescuer.

“Good God, Phil! Have they killed you? Here, Turk! Never mind those fellows! Come here, quick; we must get him to a surgeon. I'm afraid they've fixed him. Into our cab with him! Gad, he's like a rag!” It was Dickey Savage, and he was filled with dread. Turk, exploding with impotent rage, and shivering with fear that his master was dead, came to his assistance and they were soon racing for the Bellevue. A pair of wondering, patient, driverless horses watched the departure, but they did not move from the spot where they had been checked by the first attack. Across the doubletree behind them hung the limp form of their driver, a great, gaping wound in his head. He had driven them for the last time, and they seemed to know that his cold lips could never again command them to “go on.” Driven almost to the hilt, in the floor of the cab, was an ugly knife. Its point had been intended for Quentin's throat, but the hand that struck the blow was not as true as the will of its owner.

In a high state of alarm and excitement the two men in the cab took their friend to his room, their advent creating great commotion in the hotel The wildest curiosity prevailed, and they were besieged with questions from hotel men, guests and the crowd that had found shelter from the storm. Within ten minutes the news was spreading forth over the city that a wealthy American had been held up and murdered by the daring diamond thieves. Police and reporters hurried to the hotel, and the uproar was intense. The house surgeon was soon at work with the bloody, unconscious victim; Savage and Turk, with their friend, the millionaire, keeping the crowd away from the couch. It was impossible to drive the people from the room until the police arrived.

There were two ugly gashes in Quentin's head, one of which, it was feared at first, would disclose a fracture of the skull. Dr. Gassbeck, the surgeon who had

attended a wounded prince in the same hotel less that twenty-four hours before, gave out as his opinion that Quentin's injuries were not dangerous unless unexpected complications appeared. Several stitches were taken in each cut, and the patient, slowly recovering from the effects of the blows and the anesthetics, was put to bed by his friends.

Savage observed one thing when he entered the hotel with the wounded man. Prince Ugo and Count Sallaconi were among the first to come forward when the news of the attack spread through the office and corridors. The prince, in fact, was conversing with some gentlemen near the doors when the party entered. It was he who sent messengers to the central police office and who told the detectives where and how he had last seen the victim of the diamond thieves.

Dickey sat all night beside his rolling, moaning friend, unnerved, almost despairing, but the morning brought the change that gladdened his heart and gave him a chance to forget his fears and apprehensions long enough to indulge in an impressive, though inadequate, degree of profanity, with continued reference to a certain set of men whom the world called thieves, but whom he designated as dogs.

About ten o'clock a telegram from Ostend came to the hotel for him. It read: “Are you not coming to Ostend for us? Jane.” An hour later a very pretty young lady in Ostend tore a telegram to pieces, sniffed angrily and vowed she would never speak to a certain young man again. His reply to her rather peremptory query by wire was hardly calculated to restore the good humor she had lost in not finding him at the dock. “Cannot come. Awfully sorry. Can't leave Brussels. Hurry on. Will explain here. Richard Savage.” Her sister-in-law and fellow-traveler from London was mean enough to tease her with sly references to the beauty of Brussels women and the fickleness of all mankind. And so there was stored away for Mr. Savage's benefit a very cruel surprise.

The morning newspapers carried the story of Quentin's adventure to the Garrison home, and Dorothy's face, almost haggard as the result of a sleepless night, grew whiter still, and her tired eyes filled with dread. She did not have to recall their conversation of the night before, for it had not left her mind, but her thoughts went back to a former conversation in which he had ridiculed the bandits. The newspaper fell from her nerveless fingers, and she left the table, her breakfast untouched, stealing miserably to her room, to escape her mother's inquisitive eyes.

Her wretched state was not improved by the visit of a veiled young woman later in the day. The visitor was undoubtedly a lady, but the story she poured into the unwilling ears was so astounding that Dorothy dismissed her indignantly

before it was finished. The low-voiced, intense stranger, young and evidently beautiful, told her that Quentin's injuries were not inflicted by thieves, but by the hired agents of one who had cause to fear him. Before Miss Garrison could remonstrate, the stranger went into the details of a plot so cowardly that she was horrified—horrified all the more because, in a large measure, it sustained the charges made against her lover by Philip Quentin. When at last she could no longer endure the villifying recital she bade the woman to leave the house, hotly refusing to give countenance to the lies she was telling. The stranger desisted only after her abject pleading had drawn from the other a bitter threat to have her ejected by the servants.

“You will not hear me to the end, but you must give me the privilege of saying that I do not come here to do him or you an injury,” said the visitor, tremulously. “It is to save you from him and to save him for myself. Mademoiselle, I love him. He would marry me were it not for you. You think jealousy, then, inspired this visit? I admit that jealousy is the foundation, but it does not follow that I am compelled to lie. Everything I have said and would say is true. Perhaps he loves you, but he loved me first. A week ago he told me that he loved me still. It was I who warned the American gentleman against him, and my reason is plain. I want him to win. It would mean death to me if it were known that I came to you with this story. Do you bid me go, or will you hear me to the end?”

“You must go. I cannot listen to the infamous things you say about—about—him,” said Dorothy, her voice choking toward the end. A horrible fear seized upon her heart. Was this woman mad or had Quentin told the truth? A new thought came to her and she grasped the woman's hand with convulsive fingers. “You have been sent here by Mr. Quentin! O, how plain it is! Why did I not see through it at once? Go back to your employer and tell him that—” She was crying hysterically when the woman snatched away her hand, and drawing herself to full height interrupted haughtily:

“I have humbled myself that I might do you the greatest service in the world. You drive me from your presence and you call me a liar. All of that I must endure, but I will not suffer you to accuse this innocent man while I have voice to offer up in his defense. I may be some one's slave, but I am not the servant of any man. I do not know this American; he does not know me. I am my own agent and not his tool. What I have tried to tell you is true and I confess my actions have been inspired by selfish motives. Mademoiselle, the man you are to marry promised to make me his wife long before he knew you.”

“To make you his wife? Absurd! Men of his station do not marry, nor promise to marry, the grisettes or the—”

“'Madam! It is not a grisette to whom you are speaking. The blood in my veins is as noble as that which flows in his, the name I bear—and perhaps disgrace, God help me!—is as proud as any in all France. But I have not millions, as you have. My face, my person may win and hold the heart, but I have not the gold with which to buy the soul. You will pardon my intrusion and you will forgive me for any pang I have caused. He would not harken to the appeals from my breaking heart, he would not give me all his love. There was left but one course to preserve what rightfully belongs to me, and I have followed it as a last resort Were you to tell him that a woman came to you with this story, he would deny everything, and he would be lost to me, even though you cast him off in the end. It is not in my power to command you to protect the woman who is trying to help you. You do not believe what I have told to you, therefore I cannot hope for pity at your hands. You will tell him that I have been here, and I shall pay the penalty for being the fool, the mad woman. I am not asking for pity. If I have lied to you I deserve nothing but the hardest punishment. You have one way to punish me for the wounds I inflict, but it is the same to me, no matter how it ends. If you marry him, I am lost; if you cast him off and yet tell him that it was I who first sowed the seed of distrust in your heart, I am lost. It will be the same —all the same! If he cannot wed you, he will come to me and I will forgive. Madam, he is not good enough for you, but he is all the world to me. He would wed you, but you are not the one he loves. You are all the world to one whose love is pure and honest. If you would save him, become his wife. O, Mademoiselle, it grieves me so to see the tears in those good eyes of yours! Farewell, and God bless and keep you.”

XVIII. ARRIVALS FROM LONDON

Lady Saxondale and the young person with the stored-up wrath were met at the Gare du Nord by Mr. Savage, all smiles and good spirits. Quentin was rounding-to nicely, and there was little danger from complications. This fact coupled with the joy of seeing the girl who had been able to make him feel that life was not a shallow dream, sent him up to the two ladies with outstretched hands, a dancing heart and a greeting that brought smiles to the faces of crusty fellow-creatures who had not smiled in weeks.

With a deference due to premeditated gallantry, he shook hands first with Lady Frances. His ebullition almost swept him to the point of greeting the two maids who stood respectfully near their mistresses. Then he turned his beaming face upon the Arctic individual with the pink parasol and the palm-leaf fan.

“Awfully sorry, Lady Jane, but I really couldn't get to Ostend. You didn't have any trouble getting the right train and all that, did you?” he asked, vaguely feeling for the hand which had not been extended.

“Not in the least, Mr. Savage. We delight in traveling alone. Do you see the baroness anywhere, Frances?” Mr. Savage stared in amazement. A distinct, blighting frost settled over the whole September world and his smile lost all but its breadth. The joy left his eyes and his heart like a flash, but his lips helplessly, witlessly maintained a wide-open hospitality until long after the inspiration was dead.

“She is not here, I am afraid,” responded Lady Saxondale, glancing through the hurrying crowd. “Have you seen the Baroness St. Auge, Mr. Savage? Or do you know her?”

“I can't say that I have—er—I mean don't—no, I should say both,” murmured he distractedly. “Does she live here?”

“She resides in a house, not in a railway station,” observed Lady Jane, with a cutting sarcasm of which she was rather proud. Lady Saxondale turned her face away and buried a convulsive smile in her handkerchief.

“I mean in Brussels,” floundered Dickey, his wits in the wind. He was gazing dumbly at the profile of the slim iceberg that had so sharply sent the blast of winter across the summer of his content.

“She certainly understood that we were to come on this train, Frances. You

telegraphed her," said Lady Jane, ignoring him completely. She raised herself on her dainty tiptoes, elevated her round little chin and tried to peer over the heads of a very tall and disobliging multitude. Dickey, at a loss for words, stretched his neck also in search of the woman he did not know.

"How very annoying," said Lady Saxondale, a faint frown on her brow. "She is usually so punctual."

"Perhaps she—er—didn't get your telegram," ventured Dickey. "What sort of a looking—I mean, is she old or young?"

"Neither; she is just my age," smiled Lady Saxondale. Dickey dumbly permitted the rare chance for a compliment to slip by. "Jane, won't you and Mr. Savage undertake a search for her? I will give William directions regarding the luggage." She turned to the man and the maids, and Mr. Savage and Lady Disdain were left to work out their salvation as best they could.

"I can't think of troubling you, Mr. Savage. It won't be necessary for you to dodge around in this crowd to—"

"No trouble, I assure you, Lady Jane. Be glad to do it, in fact. Where shall we go first?" demanded he, considerably flurried.

"You go that way and I'll go this. We'll find her more easily," said she, relentlessly, indicating the directions.

"But I don't know her," he cried.

"How unfortunate! Would you know her if I were to describe her to you? Well, she's tall and very fair. She's also beautiful. She's quite stunning. I'm sure you'll know her." She was starting away when he confronted her desperately.

"You'll have to go with me. I'll be arrested for addressing the wrong lady if I go alone, and you'll suffer the mortification of seeing them drag me off to jail."

"The what? Why do you say mortification, Mr. Savage? I am quite sure—"

"O, come now, Jane—aw—Lady Jane—what do you mean by that? What's all the row about? What has happened?" he cried.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Savage."

"Something's wrong, or you'd seem happier to see me, that's all," he said, helplessly. "Lord, all my troubles come at once. Phil is half dead, perhaps all dead, by this time—and here you come along, adding misery instead of—"

"Phil—Mr. Quentin—what did you say, Dickey?" she cried, her haughty reserve fading like a flash.

"Don't you know?" he cried. "Almost killed last night by—by robbers.

Slugged him nearly to a finish. Horrible gashes—eight stitches”—he was blurting out excitedly, but she clasped his arm convulsively and fairly dragged him to where Lady Saxondale stood.

“Oh, Dickey! They didn't kill—he won't die, will he? Why didn't you tell us before? Why didn't you telegraph?” she cried, and there was no wrath in the thumping, terrified little heart. Lady Saxondale turned quickly upon hearing the excited words of the girl who but a moment before had been the personification of reserve.

“What are you saying, Jane? Is there anything wrong?” she asked.

“Everything is wrong—Philip is dead!” cried Lady Jane, ready to faint. “Dickey says there are eight gashes, and that he is all dead! Why don't you tell us about it, Dickey?”

“He's all right—not dead at all. Robber's held him up last night during the storm, and if help hadn't come just when it did they'd have made short work of him. But I can't tell you about it here, you know. If you'll allow me I'll take a look for the baroness.”

“I'll go with you,” said Lady Jane, enthusiastically. “Dickey,” she went on as they hurried away, “I forgive you.”

“Forgive me for what?” he asked.

“For not coming to Ostend,” demurely.

“You really wanted me to come, did you, Jane?”

“Yes, after I had been goose enough to telegraph to you, you know. You don't know how small I felt when you did not come,” she hurried out, but his merry laugh cut short the humiliating confession.

“And that was why you—”

“Yes, that was why. Don't say another word about it, though. I was such a horrid little fool, and I am so ashamed of myself. And you were so worried all the time about dear Mr. Quentin,” she pleaded, penitently.

“You might have known that nothing short of death could have prevented me from coming to Ostend,” said he softly. “But I've all sorts of news to tell you. When I tell you about the duel you'll go into convulsions; when you hear—”

“A duel? Good heavens, how—I mean who—” she gasped, her eyes wider than ever.

“I don't know how, but I do know who, Jane, I have shot a man!” he said, impressively.

“Oh, oh, oh! Dickey!” she almost shrieked, coming helplessly to a standstill, a dozen emotions crowding themselves into her pretty, bewildered face.

“Don't faint! I'll tell you all about it—to-night, eh?” he said, hastily. He was vastly afraid she might topple over in a swoon.

“I can't wait!” she gasped. “And I will not faint. You must tell me all about it this instant. Is the other man—is he—where is he?”

“He's in a hospital. Everybody's staring at us. What a fool I was to say anything about it, I won't tell you another word of it.”

“Oh, Dickey, please!” she implored. He was obdurate and her manner changed suddenly. With blighting scorn she exclaimed, “I don't believe a word you've said.”

“O, now, that's hardly a nice way—” he began, indignantly, catching himself luckily before floundering into her trap. “You will have to wait, just the same, Miss Lady Jane Oldham. Just now we are supposed to be searching for a baroness who is good enough to come to railway stations, you'll remember. Have you seen her?”

At this juncture Lady Saxondale's voice was heard behind them, and there were traces of laughter in the tones.

“Are you waiting for the mountain to come to you? Here is the baroness, delayed by an accident to her victoria.” Mr. Savage was presented to the handsome, rather dashing lady, whose smile was as broad and significant as that which still left traces about Lady Saxondale's lips. He bowed deeply to hide the red in his cheeks and the confusion in his eyes. His companion, on the other hand, greeted the stranger so effusively that he found it possible during the moments of merry chatter to regain a fair proportion of his lost composure.

The Baroness St. Auge was an English woman, famed as a whip, a golfer and an entertainer. Her salon was one of the most interesting, the most delightful in Brussels; her husband and her rollicking little boys were not a whit less attractive than herself, and her household was the wonder of that gay, careless city. The baron, a middle-aged Belgian of wealth, was as merry a nobleman as ever set forth to seek the pleasures of life. His board was known as the most bountiful, his home the cheeriest and most hospitable, his horses the best bred in all Brussels. He loved his wife and indulged her every whim, and she adored him. Theirs was a home in which the laugh seldom gave way to the frown, where happiness dwelt undisturbed and merriment kept the rafters twitching. With them the two London women were to stop until after the wedding. Saxondale was to visit his grim old castle in Luxemburg for several days before

coming up to Brussels, and he was not to leave England for another week. Baron St. Auge was looking over his estates in the north of Belgium, but was expected home before the week's end.

Mr. Savage was in an unusual flutter of exhilaration when he rushed into Quentin's presence soon after the ladies drove away from the Gare du Nord. The baroness had warmly insisted that he come that evening to regale them with the story of the robbery and the account of the duel, a faint and tantalizing rumor of which had come to her ears.

“The baroness lives on the Avenue Louise, old man,” he said, after he had described her glowingly. A long, cool drink ran down his dry throat before his listener, propped up in his bed and looking upon his friend with somber eyes, deigned to break the silence.

“So you are to tell them about the duel Dickey,” he said, slowly.

“They're crazy about it.”

“I thought it was to be kept as dark as possible.” Dickey's jaw dropped and his eyes lost their gleam of satisfaction.

“By thunder, I—I forgot that!” he exclaimed. “What am I to do?” he went on after a moment of perplexity and dismay. The long, cool drink seemed to have left a disagreeable taste in his mouth and he gulped feebly.

“Commit suicide, I should say. I see no other way out of it,” advised the man in the bed, soberly. The misery in Dickey's face was beyond description, and the perspiration that stood on his brow came not from the heat of the day.

“Did you ever know a bigger ass than I, Phil? Now, did you, honestly?” he groaned.

“I believe I can outrank you myself, Dickey. It seems to me we are out of our class when it comes to diplomacy. Give Lady Saxondale and Lady Jane my compliments to-night, and tell them I hope to see them before I sail for home.”

“What's that?” in astonishment.

“Before I sail for home.”

“Going to give it up, are you?”

“She thinks I'm a liar, so what is the use?”

“You didn't talk that way this morning. You swore she believed everything you said and that she cares for you. Anything happened since then?”

“Nothing but the opportunity to think it all over while these bandages hold my brain in one place. Her mind is made up and I can't change it, truth or no truth.

She'll never know what a villian Ravorelli—or Pavesi—is until it is too late."

"You'll feel better to-morrow, old man. The stitches hurt like the devil, don't they? Cheer up, old chap; I'm the one who needs encouragement. See what I have to face to-night. Good lord, there'll be three women, at least—maybe a dozen—begging, commanding me to tell all about that confounded shooting match, and I was getting along so nicely with her, too," he concluded, dolefully.

"With the baroness? On such short acquaintance?"

"No, of course not. With Jane Oldham. I don't know how I'm going to square it with her, by jove, I don't. Say, I'll bet my head I bray in my sleep, don't I? That's the kind of an ass I am."

When he looked listlessly into Quentin's room late that evening he wore the air of a martyr, but he was confident he had scored a triumph in diplomacy. Diplomacy in his estimation, was the dignified synonym for lying. For an hour he had lied like a trooper to three women; he left them struggling with the conviction that all the rest of the world lied and he alone told the truth. With the perspiration of despair on his brow, he had convinced them that there had been no real duel—just a trifling conflict, in which he, being a good Yankee, had come off with a moderate victory. Lady Jane believed; Lady Saxondale was more or less skeptical; while the Baroness, although graciously accepting his story as it came from his blundering lips, did not believe a word of it. His story of the "robbery" was told so readily and so graphically that it could not be doubted.

Like true women, Lady Saxondale and her sister, accompanied by their hostess and her brother, Colonel Denslow, seized the first favorable opportunity to call at the rooms of Mr. Quentin. They found him the next morning sitting up in a comfortable chair, the picture of desolation, notwithstanding the mighty efforts of Dickey Savage and the convivial millionaire. The arrival of the party put new life into the situation, and it was not long before Phil found his spirits soaring skyward.

"Tell me the truth about this awful duel," commanded Lady Saxondale, after Dickey had collected the other members of the party about a table to which tall glasses with small stems were brought at his call.

"I'm afraid Dickey has been a bit too loquacious," said he, smilingly.

"He fibs so wretchedly, you know. One could see he had been told what not to say. You can trust me, Phil," she said, earnestly. And he told her all, from beginning to end. Not once did she interrupt, and but seldom did she allow horror to show itself in her clear, brave eyes.

“And she will go on and marry this man, Phil. I am afraid she cannot be convinced—or will not, I should say,” she said, slowly, at the end of the recital. “What a villain, what a coward he is!”

“But she must not be sacrificed, Frances! She must be saved. Good God, can't something be done to drag her from the clutches of that scoundrel?” he almost groaned.

“The clutches of her mother are more vicious than those of the prince. There is the power that dominates. Can it be broken?”

“As well try to break down the Rocky Mountains. That woman has no heart—no soul, I'll swear. Dorothy has a mind and a will of her own, though, Frances. I feel that she loves me—something tells me she does, but she will not break this hateful compact. I am sure that I saw love in her eyes that last night, heard it in her voice, felt it in the way she dismissed me.”

“You made a mistake when you denounced him to her. It was but natural for her to defend him.”

“I know it, but I was driven to it. I saw no other way. She accused me of cowardice. Good heavens, I'd give my soul to be up now and able to call that villain's bluff. But I am in here for a week, at least, and the wedding is only two weeks away. When is Bob coming?” he cried, feverishly.

“Be calm, Phil. You will gain nothing by working yourself into a frenzy. Bob will come when I send for him. It shall be at once, if you have need for him here.”

“I want him immediately, but I cannot ask him or you to mix in this miserable game. There may be a scandal and I won't drag you all into it,” he said, dejectedly.

“I'll send for Bob, just the same, dear boy. What are friends for, pray?”

She left him with the firm and secret determination to carry the war for friendship's sake to the very door of Dorothy Garrison's stubborn heart, and that without delay.

XIX. THE DAY OF THE WEDDING

When Lord Bob reached Brussels on Friday he found affairs in a sorry shape. His wife's never-failing serenity was in a sad state of collapse. Quentin was showing wonderful signs of recuperation, and it almost required lock and key to keep him from breaking forth into the wildest indiscretions. Gradually and somewhat disconnectedly he became acquainted with existing conditions. He first learned that his wife had carried Quentin's banner boldly up to the walls of the fortress, and then—well, Lady Saxondale's pride was very much hurt by what happened there. Miss Garrison was exceedingly polite, but quite ungrateful for the kindness that was being bestowed upon her. She assured her ladyship that she was making no mistake in marrying Prince Ravorelli, and, if she were, she alone would suffer.

“I am so furious with her, Bob, for marrying Prince Ugo that I am not going to the wedding,” said Lady Saxondale.

“Whew! That's a bracer! But, by the way, my dear, did you introduce any real proof that he is the scoundrel you say he is? Seems to me the poor girl is right in the stand she takes. She wants proof, and positive proof, you know. I don't blame her. How the deuce can she break it off with the fellow on the flimsy excuse that Phil Quentin and Lady Saxondale say he is a rascal? You've all been acting like a tribe of ninnies, if you'll pardon my saying so.”

“She is sensible enough to know that we would not misrepresent matters to her in such a serious case as this,” she retorted.

“What proof have you that Ravorelli is a villain?”

“Good heavens, Bob, did he not try to have Phil murdered?” she exclaimed, pityingly.

“Do you know that to be a positive fact?”

“Phil and Mr. Savage are quite thoroughly convinced.”

“But if anyone asked you to go on to the witness stand and swear that Prince Ugo tried to take the life of Philip Quentin, could you do so?” he persisted.

“You goose, I was not an eye-witness. How could I swear to such a thing?”

“Well, if I understand the situation correctly, Miss Garrison is the judge, Ravorelli the accused, and you are one of the witnesses. Now, really, dear, how far do you imagine your hearsay evidence—which is no evidence at all—goes

with the fair magistrate? What would be your verdict if some one were to come to you and say, 'Saxondale is a blackguard, a rascal, a cutthroat?'"

"I confess I'd say it was not true," she said, turning quite red.

"The chances are you wouldn't even ask for proof. So, you see, Miss Garrison behaved very generously when she condescended to hear your assertions instead of instructing the servant to direct you to the door."

"She was above reproach, Bob. I never saw anyone so calm, so composed and so frigidly agreeable. If she had shown the faintest sign of anger, displeasure or even disgust, I could forgive her, but she acted just as if she were tolerating me rather than to lower herself to the point of seriously considering a word I uttered. I know the prince is a villian. I believe every word Phil says about him." She took Lord Bob's hands in hers, and her deep, earnest eyes burnt conviction into his brain.

"And so do I Frances I am as sure that Ugo is a scoundrel as if I had personal knowledge of his transactions. In fact, I have never believed in him. You and I will stand together, dear, in this fight for poor old Phil, and, by the Lord Harry, they'll find us worth backing to the finish. If there's anything to be done that can be done, we'll do it, my girl." And he was amply repaid for his loyal declaration by the love that shone refulgent from her eyes.

Quentin naturally chafed under the restraint. There was nothing he could do, nothing his friends could do, to avert the disaster that was daily drawing nearer. Lord Bob infused a momentary spark of hope into the dying fire of his courage, but even the resourceful Briton admitted that the prospect was too gloomy to warrant the slightest encouragement. They could gain absolutely no headway against the prince, for there was no actual proof to be had. To find the strange woman who gave the first warning to Quentin was out of the question. Turk had watched every movement of the prince and his aides in the hope of in some way securing a clue to her identity or whereabouts. There was but one proposition left; the purchase of Courant.

This plan seemed feasible until Turk reported, after diligent search, that the French detective could not be found. Dickey was for buying the two Italian noblemen, but that seemed out of the question, and it was unreasonable to suspect that the other hirelings recognized the prince as their real employer. The slightest move to approach the two noblemen might prove disastrous, and wisdom cut off Dickey's glorious scheme to give each of them "a hundred dollars to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Quentin at last burst all bonds, and, finding himself out of the doctor's hands,

determined to make a last desperate appeal to Dorothy Garrison. If that appeal failed, he would then give up the struggle; he would at least end the suspense. He knew how difficult it would be to obtain an audience with her, but he went ahead with the confidence of the drowning man, the boldness of the man who is wounded to the death but does not know it.

It was the Wednesday just one week before the wedding that saw the pale-faced, tall and somewhat unsteady American deliberately leave his cab and stride manfully up the steps of a certain mansion in the Avenue Louise. Miss Garrison was “not at home,” and her mother was “not at home.” So said the obsequious footman.

“Take my card to Miss Garrison,” said Quentin, coolly. The man looked bewildered and was protesting that his young mistress was not in the house when the lady herself appeared at the top of the broad stairway. Phil stood in the center of the hall watching her as she slowly descended the steps. At the bottom of the steps she paused. Neither spoke, neither smiled, for the crisis was upon them. If he were pale from the loss of blood, she was white with the aches from a fever-consumed heart.

“Why have you come?” she asked, at last, her voice so low that the words scarcely reached his ears.

“Dorothy,” was all he said.

“You knew what I must say to you before you entered the door. Will you let me tell you how deeply I have grieved over your misfortune? Are you quite wise in coming out before you have the strength? You are so pale, so weak. Won't you go back to your—to your hotel and save yourself all the pain that will come to you here?” There was pity in her eyes, entreaty in her voice, and he was enveloped in the tender warmth of her sincerity. Never had she seemed so near as now, and yet never so far away.

“Dorothy, you must know what manner of love it is that brings me to plead for the smallest crumb of what has been once refused. I come simply, in all humility, with outstretched hands to ask your love.” He drew nearer, and she did not retreat.

“Oh, it is so useless—so hopeless, Phil,” she said, softly. “Why will you persist? I cannot grant even the crumb.”

“I love you, Dorothy,” he cried passionately.

“Oh! Phil; you must understand that I can give you nothing—absolutely nothing. For God's sake—for my sake, for the sake of that dear friendship we own together, go away and forget—forget everything,” she said, piteously.

A half-hour later he slowly descended the steps, staggering like a man sick unto death. She sat where he left her, her wide, dry eyes seeing nothing, her ears hearing nothing but the words his love had forced her to utter. These words:

“Yes, heaven help me, I do care for you. But, go! Go! I can never see you again. I shall keep the bargain I have made, if I die at the altar. I cannot break my promise to him.” And all his pleading could not break down that decision—not even when she found herself for one brief, terrible instant in his straining arms, his lips upon hers.

It was all over. He calmly told his friends, as he had told her, that he would sail for New York on the first steamer, and Turk reluctantly began to pack the things. The night before he was to leave for Hamburg, the Saxondales, Lady Jane and Savage sat with him long into the night. Prince Ugo's watchdogs were not long in discovering the sudden turn affairs had taken, and he was gleefully celebrating the capitulation.

The next day the Saxondales accompanied the two Americans to the railway station, bade them a fond farewell and hastened back to the home of the Baron St. Auge with new resolutions in their hearts. The forepart of the ensuing week saw their departure from Brussels. Deliberately they turned their backs on the great wedding that was to come, and as if scorning it completely, journeyed to Lord Bob's ruins in Luxemburg, preferring the picturesque solitude of the tumbledown castle to the empty spectacle at St. Gudule. Brussels may have wondered at their strange leave-taking on the eve of the wedding, but no explanation was offered by the departing ones.

When Dorothy Garrison heard that Philip Quentin had started for the United States she felt a chill of regret sink suddenly into her soul, and it would not be driven forth. She went on to the very night that was to make her a princess, with the steel in her heart, but the world did not know it was there. There was no faltering, no wavering, no outward sign of the emotions which surged within. She was to be a princess! But when the Saxondales turned their faces from her, spurning the invitation to her wedding, the pride in her heart suffered. That was a blow she had not expected. It was like an accusation, a reproach.

Little Lady Jane blissfully carried with her to the valley of the Alzette the consciousness that Richard Savage was very much in love with her, even though he had not found courage to tell her so in plain words. A telegram from him stating that he and Quentin had taken passage for New York and would sail on the following day dispelled the hope that he might return.

Brussels was full of notables. The newspapers of two continents were fairly

blazing with details of the wedding. There were portraits of the bride and groom, and the bishop, and pictures of the gowns, the hats, the jewels; there were biographies of the noted beauty and the man she was to marry. The Brussels papers teemed with the arrivals of distinguished guests.

Overcoming Mrs. Garrison's objections, Dorothy had insisted on and obtained special permission to have a night wedding. She had dreamed of the lights, the splendor, the brilliancy of an after-sunset wedding and would not be satisfied until all barriers were put aside.

Dorothy's uncle, Henry Van Dykman, her mother's brother, and a number of elated New York relatives came to the Belgian capital, shedding their American opulence as the sun throws out its light. The skill of a general was required to direct, manage and control the pageant of the sixteenth. Thousands of dollars were tossed into the cauldron of social ambition by the lavish mother, who, from behind an army of lieutenants, directed the preliminary maneuvers.

The day came at last and St. Gudule's presented a scene so bewilderingly, so dazzlingly glorious that all Brussels blinked its eyes and was awed into silence. The church gleamed with the wealth of the universe, it seemed, and no words could describe the brilliancy of the occasion. The hour of this woman's triumph had come, the hour of the Italian conqueror had come, the hour of the victim had come.

In front of the house in the Avenue Louise, an hour before the beginning of the ceremony, there stood the landau that was to take the bride to the cathedral. Carriage after carriage passed, bearing the visitors from the new world, to the church. All were gone save the bride, her mother and her uncle. Down the carpeted steps and across to the door of the carriage came Dorothy and her uncle, followed by the genius of the hour. At the last moment Dorothy shuddered, turned sick and faint for an instant, as she thought of a ship far out at sea.

The footman swung up beside the driver, and they were off by quiet streets toward the church where waited all impatient, the vast assemblage and the triumphant prince. The silence inside the carriage was like that of the tomb. What were the thoughts of the occupants could not well be described.

“Are we not almost there, Dorothy?” nervously asked her mother, after many minutes. “Good heavens! We are late! O, what shall we do?” cried she in despair. In an instant the somber silence of the cab's interior was lost. The girl forgot her prayer in the horror of the discovery that there was to be a hitch in the well-planned arrangements. Her mother frantically pulled aside the curtains and

looked out, fondly expecting to see the lights of St. Gudule on the hill. Uncle Henry dropped his watch in his nervousness and was all confusion.

“We are not near the church, my—why, where are we? I have never seen these houses before. Henry, Henry, call to the driver! He has lost his way. My heavens, be quick!”

It was not necessary to hail the driver, for at that instant the carriage came to a sudden standstill. The door opened quickly, and before the eyes of the astonished occupants loomed the form of a masked man. In his hand he held a revolver.

XX. WITH STRANGE COMPANIONS

“A word, a sound and I fire!” came the cold, hard voice of the man in the mask. He spoke in French. The trio sat petrified, speechless, breathless. So sudden, so stunning was the shock to their senses that they were as graven images for the moment. There was no impulse to scream, to resist; they had no power to da either.

“We will injure no one unless there is an outcry or a struggle. Monsieur, Madame, there is no occasion for alarm; no more is there a chance to escape,” said the mask quietly. Three pairs of eyes looked dumbly into the gleaming holes in the black mask that covered his face.

“The police?” finally whispered Mrs. Garrison, coming slowly out of her stupor.

“Silence, madame! You are not to speak. Faint if you like; we will not object to that and it may be a relief to you,” said the man, sarcastically gallant. “I must ask you to make room for me inside the carriage. We cannot remain here; the police may come this way—I mean those who are not engaged in guarding the grand cathedral to which you were going.” He was inside the carriage and sitting beside Dorothy when he concluded the last observation. With a shudder she drew away from him. “Pardon, Mademoiselle, I must implore you to endure my presence here for a time. We have quite a distance to travel together.”

A nameless dread sent chills to the hearts which had begun to thump wildly in the reaction. What did he mean?

“What are you going to do with us?” groaned the horrified mother. The carriage was now moving rapidly over the pavement.

“In due time you may know, Madame; you have only to be patient. For the moment, it is necessary that you keep perfectly quiet. Although you are a woman, I shall have to kill you if you disobey my commands. We take desperate chances to-night in the coup which shall make all Europe ring with the crowning act of the great diamond robbers, as you are pleased to call us; and we can brook no resistance. You see my revolver, Monsieur, it is on a direct line with your breast. You are Americans, I am told, and your people are noted for coolness, for discretion under trying circumstances. Your women are as brave as your men. I merely ask you to call your courage—”

“You shall not go on, monster,” exclaimed Mrs. Garrison, fiercely. “Do you know who we are? Surely you are not inhuman enough to—”

“Madame! I warn you for the last time. You must be reasonable. Resistance, argument, pleading will avail you nothing. If you desire to discuss the situation calmly, sensibly, you may do so, but you are to go only so far as I see fit. Will you remember?” There was no mistaking the earnestness of the speaker. Mrs. Garrison realized that she was absolutely powerless, completely at the mercy of the bold intruder.

“What must we pay, then, for our freedom? Name the price, man. Order your men to drive us to St. Gudule's and anything you ask is yours. I implore you to be generous. Think, Monsieur, think what this means to us!” she said, desperately.

“I am not at liberty to dictate terms, Madame. It is only my duty to carry out my part of the transaction; another will make terms with you.”

“But when? When? We cannot be delayed a moment longer. The hour has already passed when my daughter should be before the altar. For God's sake, name your price. I will pay, I will pay,” sobbed the half-crazed woman.

“Sir, do you know what you are doing?” demanded the quaking old man, finding his voice at last. “You must listen to reason. Think of yourself, if not of us. What will become of you when you are caught? Pause in this awful crime and think—”

“You are kind; Monsieur, to advise me, but it is too late.”

“Will you take us to St. Gudule's?” cried the elder woman, on the verge of collapse. “I will give you all you ask, Monsieur.”

“Ten thousand dollars is yours if you abandon this damnable—” began Mr. Van Dykman.

“It will avail nothing to offer me money,” interrupted the master of the situation, harshly. “That is the end of it. Believe me, money is not what we are after to-night. To-morrow, perhaps, it may tempt us.”

“What do you mean to do with us?” cried the girl, horror in her voice.

“We do not mean to harm you, Mademoiselle, if you are sensible and do as we command.”

“But the wedding, the wedding!” moaned Mrs. Garrison. “What will they think of us? O, Monsieur, if you are one of the great diamond robbers I willingly give all that I have about me. On my person there are jewels valued at many thousand—”

“Another word, Madame, and I shall be obliged to use force,” said the man, leaning forward, threateningly. In the darkness they could feel the menace in his eyes.

“You are determined to go on with this outrage?” asked Van Dykman.

“A coup so well planned as this cannot be given up, Monsieur. We flatter ourselves that no such job has ever graced the history of Europe,” said the stranger, pleasantly. “Down in your hearts, I believe you will some day express admiration for the way in which the abduction has been managed.”

“Abduction?” gasped Mrs. Garrison. Dorothy sank back into the corner at that word and it seemed to her that her heart would never beat again.

“Where do you mean to take us, and what is your object?” slowly asked Mrs. Garrison, a peculiar sense of resignation coming over her. It was as if she recognized the utter hopelessness of escape from the hands of these skillful wretches. She now saw that the mind which had planned the capture was one that could carry the game to the end without a flaw in the operations.

“I can answer neither question, Madame. Suffice to say that you are rich and we are poor. I leave the rest for your imagination. It grieves us, of course, to mar the grand wedding of to-night, but you will readily understand that at no other time could we find you so well prepared. Truly, I wonder what they are doing in St. Gudule.”

“My coachman, my footman, my servants, it seems, are your accomplices,” said Mrs. Garrison, steadily.

“Not at all, Madame. To-morrow your coachman and your footman will be found where we confined them. The men here have never been in your employ. I could recommend them to you, however; they are most trusty, faithful fellows, and they would be loyal to you to the death.”

“For God's sake, where are we?” burst forth Mr. Van Dykman, unable to control his fear longer.

“We are near the edge of the city, and will soon be beyond the limits. I must command absolute silence for the next half-hour. Not a word must be spoken as we are passing a point of danger. Do not permit hope of rescue to enter your minds, however, for there is no chance. I may enlighten you by saying that the revolvers I carry work safely, quietly and very effectually. Will you join me, in a half-hour's silent consideration of the scenes that are now taking place in old St. Gudule? I am sure there is no limit to the imagination when we give over our thoughts to that subject.”

Whatever may have been the desire to shriek, to call for help, to tear away the window curtains, the three helpless captives were unable to break through the influence this lone bandit spread about them. The thought of St. Gudule, of the great gathering, of the impatience, the consternation, the sensation occasioned by the non-arrival of the bride, brought madness to the brains of the hapless trio. Like a vivid panorama they saw everything that was going on in the church. They saw alarm in faces of those closely interested in the wedding, heard the vague rumors and questionings, the order for the search, the report of accident, and then—the police and newspapers!

At last the carriage came to a stop and the footman swung down from the seat, opening the door quickly. That they were far beyond the streets of the city was apparent in the oppressive stillness, broken only by the heavy panting of the horses. “This is the place,” came in the coarse voice of the footman. “We have no time to lose.”

“Then I must ask you to get down, Monsieur, and the ladies. We are about to enter a house for a short while, the better to complete the details of our little transactions. Remember, no noise means no violence. Be quick, please.” Thus spoke the man in the seat, who an instant later stepped forth into the darkness. The trembling, sobbing women dragged themselves to the ground, their gorgeous gowns trailing in the dust, unthought of and unprotected. Mr. Van Dykman, old as he was, took courage in the momentary relaxation, and attempted to halloo for help. A heavy hand was clasped over his mouth and strong arms subdued his show of resistance. Swiftly across a short stretch of ground they went, up rickety steps and into the black hallway of a house. There were stifled moans of terror on the lips of the two women, but there was no resistance save the weight their strengthless forms imposed upon the men who had them in charge. There was no light in the house and no sign that it was occupied by others than themselves.

“We remain here for several hours. If all goes well, you will then be at liberty to depart for your home in the city. Here is a chair, Madam. Pray be seated. Pardon our inability to give you a light. You will be patient, I am sure, when it is said on the sacred word of a gentleman that no harm is to come to you. It is only necessary that you remain quiet and await the hour when we are ready to release you. I must ask permission to lock the door of this room. Before dawn your friends will be here to take you away in safety. Everything has been arranged for your personal welfare and comfort. Permit me to say goodnight.”

“Where are we?” demanded the old man.

“Why have you brought us here?” asked Mrs. Garrison from the arm chair

into which she had limply fallen.

“You will learn everything in good time. We shall be just outside the door, and will respond promptly if you need our help to the extent of shouting for it. In the meantime your horses and carriage are being well cared for. Be of good heart and your night will not be a long one. Believe me, I hope we may meet again under more pleasing conditions.”

The door closed a second later and the key clicked. Then came the shooting of a bolt, a short scuffling of feet, and the silence of the dead reigned over the strange house. Overcome with dread, the occupants of the room uttered no word, no sound for what seemed to them an hour. Then Mrs. Garrison, real tenderness in her voice, called softly to her daughter.

“Darling, can you find me in this darkness? Come to me. Let me hold you close in my arms, Dorothy, poor, poor child.”

But there was no response to the appeal, nor to a second and a third call. The mother sprang to her feet in sudden terror, her heart fluttering wildly.

“Henry! Are you here? Where is—what has happened to Dorothy?” she cried. A trembling old man and a frantic woman bumped against each other in the darkness and the search began. There were but two people in the room! Following this alarming discovery one of these persons swooned and the other battered, like a madman, against the heavy, stubborn door.

Far away in the night bowled a carriage drawn by sturdy horses. The clouds broke and the rain fell. Thunder and lightning ran rampant in the skies, but nothing served to lessen the speed of that swift flight over the highways leading into the sleep-ridden country. Inside the cab, not the one in which Dorothy Garrison had begun her journey to the altar, but another and less pretentious, sat the grim desperado and a half-dead woman. Whither they flew no one knew save the man who held the reins over the plunging horses. How long their journey—well, it was to have an end.

True to the promise made by the bandit, a clattering band of horsemen dashed up to the lonely house at the break of dawn. They were led by Prince Ugo Ravorelli, dishevelled, half-crazed. A shivering woman in silks and a cowering old man sobbed with joy when the rescuers burst through the door. Tacked to a panel in the door was an ominous, ghost-like paper on which was printed the following message from the night just gone:

“In time the one who is missing shall be returned to the arms of her mother, absolutely unharmed. She will be well cared for by those who have her in charge. After a reasonable length of time her friends will be informed as to the

terms on which she may be restored to them.”

Mrs. Garrison, more dead than alive, was conveyed to her home in the Avenue Louise, there to recover her strength with astonishing quickness. This vastly purposeful, indomitable woman, before many hours had passed, was calmly listening to plans for the capture of her daring abductors and the release of her daughter. Friends, overcome with the horror of the hour, flocked to her aid and comfort; the government offered its assistance and the police went to work as one massive sleuth-hound. Newspapers all over the world fairly staggered under the burden of news they carried to their readers, and people everywhere stood aghast at the most audacious outrage in the annals of latter-day crime.

As completely lost as if the earth had swallowed them were the diamond robbers—for all the world accepted them as the perpetrators—and their fair prize. No one saw the carriage after it turned off the Avenue Louise on the night of the abduction; no one saw the party leave the lonely house in the country. A placard found on the steps of a prominent citizen's home at an early hour in the morning told the frenzied searchers where to look for the mother and the uncle of the missing girl.

A reward of 100,000 francs for the arrest of the abductors or the return of Miss Garrison was offered at once by the stony-faced woman in the Avenue Louise, and detectives flew about like bees. Every city in the land was warned to be on the lookout, every village was watched, every train and station was guarded. Nine in every ten detectives maintained that she was still in Brussels, and house after house, mansion after mansion was searched.

Three days after the abduction word came from London that four men and a young woman, apparently insane, all roughly attired, had come to that city from Ostend, and had disappeared before the officials were fully cognizant of their arrival. The woman, according to the statements of men who saw her on the train, was beautiful and pale as with the sickness that promised death.

XXI. THE HOME OF THE BRIGANDS

It was past midnight, after a wild ride through the storm, when an old gentleman and his wife, with their sick daughter, boarded a fast eastbound train at Namur. Had the officers of the law known of the abduction at that hour it would have been an easy matter to discover that the loose-flowing gown which enveloped the almost unconscious, partially veiled daughter, hid a garment of silk so fine that the whole world had read columns concerning its beauty. The gray beard of the rather distinguished old man could have been removed: at a single grasp, while the wife, also veiled, wore the clothing of a man underneath the skirts. The father and mother were all attention to their unfortunate child, who looked into their faces with wide, hopeless eyes and uttered no word of complaint, no sound of pain.

At a small station some miles from the border line of the grand duchy of Luxemburg, the party left the coach and were met by a carriage in which they whirled away in the darkness that comes just before dawn. The horses flew swiftly toward the line that separates Belgium from the grand duchy, and the sun was barely above the bank of trees on the highlands in the east when the carriage of the impetuous travelers drew up in front of a picturesque roadside inn just across the boundary. The sweat-flecked horses were quickly stabled and the occupants of the vehicle were comfortably and safely quartered in a darkened room overlooking the highway.

So ill was the daughter, explained the father, that she was not to be disturbed on any account or pretext. Fatigued by the long ride from their home in the north, she was unable to continue the journey to Luxemburg until she had had a day of rest. At the big city she was to be placed in the care of the most noted of surgeons. Full of compassion, the keeper of the inn and his good wife did all in their power to carry out the wishes of the distressed father, particularly as he was free with his purse. It did not strike them as peculiar that the coachman remained at the stable closely, and that early in the day his horses were attached to the mud-covered carriage, as if ready for a start on the notice of a moment. The good man and his wife and the few peasants who were told of the suffering guest, in order that they might talk in lowered voices and refrain from disturbing noises, did not know that the “mother” of the girl sat behind the curtains of an upstairs window watching the road in both directions, a revolver on the sill.

The fact that the strange party decided to depart for Luxemburg just before nightfall did not create surprise in their simple breasts, for had not the anxious father said they would start as soon as his daughter felt equal to the journey? So eager were they to deliver her over to the great doctor who alone could save her life. With a crack of the whip and a gruff shout of farewell to the gaping stableboy who had been his companion for a day, the driver of the early morning coach whirled into the road and off toward the city of precipices. No one about the inn knew who the brief sojourners were, nor did they know whence they came. The stableboy noted the letter S blazoned on the blinds of the horses' bridles, but there were no letters on the carriage. There had been, but there was evidence that they had been unskillfully removed.

Late in the night the coachman pulled rein and a man on horseback rode up, opened the door and softly inquired after the welfare of the occupants. With a command to follow, he rode away through a narrow, uncertain wagon path. When the way became rough and dangerous, he dismounted and climbed to the boot of the cab, the coachman going to the empty saddle. Half an hour later the new coachman stopped the puffing horses in front of a great, black shadow from which, here and there, lights beamed cheerfully. From the back of the vehicle the two men unstrapped the heavy steamer trunk which had come all the way from Brussels with the party, and then the doors of the big shadow opened and closed behind Dorothy Garrison and her captors. So skillfully and so audaciously were the plans of the abductors carried out that when Miss Garrison entered a room set apart for her in the great house, after passing through long, grotesque and ill-lighted corridors, she found an open trunk full of garments she had expected to wear on her wedding journey!

A trim and pretty English maid entered the room the instant it was vacated by the gray-bearded man and the tall person who had posed as his wife. While Dorothy sat like a statue, gazing upon her, the young woman lighted other candles in the apartment and then came to the side of the mute, wretched newcomer.

“Will you let me prepare you for bed, miss? It is very late, and you must be tired. Would you like anything to eat before retiring?” she asked, as quietly as if she had been in her service forever.

“In heaven's name, where am I? Tell me what does it all mean? What are they going to do with me?” cried Dorothy, hoarsely, clutching the girl's hand.

“You could not be in safer hands, Miss Garrison,” said the maid, kindly. “I am here to do all that is your pleasure.”

“All? Then I implore you to aid me in getting from—” began Dorothy, excitedly, coming to her unsteady feet.

“I am loyal to others as well as to you,” interposed the maid, firmly. “To-morrow you will find that—but, there, I must say no more. Your bedchamber is off here, Miss. You will let me prepare you for the sleep you need so much? No harm can come to you here.”

Dorothy suddenly felt her courage returning; her brain began to busy itself with hopes, prospects, plans. After all they could not, would not kill her; she was too valuable to them. There was the chance of escape and new strength in the belief that she could in some way outwit them; there was a vast difference between the woman who suffered herself to be put to bed by the deft, kindly maid, and the one who dragged herself hopelessly into the room such a short time before. With the growth of hope and determination there came the courage to inspect her surroundings.

The rooms were charming. There was a generous, kindly warmth about them that suggested luxury, refinement and the hand of a connoiseur. The rugs were of rare quality, the furnishings elegant, the appointments modern and complete. She could not suppress a long breath of surprise and relief: it was no easy matter to convince herself that she was not in some fastidious English home. Despite the fearful journey, ending in the perilous ascent over rocks and gullies, she felt herself glowing with the belief that she was still in Brussels, or, at the worst, in Liege. Her amazement on finding her own trunk and the garments she had left in her chamber the night before was so great that her troubled, bewildered mind raced back to the days when she marvelled over Aladdin's wonderful lamp and the genii. How could they have secured her dresses? But how could anything be impossible to these masters in crime? Once when her eyes fell upon the dark windows a wistful, eager expression came into them. The maid observed the look, and smiled.

“It is fully fifty feet to the ground,” she said, simply. Miss Garrison sighed and then smiled resignedly.

Worn out in body and mind, she sank into sleep even while the mighty, daring resolve to rush over and throw herself from the window was framing itself in her brain. The resolve was made suddenly, considered briefly and would have been acted on precipitously had not the drowsy, lazy influence of slumber bade her to wait a minute, then another minute, another and another, and then—to forget.

Sunlight streamed into the room when she opened her eyes, and for a few minutes she was in a state of uncanny perplexity. Where was she? In whose bed

—then she remembered. With the swiftness of a cat she left the bed and flew to the window to look out upon—space at first, then the trees and rocks below. The ground seemed a mile below the spot on which she stood. Gasping with dread she shrank back and covered her eyes with her tense fingers.

“Are you ready for me, Miss?” asked a soft voice from somewhere, and Dorothy whirled to face the maid. Her throat choked, her eyes filled with tears of the reawakening, her heart throbbed so faintly that her hand went forth to find support. The little maid put her strong, gentle arm about the trembling girl and drew her again to the bed “They are expecting you down to breakfast, but I was instructed not to hurry you, Miss.”

“To breakfast?” gasped Dorothy, staring at the girl as if her eyes would pop out. “Wha—what! The impudence!”

“But you must eat, you know.”

“With—with these despicable wretches? Never! I will starve first! Go away from me! I do not need you. I want to be alone, absolutely alone. Do you hear?” She violently shoved the girl away from her, but the friendly smile did not leave the latter's face.

“When you need me, Miss, I am in the next room,” she said, calmly, and was gone. Anger, pure and simple, brought sobs from the very heart of the girl who lay face downward on the crumpled bed.

A new impulse inspired her to call sharply to the maid, and a moment later she was hastily, nervously, defiantly preparing herself to face the enemy and—breakfast. Tingling with some trepidation and some impatience, she led the maid through a strenuous half-hour. What with questions, commands, implorings, reprimands, complaints and fault findings, the poor girl had a sad time of it. When at last Miss Garrison stood ready to descend upon the foe she was the picture of defiance. With a steady stride she followed the maid to the door. Just as it was opened a strong, rollicking baritone voice came ringing through the halls attuned in song:

“In the days of old when knights were bold, And barons held their sway,” etc.

Dorothy stopped stockstill in the doorway, completely overwhelmed. She turned helplessly to the maid, tried to gasp the question that filled her mind, and then leaned weakly against the wall. The singer's voice grew suddenly fainter with the slam of a door, and while its music could still be heard distinctly, she knew that he of the merry tones had left the lower hallway. Feebly she began to wonder what manner of men these thieves could be, these miscreants who lived in a castle, who had lady's maids about them, who sang in cheery tones and who

knew neither fear nor caution.

“One of the new guests who came last night,” explained the maid, unconcernedly.

“One who came—who came with me? O, how can such a wretch sing so gayly? Have they been drinking all night?” cried Dorothy, shrinking back into the room.

“Lor', no, Miss, there can't be any such goings on as that here. I think they are waiting for you in the breakfast room,” said the girl, starting down the broad steps.

“I'd sooner die than venture among those ruffians!”

“But the ladies are expecting you.”

“Ladies! Here?” gasped Dorothy.

“Yes, Miss; why not?”

Dorothy's head whirled again. In a dazed sort of way she glanced down at her morning gown, her mind slowly going back to the glittering costume she had worn the night before. Was it all a dream? Scarcely knowing what she did, she followed the girl down the steps, utterly without purpose, drawn as by some strange subtle force to the terminal point in the mystery.

Through the dimly-lighted hall she passed with heart throbbing wildly, expecting she knew not what. Her emotions as she approached the door she could have never told, so tumultuously were they surging one upon the other. The maid grasped the huge knob and swung wide the door, from whose threshold she was to look upon a picture that would linger in her mind to the end of time.

A great sunlit room; a long table and high-backed Flemish chairs; a bewildering group of men and women; a chorus of friendly voices; and then familiar faces began to stand out plainly before her eyes.

Lady Saxondale was advancing toward the door with outstretched hands and smiling face. Over her shoulder the dumbfounded girl saw Lady Jane Oldham, Saxondale, happy faced Dickey Savage and—Philip Quentin!

XXII. CASTLE CRANEYCROW

Dorothy staggered into the arms of Lady Saxondale, choking with a joy that knew no bounds, stupefied past all power of understanding. She only saw and knew that she was safe, that some strange miracle had been wrought and that there were no terrible, cruel-hearted robbers in sight. It was some time before she could utter a word to those who stood about eagerly—anxiously—watching the play of emotions in her face.

“O, you will never know how glorious you all look to me. How is it that I am here? Where are those awful men? What has happened to me, Lady Saxondale, tell me? I cannot breathe till everything is explained to me,” she cried, her voice trembling with gladness. In her vast exuberance she found strength and with it the desire to embrace all these good friends. Her ecstatic exhibition of joy lost its violence after she had kissed and half crushed Lady Jane and had grasped both of Lord Bob's big hands convulsively. The young men came in for a much more formal and decorous greeting. For an instant she found herself looking into Quentin's eyes, as he clasped her hand, and there was a strange light in them—a bright, eager, victorious gleam which puzzled her not a little. “O, tell me all about it! Please do! I've been through such a terrible experience. Can it be true that I am really here with you?”

“You certainly are, my dear,” said Lady Saxondale, smiling at her, then glancing involuntarily into the faces of the others, a queer expression in her eyes.

“Where is mamma? I must go to her at once, Lady Saxondale. The wretches were so cruel to her and to poor Uncle Henry—good heavens! Tell me! They did not—did not kill her!” She clutched at the back of a chair and—grasped Quentin's arm as it swept forward to keep her from falling.

“Your mother is safe and well,” cried Lady Saxondale, quickly. “She is in Brussels, however, and not here, Dorothy.”

“And where am I? Are you telling the truth? Is she truly safe and well? Then, why isn't she here?” she cried, uneasily, apprehensively.

“It takes a long story, Miss Garrison,” said Lord Bob, soberly. “I think you would better wait till after breakfast for the full story, so far as it is known to us. You'll feel better and I know you must be as hungry as a bear.”

There was a troubled, uncertain pucker to her brow, a pleading look in her

eyes as she suffered herself to be led to a chair near the end of the table. It had not struck her as odd that the others were deplorably devoid of the fervor that should have manifested itself, in words, at least. There was an air of restraint almost oppressive, but she failed to see it, and it was not long until it was so cleverly succeeded by a genial warmth of manner that she never knew the severity of the strain upon the spirits of that small company.

Suddenly she half started from the chair, her gaze fastened on Quentin's face. He read the question in her eyes and answered before she could frame it into words.

“I did not sail for New York, at all,” he said, with an assumption of ease he did not feel. “Dickey and I accepted Lord Saxondale's pressing invitation to stop off with them for awhile. I don't wonder that you are surprised to find us here.”

“I am not surprised at anything now,” she said in perplexed tones. “But we are not in England; we were not on the water. And all those trees and hills and rocks I saw from the window—where are we?”

“In the grimmest, feudliest, ghastliest old place between Brussels and Anthony Hope's domain. This is Castle Craneycrow; a real, live castle with parapets, bastions, traditions and, I insist—though they won't believe me—snakes and mice and winged things that screech and yowl.” So spoke Lady Jane, eagerly. Miss Garrison was forgetting to eat in her wonder, and Mr. Savage was obliged to remind her that “things get cold mighty quick in these baronial ice-houses.”

“I know it's a castle, but where is it located? And how came you here?”

“That's it,” quoth Mr. Savage, serenely. “How came we here? I repeat the question and supply the answer. We came by the grace of God and more or less luck.”

“O, I'll never understand it at all,” complained Dorothy, in despair. “Now, you must answer my questions, one by one, Lord Saxondale. To whom does the castle belong?”

“To the Earl of Saxondale, ma'am.”

“Then, I know where it is. This is the old place in Luxemburg you were telling me about.”

“That isn't a question, but you are right.”

“But how is it that I am here?”

“You can answer that question better than I, Miss Garrison.”

“I only know those wretches—the one who disguised himself as my father and

the one who tried to be my mother—jostled me till I was half dead and stopped eventually at the doors—O, O, O!" she broke off, in startled tones, dropping her fork. "They—they did not really bring me here—to your house, did they?"

"They were good enough to turn you over to our keeping last night, and we are overjoyed to have you here."

"Then," she exclaimed, tragically, rising to her feet, "where are the men who brought me here?" A peculiar and rather mirthless smile passed from one to the other of her companions and it angered her. "I demand an explanation, Lord Saxondale."

"I can give none, Miss Garrison, upon my soul. It is very far from clear to me. You were brought to my doors last night, and I pledge myself to protect you with my life. No harm shall come to you here, and at the proper time I am sure everything will be made clear to you, and you will be satisfied. Believe me, you are among your dearest friends—"

"Dearest friends!" she cried, bitterly. "You insult me by running away from my wedding, you league yourselves with the fiends who committed the worst outrage that men ever conceived, and now you hold me here a—a prisoner! Yes, a prisoner! I do not forget the words of the maid who attended me; I do not forget the inexplicable presence of my traveling clothes in this house, and I shall never forget that my abductors came direct to your castle, wherever it may be. Do you mean to say that they brought me here without an understanding with you? Oh! I see it all now! You—you perpetrated this outrage!"

"On the contrary, Miss Garrison, I am the meekest and lowliest of English squires, and I am in no way leagued with a band of robbers. Perhaps, if you will wait a little while, Lady Saxondale may throw some light on the mystery that puzzles you. You surely will trust Lady Saxondale."

"Lady Saxondale did me the honor to command me to give up Prince Ravorelli. I am not married to him and I am here, in her home, a prisoner," said Dorothy, scornfully. "I do not understand why I am here and I do not know that you are my friends. Everything is so queer, so extraordinary that I don't know how to feel toward you. When you satisfactorily explain it all to me, I may be able to forget the feeling I have for you now and once more regard you as friends. It is quite clear to me that I am not to have the privilege of quitting the castle without your consent; I acknowledge myself a prisoner and await your pleasure. You will find me in the room to which you sent me last night. I cannot sit at your table, feeling that you are not my friends; I should choke with every mouthful."

No one sought to bar her way from the dining-room. Perhaps no one there felt equal to the task of explaining, on the moment, the intricacies of a very unusual transaction, for no one had quite expected the bolt to fall so sharply. She paced the floor of her room angrily, bewailing the fate that brought her to this fortress among the rocks. Time after time she paused at the lofty windows to look upon the trees, the little river and the white roadbed far below. There was no escape from this isolated pile of stone; she was confined as were Bluebeard's victims in the days of giants and ogres and there were no fairy queens to break down the walls and set her free. Each thought left the deeper certainty that the people in the room below were banded against her. An hour later, Lady Saxondale found her, her flushed face pressed to the window pane that looked down upon the world as if out of the sky.

“I suppose, Lady Saxondale, you are come to assure me again that I am perfectly safe in your castle,” said the prisoner, turning at the sound of her ladyship's voice.

“I have come to tell you the whole story, from your wedding to the present moment. Nothing is to be hidden from you, my dear Miss Garrison. You may not now consider us your friends, but some day you will look back and be thankful we took such desperate, dangerous means to protect you,” said Lady Saxondale, coming to the window. Dorothy's eyes were upon the outside world and they were dark and rebellious. The older woman complacently stationed herself beside the girl and for a few moments neither spoke.

“I am ready to hear what you have to say,” came at last from Miss Garrison.

“It is not necessary to inform you that you were abducted—”

“Not in the least! The memory of the past two days is vivid enough,” said Miss Garrison, with cutting irony in her voice.

“But it may interest you to know the names of your abductors,” said the other, calmly.

“I could not miss them far in guessing, Lady Saxondale.”

“It was necessary for some one to deliver you from the villain you were to marry, by the most effective process. There is but one person in all this world who cares enough for you to undertake the stupendous risk your abduction incurred. You need not be told his name.”

“You mean,” said Dorothy, scarcely above a whisper, “that Philip Quentin planned and executed this crime?”

Lady Saxondale nodded.

“And I am his prisoner?” breathlessly. “You are under his protection; that is all.”

“Do you call it protection to—” began Dorothy, her eyes blazing, but Lady Saxondale interrupted firmly.

“You are his prisoner, then, and we are your jailers. Have it as you will.”

Lady Saxondale proceeded to relate the history of Philip Quentin's achievement. Instead of sailing for New York, he surrendered to his overpowering love and fell to work perfecting the preposterous plan that had come to him as a vision in the final hour of despair. There was but little time in which to act, and there was stubborn opposition to fight against. The Saxondales were the only persons to whom he could turn, and not until after he had fairly fought them to earth did they consent to aid him in the undertaking. There remained to perform, then, the crowning act in this apparently insane transaction. The stealing of a woman on whom the eyes of all the world seemed riveted was a task that might well confound the strategy of the most skillful general, but it did not worry the determined American.

Wisely he chose the wedding day as the best on which to carry out his project. The hulla-balloo that would follow the nonappearance of the bride would throw the populace and the authorities into a state of confusion that might last for hours. Before they could settle down to a systematic search, the bold operator would be safely in the last place they would suspect, an English lord's playhouse in the valley of the Alzette. Nothing but the most audacious daring could hope to win in such an undertaking. When Mrs. Garrison's coachman and footman came forth in all their august splendor on the night of the wedding, they were pounced upon by three men, overpowered, bound and locked in a small room in the stables. One of the desperadoes calmly approached the servants' quarters, presented a bold face (covered with whiskers), and said he had come for Miss Garrison's trunks. Almost insane with the excitement of the occasion, the servants not only escorted him to the bride's room, but assisted him in carrying two trunks downstairs. He was shrewd enough to ascertain which trunk was most needed, and it was thrown into a buggy and driven away by one of the trio.

When the carriage stopped for the first time to permit the masked man to thrust his revolver into the faces of the occupants, the trunk was jerked from that same buggy and thrown to the boot of the larger vehicle. Of course, having absolute control of the carriage, it was no trick, if luck attended, for the new coachman and footman to drive away with the unsuspecting bride and her companions. It is only the ridiculously improbable projects that are successful, it has been said. Certainly it was proven in this case. It is not necessary to tell the

full story, except to say that the masked man who appeared at the carriage door in the little side street was Quentin; that the foot-man was Dickey Savage, the driver Turk. In the exchange of clothing with the deposed servants of Mrs. Garrison, however, Turk fell into a suit of livery big enough for two men of his stature.

The deserted house was beyond the city limits, and had been located the day before by Turk, whose joy in being connected with such a game was boundless. Other disguises, carefully chosen, helped them on to the Grand Duchy, Quentin as the gray-bearded man, Savage as the old woman. The suffering of Dorothy Garrison during that wild night and day was the only thing that wrung blood from the consciences of these ruthless dare-devils. Philip Quentin, it must be said, lived years of agony and remorse while carrying out his part of the plan. How the plot was carried to the stage where it became Lady Saxondale's duty to acquaint Dorothy Garrison with the full particulars, the reader knows. It only remains to say that good fortune favored the conspirators at every turn, and that they covered their tracks with amazing effectiveness. Utterly cut off from the eyes of the world, the captive found herself powerless to communicate with the hysterical people who were seeking her in every spot save the right one.

“Now that you have finished this remarkable story and have pleaded so prettily for him, may I ask just what Mr. Quentin expects of me?” asked Dorothy, cold, calm, and entirely the mistress of herself and the million emotions that Lady Saxondale's disclosures aroused.

“He expects you to give him your heart,” said her ladyship, slowly. Dorothy fell back against the wall, aghast, overcome by this crowning piece of audacity.

“Dorothy, a week ago you loved Phil Quentin; even when you stepped inside the carriage that was to take you to the altar you loved him better—”

“I did not! I hate him!” cried Dorothy.

“Perhaps, now, but let me ask you this question: When you were being dragged away by those three men, when they were putting miles and miles between you and your friends, of whom were you thinking? Ah, your face, your eyes betray you!—You were thinking of Philip Quentin, not of Ugo Ravorelli. You were praying that one strong arm might come to your relief, you knew but one man in all the world who had the courage, the love, the power to rescue you. Last night, when you entered this dismal place, you wondered if Philip Quentin —yes, Philip Quentin—could break down the doors and save you. And then you remembered that he could not help you, for you had thrown aside his love, had driven him away. Listen! Don't deny it, for I am a woman and I know! This

morning you looked from yon window and your heart sank with despair. Then, forgetful again, your eye swept the road in the hope of seeing—of seeing, whom? But one man was in your mind, Dorothy Garrison, and he was on the ocean. When you came into the breakfast room, whose face was it that sent the thrill to your heart? Whose presence was it that told you your prayers had been answered? Whom did you look upon as your savior, your rescuer? That big American, who loves you better than life. Philip Quentin had saved you from the brigands, and you loved him for it. Now, Dorothy Garrison, you hate him because he saved you from a worse fate—marriage with the most dissolute hypocrite in Europe, the most cunning of all adventurers. You are not trying to check the tears that blind your eyes; but you will not confess to me that your tears come from a heart full of belief in the man who loves you deeply enough to risk his honor and his life to save you from endless misery. Lie where you are, on this couch, Dorothy, and just think of it all—think of Phil."

When Dorothy raised her wet eyes from the cushion in which they had been buried, Lady Saxondale was gone.

Philip Quentin stood in the doorway.

XXIII. HIS ONLY

In an instant she was on her feet and struggling to suppress the sobs that had been wrung from her by the words of Lady Saxondale.

“Dorothy,” said Quentin, his voice tender and pleading, “you have heard what Lady Saxondale had to say?”

She was now standing at the window, her back to him, her figure straight and defiant, her hands clenched in the desperate effort to regain her composure.

“Yes,” she responded, hoarsely.

“I have not come to ask your pardon for my action, but to implore you to withhold judgment against the others. I alone am to blame; they are as loyal to you as they have been to me. Whatever hatred you may have in your heart, I deserve it. Spare the others a single reproach, for they were won to my cause only after I had convinced them that they were serving you, not me. You are with true friends, the best that man or woman could have. I have not come to make any appeal for myself. There will be time enough for that later on, when you have come to realize what your deliverance means.”

She faced him, slowly, a steady calm in her face, a soft intensity in her voice.

“You need not hope that I shall forgive this outrage—ever—as long as I live. You may have had motives which from your point of view were good and justifiable—but you must not expect me to agree with you. You have done something that no love on earth could obliterate; you have robbed my memory of a sweet confidence, of the one glorious thing that made me look upon you as the best of men—your nobility. I recognize you as the leader in this cowardly conspiracy, but what must I think of these willing tools you plead for? Are they entitled to my respect any more than you? I am in your power. You can and will do with me as you like, but you cannot compel me to alter that over which I have no control—my reason. Oh, how could you do this dreadful thing, Phil?” she cried, suddenly casting the forced reserve to the winds and relapsing into a very undignified appeal. He smiled wearily and met her gaze with one in which no irresolution flickered.

“It was my only way,” he said, at last.

“The only way!” she exclaimed. “There was but one way, and I had commanded you to take it. Do you expect to justify yourself by saying it was the

'only way'? To drag me from my mother, to destroy every vestige of confidence I had in you, to make me the most talked-of woman in Europe to-day—was that the 'only way'? What are they doing and saying to-day? Of what are the newspapers talking under those horrid headlines? What are the police, the detectives, the gossips doing? I am the object on which their every thought is centered. Oh, it is maddening to think of what you, of all people, have heaped upon me!”

She paced the floor like one bereft of reason. His heart smote him as he saw the anguish he had brought into the soul of the girl he loved better than everything.

“And my poor mother. What of her? Have you no pity, no heart? Don't you see that it will kill her? For God's sake, let me go back to her, Phil! Be merciful!” she cried.

“She is safe and well, Dorothy; I swear it on my soul. True, she suffers, but it is better she should suffer now and find joy afterward than to see you suffer for a lifetime. You would not listen to me when I told you the man you were to marry was a scoundrel. There was but one way to save you from him and from yourself; there was but one way to save you for myself, and I took it. I could not and would not give you up to that villain. I love you, Dorothy; you cannot doubt that, even though you hate me for proving it to you. Everything have I dared, to save you and to win you—to make you gladly say some day that you love me.”

Her eyes blazed with scorn. “Love you? After what you have done? Oh, that I could find words to tell you how I hate you!” She stopped in front of him, her white face and gleaming eyes almost on a level with his, and he could not but quail before the bitter loathing that revealed itself so plainly. Involuntarily his hand went forth in supplication, and the look in his eyes came straight from the depths into which despair had cast him. If she saw the pain in his face her outraged sensibilities refused to recognize it.

“Dorothy, you—you—” he began, but pulled himself together quickly “I did not come in the hope of making you look at things through my eyes. It is my mission to acknowledge as true, all that Lady Saxondale has told you concerning my culpability. I alone am guilty of wrong, and I am accountable. If we are found out, I have planned carefully to protect my friends. Yet a great deal rests with you. When the law comes to drag me from this place, its officers will find me alone, with you here as my accuser. My friends will have escaped. They are your friends as well as mine. You will do them thejustice of accusing but me, for I alone am the criminal.”

“You assume a great deal when you dictate what I am to do and to say, if I have the opportunity. They are as guilty as you, and without an incentive. Do you imagine that I shall shield them? I have no more love for them than I have for you; not half the respect, for you, at least, have been consistent. Will you answer one question?”

“Certainly.”

“How long do you purpose to keep me in this place?”

“Until you, of your own free will, can utter three simple words.”

“And those words?”

“I love you.”

“Then,” she said, slowly, decisively, “I am doomed to remain here until death releases me.”

“Yes; the death of ambition.”

She turned from him with a bitter laugh, seating herself in a chair near the window. Looking up into his face, she said, with maddening submission:

“I presume your daily visits are to be a part of the torture I am to endure?”

His smile, as he shook his head in response, incensed her to the point of tears, and she was vastly relieved when he turned abruptly and left the apartment. When the maid came in she found Miss Garrison asleep on the couch, her cheeks stained with tears. Tired, despairing, angry, she had found forgetfulness for the while. Sleep sat lightly upon her troubled brain, however, for the almost noiseless movements of the maid awakened her and she sat up with a start.

“Oh, it is you!” she said, after a moment. “What is your name?'

“Baker, Miss.”

The captive sat on the edge of the couch and for many minutes watched, through narrow eyes, the movements of the servant. A plan was growing in her brain, and she was contemplating the situation in a new and determined frame of mind.

“Baker,” she said, finally, “come here.” The maid stood before her, attentively.

“Would you like to earn a thousand pounds?”

Without the faintest show of emotion, the least symptom of eagerness, Baker answered in the affirmative.

“Then you have but to serve me as I command, and the money is yours.”

“I have already been instructed to serve you, Miss.”

“I don't mean for you to dress my hair and to fasten my gown and all that. Get

me out of this place and to my friends. That is what I mean," whispered Dorothy, eagerly.

"You want to buy me, Miss?' said Baker, calmly.

"Not that, quite, Baker, but just—"

"You will not think badly of me if I cannot listen to your offer, Miss? I am to serve you here, and I want you to like me, but I cannot do what you would ask. Pardon me if I speak plainly, but I cannot be bought." There was no mistaking the honest expression in the maid's eyes. "Lady Saxondale is my mistress, and I love her. If she asks me to take you to your friends, I will obey."

Dorothy's lips parted and a look of incredulity grew in her eyes. For a moment she stared with unconcealed wonder upon this unusual girl, and then wonder slowly changed to admiration.

"Would that all maids were as loyal, Baker. Lady Saxondale trusts you and so shall I. But," wonder again manifesting itself, "I cannot understand such fidelity. Not for £5,000?"

"No, Miss; thank you," respectfully and firmly.

"Ask Lady Saxondale if I may come to her."

The maid departed, and soon returned to say that Lady Saxondale would gladly see her. Dorothy followed her down the long, dark hall and into the boudoir of Castle Craneycrow's mistress. Lady Jane sat on the broad window seat, looking pensively out at the blue sky. There was in the room such an air of absolute peace and security that Dorothy's heart gave a sharp, wistful throb.

"I'm glad you've come, Dorothy," said Lady Saxondale, approaching from the shadowy side of the room. Dorothy turned to see the hands of her ladyship extended as if calling her to friendly embrace. For a moment she looked into the clear, kindly eyes of the older woman, and then, overcome by a strange, inexplicable longing for love and sympathy, dropped her hands into those which were extended.

"I've come to beg, Lady Saxondale—to beg you to be kind to me, to have pity for my mother. I can ask no more," she said, simply.

"I love you, dear; we all love you. Be content for a little while, a little while, and then you will thank Heaven and thank us."

"I demand that you release me," cried the other. "You are committing a crime against all justice. Release me, and I promise to forget the part you are taking in this outrage. Trust me to shield you and yours absolutely."

"You ask me to trust you. Now, I ask you to trust me. Trust me to shield you

and to—”

“You are cruel!”

“Forgive me,” said Lady Saxondale, simply. She pressed the hands warmly, and passed from the room. Dorothy felt her head reel, and there was in her heart the dread of losing something precious, she knew not what.

“Come up into the tower with me, Dorothy,” said Lady Jane, coming to her side, her voice soft and entreating. “The view is grand. Mr. Savage and I were there early this morning to see the sun rise.”

“Are you all against me? Even you, Lady Jane? Oh, how have I wronged you that I should be made to suffer so at your hands? Yes, yes! Take me to the tower! I can't stay here.”

“I shall ask Mr. Savage to go with us. He will hold you. It would be too bad to have you try to fly from up there, because it's a long way to the crags, and you'd never fly again—in this world, at least. I believe I'll call Dickey, to be on the safe side.”

There was something so merry, so free and unrestrained about her that Dorothy smiled in spite of herself. With a new sensation in her heart, she followed her guide to the top of the broad stairway. Here her ladyship paused, placed two pink fingers between her teeth, and sent a shrill whistle sounding down between the high walls.

“All right!” came a happy voice from below. There was a scramble of feet, two or three varied exclamations in masculine tones, and then Mr. Savage came bounding up the stairs. “Playing chess with your brother and had to break up the game. When duty calls, you know. Morning, Miss Garrison. What's up?”

“We're just on the point of going up,” said Jane, sweetly. “Up in the tower. Miss Garrison wants to see how far she can fly.”

“About 800 feet, I should say, Miss Garrison. It's quite a drop to the rocks down there. Well, we're off to the top of Craneycrow. Isn't that a jolly old name?”

“Chick o' me, Chick o' me, Craneycrow, Went to the well to wash her toe, When she got back her chicken was dead—chick o' me, Chick o' me, chop off his head—What time is it, old witch?”

“Who gave the castle such an odd, uncanny name?” asked Dorothy, under the spell of their blithesome spirits.

“Lady Jane—the young lady on your left, an' may it please you, Miss,” said Dickey.

“Bob couldn't think of a name for the old thing, so he commissioned me. Isn't Craneycrow delightful? Crane—that's a bird, you know, and crow is another bird, too, you know; isn't it a joy? I'm so proud of it,” cried Lady Jane, as she scurried up the narrow, winding stone steps that led to the top of the tower. Dorothy followed more sedately, the new-born smile on her lips, the excitement of a new emotion surging over the wall of anger she had thrown up against these people.

“I wish I could go out and explore the hills and rocks about this place,” said Dickey, wistfully.

“Why can't you? Is it dangerous?” queried Dorothy.

“Heavens, no! Perfectly safe in that respect. Oh, I forgot; you don't know, of course. Phil Quentin and your devoted servant are not permitted to show their faces outside these walls.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you see, we're in America. Don't you understand? You're not the only prisoner, Miss Garrison. Behold two bold, bad bandits as your fellow captives. Alas! that I should have come to the cruel prison cell!”

“I had not thought of that,” said Miss Garrison, reflectively, and then she looked upon Dickey with a new interest. They crawled through the trap door and out upon the stone-paved, airy crown of the tower. She uttered an exclamation of awe and shrank back from the sky that seemed to press down upon her. Nothing but sky—blue sky! Then she peered over the low wall, down upon the rocks below, and shuddered.

“Hello, Phil! Great, isn't it?” exclaimed Dickey, and Dorothy realized that Quentin was somewhere behind her in the little rock-bound circle among the clouds. A chill fell upon her heart, and she would not turn toward the man whose very name brought rage to her heart.

“Magnificent! I have been up here in the sun and the gale for half an hour. Here are the newspapers, Lady Jane; Bob's man brought them an hour ago. There is something in them that will interest you, Dorothy. Pardon me, but I must go down. And don't fall off the tower, Lady Jane.”

“Don't worry, grandfather; I'll be a good little girl and I shan't fall off the tower, because I'm so afraid you'd find it out and beat me and send me to bed without my supper. Won't you stay up just a wee bit longer?”

“Now, don't coax, little girl. I must go down.”

“See you later,” Dickey called after him as he disappeared through the narrow

opening. Dorothy turned her stony face slightly, and quick, angry eyes looked for an instant into the upturned face of the man who was swallowed in the darkness of the trap hole almost in the same second.

“Don't fall off the tower, Lady Jane,” came the hollow voice from the ladders far below, and, to Dorothy's sensitive ears, there was the most devilish mockery in the tones.

“I can forgive all of you—all of you, but—but—never that inhuman wretch! Oh, how I hate him!” cried she, her face ablaze, her voice trembling with passion.

“Oh, Dorothy!” cried Lady Jane, softly, imploringly.

“I wish from my soul, that this tower might tumble down and kill him this instant, and that his bones could never be found!” wailed the other.

“There's an awful weight above him, Miss Garrison—the weight of your wrath,” said Dickey, without a smile.

XXIV. THE WHITE FLAG

After returning to her room later on, Dorothy eagerly devoured the contents of the newspapers, which were a day or two old. They devoted columns to the great abduction mystery; pictured the grief of the mother and marvelled at her courage and fortitude; traced the brigands over divers streets to the deserted house; gave interviews with the bride's fiance, her uncle and the servants who were found in the stables; speculated on the designs of the robbers, their whereabouts and the nature of their next move; drew vivid and terrifying visions of the lovely bride lying in some wretched cave, hovel or cellar, tortured and suffering the agony of the damned. Opinions of police officers disclosed some astonishing solutions to the mystery, but, withal, there was a tone of utter bewilderment in the situation as they pictured it. She read the long and valiant declaration of Prince Ugo Ravorelli, the frantic, broken-hearted bridegroom, in which he swore to rescue the fair one from the dastards, “whoever and wherever they might be.” Somehow, to her, his words, in cold print, looked false, artificial, theatrical—anything but brave and convincing.

She stared in amazement at the proclamation offering 100,000 francs for her restoration. The general opinion, however, was that the abductors might reasonably be expected to submit a proposition to give up their prize for not less than twice the amount. To a man the police maintained that Miss Garrison was confined somewhere in the city of Brussels. There were, with the speculations and conjectures, no end of biographical sketches and portraits. She found herself reading with a sort of amused interest the story of how one of the maids had buckled her satin slippers, another had dressed her hair, another had done something and another something else. It was all very entertaining, in spite of the conditions that made the stories possible. But what amused her most of all were the wild guesses as to her present whereabouts. There was a direful unanimity of opinion that she was groveling in her priceless wedding-gown on the floor of some dark, filthy cellar. The papers vividly painted her as haggard, faint, despairing of succor, beating her breast and tearing her beautiful hair in the confines of a foul-smelling hole in the ground, crying for help in tones that would melt a heart of stone, and guarded by devils in the guise of men.

Then she came to the paragraph which urged the utmost punishment that law could inflict upon the desperadoes. The outraged populace could be appeased

with nothing save death in its most ignominious, inglorious form. The trials would be short, the punishment swift and sure. The people demanded the lives of the villains.

For a long time she sat with expressionless eyes, staring at the wall opposite, thinking of the five persons who kept her a prisoner, thinking of the lives the people longed to take, thinking of death. Death to pretty Lady Jane, to Lady Saxondale, to Lord Bob, to Dickey Savage—the hunted—and to Philip Quentin, the arch conspirator! To kill them, to butcher them, to tear them to pieces—that was what it meant, if they were taken before the maddened people. When Baker brought in the tea, Dorothy was shivering as one with a chill, and there was a new terror in her soul. What if they were taken? Could she endure the thought that death was sure to come to them, or to two of 'them, at least? Two of the men? Two Americans?

During the next three days she refused to leave her room, coldly declining the cordial invitations to make one of a very merry house party, as Lady Jane called it. Her meals were sent to her room, and Baker was her constant attendant. Into her cheek came the dull white of loneliness and despair, into her eye the fever of unrest. The visits met with disdain, and gradually they became less frequent. On the third day of this self-inflicted separation she sat alone from early morn until dusk without the first sign of a visit from either Lady Saxondale or Lady Jane.

All day long she had been expecting them, and now she was beginning to hunger for them. A ridiculous, inconsistent irritation had been building itself in her heart since midday, and at dusk it reached its limit in unmistakable rage. That they might be willing to ignore her entirely had not entered her mind before. Her heart was very bitter toward the disagreeable creatures who left her alone all day in a stuffy room, and in a most horrid temper to boot.

From below, at different times during the afternoon, came the happy laughter of men and women, rollicking songs, the banging of a piano in tantalizing “rag-time” by strong New York fingers, the soft boom of a Chinese dinner gong and —oh! it was maddening to sit away up there and picture the heartless joy that reigned below. When Baker left the room, Dorothy, like a guilty child, sneaked —actually sneaked—to the hall door, opened it softly, and listened with wrathful longing to the signs of life and good cheer that came to her ears. Desolate, dispirited, hungry for the companionship of even thieves and robbers, she dragged herself to the broad window and looked darkly down upon the green and gray world.

Her pride was having a mighty battle. For three long days had she maintained a stubborn resistance to all the allurements they could offer; she had been strong

and steadfast to her purpose until this hour came to make her loneliness almost unendurable—the hour when she saw they were mean enough to pay her in the coin of her own making. Now she was crying for them to come and lift the pall of solitude, to brighten the world for her, to drive the deadly sickness out of her heart. They had ignored her for a whole day, because, she was reasonable enough to see, they felt she did not want them to be near her. Would they never come to her again? Pride was commanding her to scorn them forever, but a lonely heart was begging for fellowship.

"Baker!" she called, suddenly, turning from the window, her face aglow, her breath coming fast, her heart bounding with a new resolution—or the breaking of an old one. Baker did not respond at once, and the now thoroughly aroused young lady hurried impatiently to the bedchamber in quest of her. The maid was seated in a window, with ears as deaf as a stone, reading the harrowing news from the latest newspaper that had come to Castle Craneycrow. Dorothy had read every line of the newest developments, and had laughed scornfully over the absurd clews the police were following. She had been seen simultaneously in Liverpool and in London and in Paris and in Brussels. And by reputable witnesses, too.

"Baker!"

"Yes, Miss," and the paper rattled to the floor, for there was a new tone in the voice that called to her.

"You may go to Lady Saxondale and say that I accept yesterday's invitation to dine with her and Lord Saxondale."

"Yesterday's invitation—you mean to-day's, Miss—" in bewildered tones.

"I mean yesterday's, Baker. You forget that I have no invitation for to-day. Tell her that Miss Garrison will be delighted to dine with her."

Baker flew out of the room and downstairs with the message, the purport of which did not sift through her puzzled head until Lady Saxondale smiled and instructed her to inform Miss Garrison that she would be charmed to have her dine with her both yesterday and to-day.

In the meantime Dorothy was reproaching herself for her weakness in surrendering. She would meet Quentin, perhaps be placed beside him. While she could not or would not speak to him, the situation was sure to be uncomfortable. And they would think she was giving in to them, and he would think she was giving in to him—and—but anything was better than exile.

While standing at the window awaiting Baker's return, her gaze fell upon a solitary figure, trudging along the white, snake-like road, far down among the

foothills—the figure of a priest in his long black robe. He was the first man she had seen on the road, and she watched him with curious, speculative eyes.

“A holy priest,” she was thinking; “the friend of all in distress. Why not me? Would he, could he help me? Oh, good father, if you could but hear me, if I could but reach your ears! How far away he is, what a little speck he seems away down there! Why, I believe he is—yes, he is looking up at the castle. Can he see me? But, pshaw! How could he know that I am held here against my will? Even if he sees my handkerchief, how can he know that I want him to help me?” She was waving her handkerchief to the lonely figure in the road. To her amazement he paused, apparently attracted by the signal. For a brief instant he gazed upward, then dropped his cowled head and moved slowly away. She watched him until the trees of the valley hid his form from view, and she was alone with the small hope that he might again some day pass over the lonely road and understand.

When the dinner gong rang, she was ready to face the party, but there was a lively thumping in her breast as she made her way down the steps. At the bottom she was met by Lady Saxondale, and a moment later Lord Bob came up, smiling and good-natured. There was a sudden rush of warmth to her heart, the bubbling over of some queer emotion, and she was wringing their hands with a gladness she could not conceal.

“I am so lonely up there, Lady Saxondale,” she said, simply, unreservedly.

“Try to look upon us as friends, Dorothy; trust us, and you will find more happiness here than you suspect. Castle Craneycrow was born and went to ruin in the midst of feud and strife; it has outlived its feudal days, so let there be no war between us,” said her ladyship, earnestly.

“If we must live together within its battered walls, let us hoist a flag of truce, pick up the gauntlet and tie up the dogs of war,” added bluff Lord Bob.

Dorothy smiled, and said: “There is one here who is not and can never be included in our truce. I ask you to protect me from him. That is the one condition I impose.”

“You have no enemies here, my dear.”

“But I have a much too zealous friend.”

“Last call for dinner in the dining-car,” shouted Dickey Savage, corning down the stairs hurriedly. “I was afraid I'd be late. Glad to see you. I haven't had a chance to ask how you enjoyed that view from the tower the other day.” She had given him her hand and he was shaking it rapturously.

“It was glorious, and I haven't had the opportunity to ask if you have explored the hills and forest.”

“I'm afraid of snakes and other creeping things,” he said, slyly.

They had gone to the dining-room when Quentin entered. He was paler than usual, but he was as calm, as easy and as self-possessed as if he had never known a conscience in all his life. She was not looking at him when he bowed to her, but she heard his clear voice say:

“I am glad to see you, Dorothy.”

He sat across the table, beside Lady Jane, who was opposite Dorothy. If he noticed that she failed to return his greeting, he was not troubled. To his credit be it said, however, he did not again address a remark to her during the meal. Within the sound of his voice, under the spell of his presence, in such close proximity to his strong, full-blooded body, she could not but give a part of her thought to this man who, of all others, the mob would slay if they had the chance.

She could not conceal from herself the relief she felt in mingling with friends. A willful admiration grew full in the face of resentful opposition, and there was a reckless downfall of dignity. They treated her without restraint, talked as freely of their affairs as if she were not there, boldly discussed the situation in Brussels, and laughed over the frantic efforts of the authorities. Helplessly she was drawn into the conversation, and, at last, to her dismay, joined with them in condolences to the police.

“But some day they will find the right trail and pounce upon you like so many wild beasts,” she said, soberly. “What then? You may be laughing too soon.”

“It would be hard luck to have to break up such an awfully nice house party,” said Dickey, solemnly.

“And the papers say they will kill us without compunction,” added Lady Jane.

“It wouldn't be the first slaughter this old house has known,” said Lord Bob. “In the old days they used to kill people here as a form of amusement.”

“It might amuse some people even in our case, but not for me, thanks,” said Quentin. “They'd execute me first, however, and I wouldn't have to endure the grief of seeing the rest of you tossed out of the windows.”

“Do you really believe they would kill poor little me?” demanded Lady Jane, slowly, her eyes fastened on her brother's face.

“Good Heaven, no!” cried Dorothy, at the possibility of such a calamity. “Why should they kill a helpless girl like you?”

“But I am one of the wretches they are hunting for. I'm a desperado,” argued Lady Jane.

“I'd insist on their killing Lady Jane just the same as the rest of us. It would be all wrong to discriminate, even if she is young and—and—well, far from ugly,” declared Dickey, decidedly.

“You might try to save my life, Mr. Savage; it would be the heroic thing to do,” she said.

“Well I'll agree to let 'em kill me twice if it will do any good. They'd surely be obliging if I said it was to please a lady. Couldn't you suggest something of the kind to them, Miss Garrison? You know the whole massacre is in your honor, and I imagine you might have a good bit to say about the minor details. Of course, Lady Jane and I are minor details—purely incidentals.”

“We are in the chorus, only,” added Lady Jane, humbly.

“If you persist in this talk about being killed, I'll go upstairs and never come down again,” cried Dorothy, wretchedly, and the company laughed without restraint.

“Dickey, if you say another word that sounds like 'kill' I'll murder you myself,” threatened Lord Bob.

Lady Jane began whetting a silver table knife on the edge of her plate.

That evening Dorothy did not listen to Dickey Savage's rag-time music from an upstairs room. She stood, with Lady Jane, beside the piano bench and fervently applauded, joined in the chorus and consoled herself with the thought that it was better to be a merry prisoner than a doleful one. She played while Dickey and Jane danced, and she laughed at the former's valiant efforts to teach the English girl how to “cake walk.”

Philip Quentin, with his elbows on the piano, moodily watched her hands, occasionally relaxing into a smile when the laughter became general. Not once did he address her, and not once did she look up at him. At last he wandered away, and when next she saw him he was sitting in a far corner of the big room, his eyes half closed, his head resting comfortably against the high back of the chair.

Lord and Lady Saxondale hovered about the friendly piano, and there was but one who looked the outcast. Conditions had changed. She was within a circle of pleasure, he outside. She gloated in the fact that he had been driven into temporary exile, and that he could not find a place in the circle as long as she was there. Occasionally one or the other of his accomplices glanced anxiously

toward the quiet outsider, but no one asked him to come into the fold. In the end, his indifference began to irritate her. When Lady Saxondale rang for the candles near the midnight hour, she took her candlestick from the maid, with no little relief, and unceremoniously made her way toward the hall. She nervously uttered a general good-night to the party and flushed angrily when Quentin's voice responded with the others:

“Good-night, Dorothy.”

XXV. DOWN AMONG THE GHOSTS

“I cannot endure it,” she cried to herself a dozen times before morning. “I shall go mad if I have to see his face and hear his voice and feel that he is looking at me. There must be a way to escape from this place, there must be a way. I will risk anything to get away from him!”

At breakfast she did not see him; he had eaten earlier with Lord Bob. The others noted the hunted look in her eye and saw that she had passed a sleepless night. The most stupendous of Dickey's efforts to enliven the dreary table failed, and there was utter collapse to the rosy hopes they had begun to build. Her brain was filled by one great thought—escape. While they were jesting she was wondering how and where she could find the underground passages of which they had spoken and to what point they would lead.

“I'd give a round sum if I could grow a set of whiskers as readily and as liberally as Turk,” commented Dickey, sadly. “He came out of Phil's room this morning, and I dodged behind a door post, thinking he was a burglar. Turk looks like a wild man from Borneo, and his whiskers are not ten days out. He's letting 'em grow so that he can venture outside the castle without fear of recognition. I'd like to get outside these walls for half a day.”

“I detest whiskers,” decided Lady Jane.

“So do I, especially Turk's. But they're vastly convenient, just the same. In a couple of days Turk won't know himself when he looks in the mirror. I believe I'll try to cultivate a bunch.”

“I'm sure they would improve you very much,” said Lady Jane, aggressively. “What is your idea as to color?”

“Well, I rather fancy a nice amber. I can get one color as easily as another. Have you a preference?”

“I think pink or blue would become you, Dickey. But don't let my prejudices influence you. Of course, it can't make any difference, because I won't recognize you, you know.”

“In other words, if I don't cut my whiskers you'll cut me?”

“Dead.”

“Lots of nice men have whiskers.”

“And so do the goats.”

“But a brigand always has a full set—in the opera, at least.”

“You are only a brigand's apprentice, and, besides, this isn't an opera. It is a society tragedy.”

“Won't you have another egg?” he asked, looking politely at her plate. Then he inquired if Miss Garrison would like to join him in a climb among the rocks. She smiled wistfully and said she would be charmed to do so if she were not too feeble with age when the time came to start.

Consumed with a desire to acquaint herself with her surroundings, she begged her companions to take her over the castle from turret to cellar. Later in the day, with Turk carrying the lantern, she was eagerly taking notes in the vast, spooky caves of Craneycrow.

Vaulted chambers here, narrow passages there, spider-ridden ceilings that awoke to life as the stooping visitors rustled beneath them, slimy walls and ringing floors, all went to make up the vast grave in which she was to bury all hope of escape. Immense were the iron-bound doors that led from one room to another; huge the bolts and rusty the hinges; gruesome and icy the atmosphere; narrow the steps that led to regions deeper in the bowels of the earth. Dorothy's heart sank like lead as she surveyed the impregnable walls and listened to the mighty groans of long-sleeping doors as the shoulder of the sturdy Turk awoke them to torpid activity. There was surprise and resentment in the creak of grim old hinges, in the moans of rheumatic timbers, in the jangle of lazy chains and locks. The stones on which they trod seemed to snap back in the echo of their footfalls a harsh, strident laugh of derision. Every shadow grinned mockingly at her; the very darkness ahead of the lantern's way seemed to snort angrily at the approach of the intruders. The whole of that rockbound dungeon roared defiance in answer to her timid prayer, and snarled an ugly challenge to her courage.

Lady Saxondale and Dickey confronted two rather pale-faced girls when the party of explorers again stood in the sunlit halls above. Across their shrinking faces cobwebs were lashed, plastered with the dank moisture of ages; in their eyes gleamed relief and from their lips came long breaths of thankfulness. Turk, out of sight and hearing, was roundly cursing the luck that had given him such a disagreeable task as the one just ended. From the broad, warm windows in the south drawing-room, once the great banquet hall, the quartet of uncomfortable sight-seekers looked out upon the open courtyard that stretched down to the fort-like wall, and for the moment Dorothy envied Philip Quentin. He was briskly pacing the stone-paved inclosure, smoking his pipe and basking in the sunshine that had never penetrated to the horrors of Castle Craneycrow. Lord Bob was serenely lounging on a broad oaken bench, his back to the sun, reading from

some musty-backed book.

“Oh, won't you let me go out in the sun for just a little while?” she cried, imploringly. A mist came over Lady Saxondale's eyes and Dickey turned away abruptly.

“As often as you like, Dorothy. The courtyard is yours as much as it is ours. Jane, will you take her through our fort? Show her the walls, the parapets, the bastions, and where the moat and drawbridge were when the place was young. It is very interesting, Dorothy.”

With Dickey and Lady Jane, Dorothy passed into the courtyard and into the open air for the first time in nearly a week. She felt like a bird with clipped wings. The most casual inspection convinced her that there was no possible chance of escape from the walled quadrangle, in the center of which loomed the immense, weather-painted castle. The wall was high and its strength was as unbroken as in its earliest days. Lord Saxondale joined them and explained to her all the points of interest about the castle as viewed from the outside, but Quentin quietly abandoned his walk and disappeared.

“It is as difficult to get out of Castle Craney-crow as it is to get in, I dare say,” observed Dorothy, looking with awe upon the grim old pile of rocks, they called a castle. Far above their heads stood the tower, from which she had seen earth and sky as if in a panorama, three days before.

“One might be able to get out if he could fly. It seems the only way, provided, of course, there were opposition to his departure,” said Lord Bob, smiling.

“Alas, I cannot fly,” she said, directly.

At the rear of the castle, where the stonework had been battered down by time, man and the elements, she saw several servants at work. “You have trustworthy servants, Lord Saxondale. I have tried to bribe one of them.”

“You see, Miss Garrison, they love Lady Frances. That is the secret of their loyalty. The chances are they'd sell me out to-morrow, but they'd die before they'd cut loose from my wife. By Jove, I don't understand how it is that everybody is won over by you American women.”

During the trip through the cellars, Dorothy had learned that the secret passages to the outside world began in the big chamber under the tower. Lady Saxondale had unwittingly confessed, while they were in the room, that two of the big rocks in the wall were false and that they were in reality doors which opened into the passages. One of the passages was over a mile long, and there were hundreds of steps to descend before one reached a level where walking was not laborious. The point of egress was through a hidden cave up the valley, near

the ruins of an old church. Where the other passage had once led to she did not know, for it had been closed by the caving in of a great pile of rocks.

With a determined spirit and a quaking courage, Dorothy vowed that she would sooner or later find this passage-way and make a bold dash for liberty. Her nerves were tingling with excitement, eagerness and a horror of the undertaking, and she could scarcely control herself until the opportunity might come for a surreptitious visit to the underground regions. Her first thought was to locate, if possible, the secret door leading into the passage. With that knowledge in her possession she could begin the flight at once, or await a favorable hour on some later day.

That very afternoon brought the opportunity for which she was waiting. The other women retired for their naps, and the men went to the billiard room. The lower halls were deserted, and she had little difficulty in making her way unseen to the door that led to the basement. Here she paused irresolutely, the recollection of the dismal, grasping solitude that dwelt beyond the portal sending again the chill to her bones.

She remembered that Turk had hung the lantern on a peg just inside the door, and she had provided herself with matches. To turn the key, open the door, pass through and close it, required no vast amount of courage, for it would be but an instant until she could have a light. Almost before she knew what she had done, she was in the drafty, damp stairway, and the heavy door was between her and her unsuspecting captors. With trembling, agitated fingers she struck a match. It flickered and went out. Another and another met the same fate, and she began to despair. The darkness seemed to choke her, a sudden panic rushed up and overwhelmed her fainting courage, and with a smothered cry of terror she turned to throw open the door. But the door refused to open! A modern spring lock had set itself against her return to the coveted security of the halls above.

A deathly faintness came over her. She sobbed as she threw herself against the stubborn door and pounded upon its panels with her hands. Something dreadful seemed to be crawling up from behind, out of the cavernous hole that was always night. The paroxysms of fear and dread finally gave way to despair, and despair is ever the parent of pluck. Impatiently she again undertook the task of lighting the lantern, fearing to breathe lest she destroy the wavering, treacherous flame that burnt inside her bleeding hands. Her pretty knuckles were bruised and cut in the reckless pounding on the door.

At last the candle inside the lantern's glass began to flicker feebly, and then came the certainty that perseverance had been rewarded. Light filled the narrow way, and she looked timidly down the rickety stone steps, dreading to venture

into the blackness beyond. Ahead lay the possibility of escape, behind lay failure and the certainty that no other opportunity would be afforded her. So she bravely went down the steps, her knees weakly striking against each other, the lantern jangling noisily against the stone wall.

How she managed to reach the chamber under the tower she could not have told afterward; she did not know at the time. At last, however, she stood, with blood chilled to the curdling point, in the center of the room that knew the way to the outside world. Pounding on the rocky walls with a piece of stone against which her foot had struck, she at length found a block that gave forth the hollow sound she longed to hear. Here, then, was the key to the passage, and it only remained for her to discover the means by which the osbtruction could be moved from the opening.

For half an hour, cold with fear and nervousness, she sought for the traditional spring, but her efforts were in vain. There was absolutely no solution, and it dawned upon her that she was doomed to return to the upper world defeated. Indeed, unless she could make those in the castle hear her cries, it was possible that she might actually die of starvation in the pitiless cavern. The lantern dropped from her palsied fingers, and she half sank against the stubborn door in the wall. To be back once more in the rooms above, with cheery human beings instead of with the spirits of she knew not how many murdered men and women, was now her only desire, her only petition.

The contact of her body with the slab in some way brought about the result for which she had striven. The door moved slowly downward and a dash of freezing air came from the widening aperture at the top, blowing damp across her face. Staggering away from the ghostlike hole that seemed to grin fiendishly until it spread itself into a long, black gulf with eyes, a voice, and clammy hands, she grabbed up the still lighted lantern and cried aloud in a frenzy of fear. The door slowly sank out of sight and the way was open but her courage was gone. What was beyond that black hole? Could she live in the foul air that poured forth from that dismal mouth? Trembling like a leaf, she lifted the lantern and peered into the aperture, standing quite close to the edge.

Her eyes fastened themselves in mute horror upon the object that first met their gaze; she could not breathe, her heart ceased beating, and every vestige of life seemed to pass beyond recall. She was looking upon the skeleton of a human being, crouched, hunched against the wall of the narrow passage, a headless skeleton, for the skull rolled out against her feet as the sliding door sank below the level. Slowly she backed away from the door, not knowing what she did, conscious only that her eyes could not be drawn from the horrifying spectacle.

“Oh, God!” she moaned, in direst terror. Her ghastly companion seemed to edge himself toward her, an illusion born in the changing position of the light as she retreated.

“Dorothy,” came a voice behind her, and she screamed aloud in terror, dropping the lantern and covering her face with her hands. As she swayed limply, a pair of arms closed about her and a voice she knew so well called her name again and again. She did not swoon, but it was an interminably long time to him before she exhibited the faintest sign of life other than the convulsive shudders that swept through her body. At last her hands clasped his arm fiercely and her body stiffened.

“Is it you, Phil? Oh, is it really you? Take me away from this place! Anywhere, anywhere! I'll do anything you say, but don't let that awful thing come near me!” she wailed. By the flickering light he caught the terrified expression in her eyes.

“You are safe, dear. I'll carry you upstairs, if you like,” he said, softly.

“I can walk, or run. Oh, why did I come here? But, Phil,” suddenly, “we are locked in this place. We can't get out!”

“Oh, yes, we can,” he cried, quickly. “Come with me.” He picked up the lantern, threw an arm about her and hurried toward the stairs that led aloft. Afterwards he was not ashamed to admit that he imagined he felt bony hands clutching at him from behind, and fear lent speed to his legs. Up the stairs they crowded, and he clutched at the huge handle on the door. In surprise, he threw his weight against the timbers, and a moment later dropped back with an exclamation of dismay. The door was locked!

“What does it mean!” he gasped. “I left it standing open when I came down. The draft must have shut it. Don't be alarmed, Dorothy; I'll kick the damned thing down. What an idiot I was to tell no one that I was coming down here.” But his kicking did not budge the door, and the noise did not bring relief. She held the lantern while he fought with the barricade, and she was strangely calm and brave. The queer turn of affairs was gradually making itself felt, and her brain was clearing quickly. She was not afraid, now that he was there, but a new sensation was rushing into her heart. It was the sensation of shame and humiliation. That he, of all men, should find her in that unhappy, inglorious plight, ending her bold dash for freedom with the most womanly of failures, was far from comforting, to say the least.

“Dorothy, I can't move it. I've kicked my toes off, and my knees are bleeding, but there it stands like a rock. We've got to stay here till some one chances to

hear us," he said, ruefully. "Are you afraid now?"

"Why didn't you spring the lock when you came down? This is a pretty pass, I must say," she said, her voice still shaky, her logic abnormal.

"I like that! Were you any better off before I came than you are now? How were you going to get out, may I ask?" he demanded, coolly seating himself on the top step. She stood leaning against the wooden door, the diplomatic lantern between them.

"I was going out by another way," she said, shortly, but a shudder gave the lie to the declaration.

"Do you know where that hidden passage leads to?" he asked, looking up into her face. She was brushing cobwebs from her dress.

"To a cave near the old church," she replied, triumphantly.

"Blissful ignorance!" he laughed. "It doesn't lead anywhere as it now exists. You see, there was a cave-in a few decades ago—"

"Is that the one that caved in?" she cried, in dismay.

"So Saxondale tells me."

"And—and how did the—the—how did that awful thing get in there?" she asked, a new awe coming over her.

"Well, that's hard to tell. Bob says the door has never been opened, to his knowledge. Nobody knows the secret combination, or whatever you call it. The chances are that the poor fellow whose bones we saw got locked in there and couldn't get out. So he died. That's what might have happened to you, you know."

"Oh, you brute! How can you suggest such a thing?" she cried, and she longed to sit close beside him, even though he was her most detested enemy.

"Oh, I would have saved you from that fate, never fear."

"But you could not have known that I was inside the passage."

"Do you suppose I came down here on a pleasure trip?"

"You—you don't mean that you knew I was here?"

"Certainly; it is why I came to this blessed spot. It is my duty to see that no harm comes to you, Dorothy."

"I prefer to be called Miss Garrison," coldly.

"If you had been merely Miss Garrison to me, you'd be off on a bridal tour with Ravorelli at this moment, instead of enjoying a rather unusual tete-a-tete with me. Seriously, Dorothy, you will be wise if you submit to the inevitable

until fate brings a change of its own accord. You are brave and determined, I know, and I love you more than ever for this daring attempt to get out of Craneycrow, but you don't know what it might have brought you to. Good heavens, no one knows what dangers lie in those awful passages. They have not been used in a hundred years. Think of what you were risking. Don't, for your own sake, try anything so uncertain again. I knew you were down here, but no one else knows. How you opened that secret door, I do not know, but we both know what happened to one other poor wretch who solved the mystery."

"I didn't solve it, really I didn't. I don't know how it happened. It just opened, that's all, and then I—oh, it was terrible!" She covered her eyes with her hands and he leaped to his feet.

"Don't think about it, Dorothy. It was enough to frighten you to death. Gad, I should have gone mad had I been in your place." He put his arm about her shoulder, and for a moment she offered no resistance. Then she remembered who and what he was and imperiously lifted angry eyes to his.

"The skeleton may have been a gentleman in his day, Mr. Quentin. Even now, as I think of him in horror, he could not be as detestable as you. Open this door, sir!" she said, her voice quivering with indignation.

"I wish I could—Dorothy, you don't believe that I have the power to open this door and am blackguard enough to keep you here? My God, what do you think I am?" he cried, drawing away from her.

"Open this door!" she commanded, resolutely. He looked long and earnestly into her unflinching eyes, and his heart chilled as if ice had clogged the blood.

"I cannot open it," he said at last. With not another word he sat down again at her feet, and, for what seemed like an age, neither spoke. The lantern sputtered warningly, but they did not know the light of its life was ebbing away. They breathed and thought, and that was all. At length the chill air began to tell, and he plainly heard the chatter of her teeth, the rustling of her dress as her body shivered. He arose, stiff and cold, drew off his coat and threw it about her shoulders. She resisted at first, but he was master. Later his waistcoat was wrapped about her throat and the warm lantern was placed at her feet, but she never gave him one look of gratitude.

At intervals he pounded on the door until finally there came the joyous, rasping sound of a key in the lock, and then excited exclamations filled the ears of the two prisoners.

XXVI. “THE KING OF EVIL-DOERS”

“Turk has been in Brussels,” said Quentin to her on the day following her underground adventure. She was walking in the courtyard, and her brain was busy with a new interest. Again had the lonely priest passed along the road far below, and she had made him understand that he was wanted at the castle gates. When he turned off the road and began slowly to climb the steep, she was almost suffocated with nervous excitement. Her experience of the day before had left her unstrung and on the verge of collapse, and she was beginning to enjoy a strange resignation.

She was beginning to feel that there were terrors worse than those of the kindly prison, and that escape might be tenfold more unpleasant than confinement. Then she saw the priest, and her half-hearted attempt to attract his attention to her plight, resulted so differently from what she had expected that her nerves were again leaping with the old desire to outwit her captors. He was coming to the castle, but how was she to acquaint him with the true state of affairs? She would not be permitted to see him, much less to talk with him; of that she was sure. Not knowing what else to do, she went into the courtyard and loitered near the big gates, trying to appear at ease. She prayed for but a few moments' time in which to cry out to him that she was a prisoner and the woman for whom 100,000 francs were offered in Brussels.

But now comes Quentin upon the scene. His voice was hoarse, and it was plain that he had taken a heavy cold in the damp cellar. She deliberately turned her back upon him, not so much in disdain as to hide the telltale confusion in her face. All hope of conversing with the priest was lost if Quentin remained near by.

“I sent him to Brussels, Dorothy, and he has learned something that will be of vital interest to you,” Philip went on, idly leaning against the gate as if fate itself had sent him there to frustrate her designs.

“Don't talk to me now, Philip. You must give me time. In an hour, when I have gotten over this dreadful headache, I will listen to you. But now, for heaven's sake, leave me to myself,” she said, rapidly, resorting to deception.

“I'm sorry I have disturbed you. In an hour, then, or at any time you may feel like listening. It concerns Prince Ugo.”

“Is he—what has happened to him?” she demanded, turning to him with alarm

in her eyes.

“It is not what has happened to him, but to one who was his intimate. The woman who warned me to beware of his treachery has been murdered in Brussels. Shall I come to you here in an hour?”

“Yes,” she said, slowly, the consciousness of a new dread showing itself in her voice. It was not until he reentered the house that she became fully possessed of a desire to learn more of this startling news. Her mind went back to the strange young woman who came to her with the story of the prince's duplicity, and her blood grew cold with the thought that brutal death had come to her so soon after that visit. She recalled the woman's voice, her unquestioned refinement, her dignity of bearing and the positiveness with which she declared that Ugo would kill her if he knew the nature of her visit to his promised wife. And now she was dead—murdered! By whom? That question burst upon her with the force of a heavy blow. Who killed her?

A pounding on the heavy gate brought her sharply to the project of the moment. She walked as calmly as her nerves would admit to the gate and called in French:

“Who is there?”

“Father Paul,” came a subdued voice from the outside. “Am I wrong in believing that I was called here by some one in the castle? Kindly admit me. I am fatigued and athirst.”

“I cannot open the gate, good Father, You must aid me to escape from this place,” she cried, eagerly, her breast thumping like a hammer. There was no interruption, and she could have shrieked with triumph when, five minutes later, the priest bade her be of good cheer and to have confidence in him. He would come for her on the next night but one, and she should be freed. From her window in the castle she saw the holy man descend the steep with celerity not born of fatigue. When he reached the road below he turned and waved his hand to her and then made his way swiftly into the forest.

After it was all over and relief was promised, her excitement subsided and in its place began to grow a dull contemplation of what her rescue would mean to the people who were holding her captive. It meant exposure, arrest, imprisonment and perhaps death. The appeal she had succeeded in getting to the ears of the passing priest would soon be public property, and another day might see the jubilant minions of the law in front of Castle Craneycrow demanding her release and the surrender of the culprits. There was not the joy in her heart that she had expected; instead there was a sickening fancy that she had done

something mean and treacherous. When she rejoined the unsuspecting party downstairs soon afterward, a mighty weakness assailed her, and it was she, instead of they who had boldly stolen her from her home, that felt the pangs of guilt. She went into the courtyard where Savage and Lady Jane were playing handball, while the Saxondales looked on, happily unconscious of a traitor in their midst. For an instant, pale and remorseful, she leaned against the door-post, struggling to suppress the tears of pity and contrition. Before she had fully recovered her strength Lady Jane was drawing her into the contest with Dickey. And so she played cravenly with those whose merry hearts she was to crush, listening to the plaudits of the two smiling onlookers. It was too late to save them, for a priest of God had gone out into the world to herald their guilt and to deal a blow that would shatter everything.

Quentin came down a little later, and she was conscious that he watched the game with eyes in which pleasure and trouble fought for supremacy. Tired at last of the violent exercise, the trio threw themselves upon the bench in the shade of the wall, and, with glowing faces and thumping breasts, two of them laughed over the antics they had cut. Dorothy's lawless lover stood afar off, lonely and with the resignation of the despised. Presently he drew near and asked if he might join them in the shade.

“What a dreadful cold you have taken, Phil,” cried Lady Saxondale, anxiously.

“Commonest sort of a cold, I assure you. Damp cellars don't agree with me,” he said.

“I did not want your coat, but you would give it to me,” said Dorothy, as if called upon to defend herself for some crime.

“It was you or I for the cold, you know,” he said, simply, “and I was your protector.”

“Right and good,” agreed Dickey. “Couldn't do anything else. Lady needed a coat, had to have it, and she got it. Duty called and found him prepared. That's why he always wears a coat in the presence of ladies.”

“I've had your friend, the skeleton, buried,” said Lord Bob. “Poor chap, he seemed all broken up over leaving the place.”

“Yes—went all to pieces,” added Dickey.

“Dickey Savage, do you think you are funny?” demanded Lady Jane, loftily. “I would not jest about the dead.”

“The last I saw of him he was grinning like the—”

“Oh, you wretch!” cried the girl, and Dorothy put her fingers to her ears.

“Shut up, Dickey,” exclaimed Quentin. “Do you care to hear about that woman in Brussels, Dorothy?”

“It is of no great consequence to me, but I'll listen if you like,” she said, slowly.

Thereupon he related to the party the story of the finding of the dead woman in a house near the Garrison home in the Avenue Louise. She had been dead for two days and her throat was cut. The house in which she was found was the one into which Turk had seen Courant disappear on the night of the veranda incident at the Garrison's. Turk had been sent to Brussels by Quentin on a mission of considerable importance, arriving there soon after the body was discovered. He saw the woman's face at the morgue and recognized her as the one who had approached Quentin in the train for Paris. Turk learned that the police, to all appearances had found a clew, but had suddenly dropped the whole matter and the woman was classified with the “unknown dead.” An attendant at the morgue carelessly remarked in his hearing that she was the mistress of a great man, who had sent them word to “throw her in the river.” Secretly Turk assured himself that there was no mistake as to the house in which she had been found, and by putting two and two together, it was not unnatural to agree with the morgue officer and to supply for his own benefit the name of the royal lover. The newspapers which Turk brought from Brussels to Castle Craneycrow contained accounts of the murder of the beautiful woman, speculated wildly as to her idenity and termed the transaction a mystery as unsolvable as the great abduction. The same papers had the report, on good authority, that Miss Garrison had been murdered by her captors in a small town in Spain, the authorities being so hot on the trail that she was put out of the way for safety's sake.

But the papers did not know that a bearded man named Turk had slipped a sealed envelope under a door at the Garrison home, and that a distressed mother had assurance from the brigand chief that her daughter was alive and well, but where she could not be found. To prove that the letter was no imposition, it was accompanied by a lock of hair from Dorothy's head, two or three bits of jewelry and a lace handkerchief that could not have belonged to another. Dorothy did not know how or when Baker secured these bits of evidence, When Quentin told her the chief object of Turk's perilous visit to Brussels, her eyes filled with tears, and for the first time she felt grateful to him.

“I have a confession to make,” she said, after the story was finished and the others had deliberately charged Ugo with the crime. “That poor woman came to me in Brussels and implored me to give up the prince. She told me, Phil, that she loved him and warned me to beware of him. And she said that he would kill her

if he knew that she had come to me."

"That settles it!" exclaimed he, excitedly, the fever of joy in his eyes. "He killed her when he found that she had been to you. Perhaps, goaded to desperation, she confessed to him. Imagine the devilish delight he took in sniffing out her life after that! We have him now! Dorothy, you know as well as I that he and he alone had an object in killing her. You have only to tell the story of her visit to you and we'll hang the miserable coward." He was standing before her, eager-eyed and intense.

"You forget that I am not and do not for some time expect to be in a position to expose him. I am inclined to believe that the law will first require me to testify against you, Philip Quentin," she said, looking fairly into his eyes, the old resentment returning like a flash. Afterward she knew that the look of pain in his face touched her heart, but she did not know it then. She saw the beaten joy go out of his eyes, and she rejoiced in the victory.

"True," he said, softly. "I have saved the woman I love, while he has merely killed one who loved him." It angered her unreasonably when, as he turned to enter the house, Lady Saxondale put her arm through his and whispered something in his ear. A moment or two later Lady Jane, as if unable to master the emotion which impelled, hurried into the castle after them. Dickey strolled away, and she was left with Lord Bob. It would have been a relief had he expressed the slightest sign of surprise or regret, but he was as imperturbable as the wall against which he leaned. His mild blue eyes gazed carelessly at the coils of smoke that blew from his lips.

"Oh," she wailed to herself, in the impotence of anger, "they all love him, they all hate me! Why does he not mistreat me, insult me, taunt me—anything that will cost him their respect, their devotion! How bitterly they feel toward me for that remark! It will kill me to stay here and see them turn to him as if he were some god and I the defiler!"

That night there was a battle between the desire to escape and the reluctance she felt in exposing her captors to danger. In the end she admitted to herself that she would not have Philip Quentin seized by the officers: she would give them all an equal chance to escape, he with the others. Her heart softened when she saw him, in her imagination, alone and beaten, in the hands of the police, led away to ignominy and death, the others perhaps safe through his loyalty. She would refuse absolutely, irrevocably, to divulge the names of her captors and would go so far as to perjure herself to save them if need be. With that charitable resolution in her heart she went to sleep.

When she arose the next morning, Baker told her that Mr. Quentin was ill. His cold had settled on his lungs and he had a fever. Lady Saxondale seemed worried over the rather lugubrious report from Dickey Savage, who came downstairs early with Phil's apologies for not presenting himself at the breakfast table.

While Quentin cheerfully declared that he would be himself before night, Dickey was in a doleful state of mind and ventured the opinion that he was “in for a rough spell of sickness.” What distresed the Saxondales most was the dismal certainty that a doctor could not be called to the castle. If Quentin were to become seriously ill, the situation would develop into something extremely embarrassing.

He insisted on coming downstairs about noon, and laughed at the remonstrances of Lord Bob and Dickey, who urged him to remain in bed for a day or two, at least. His cough was a cruel one, and his eyes were bright with the fever that raced through his system. The medicine chest offered its quinine and its plasters for his benefit, and there was in the air the tense anxiety that is felt when a child is ill and the outcome is in doubt. The friends of this strong, stubborn and all-important sick man could not conceal the fact that they were nervous and that they dreaded the probability of disaster in the shape of serious illness. His croaking laugh, his tearing cough and that flushed face caused Dorothy more pain than she was willing to admit, even to herself.

As night drew near she quivered with excitement. Was she to leave the castle? Would the priest come for her? Above all, would he be accompanied by a force of officers large enough to storm the castle and overpower its inmates? What would the night bring forth? And what would be the stand, the course, taken by this defiant sick man, this man with two fevers in his blood?

She had not seen or spoken to him during the day, but she had frequently passed by the door of the library in which he sat and talked with the other men. An irresistible longing to speak to him, to tell him how much she regretted his illness, came over her. There was in her heart a strange tenderness, a hungry desire to comfort him just the least bit before she took the flight that was to destroy the hope his daring and skillfully executed scheme had inspired.

Three times she hesitated in front of the library door, but her courage was not as strong as her desire. Were he alone she could have gone in and told him frankly that she would not expose him to the law in the event that she ever had the opportunity. But the other men were with him. Besides, his cough was so distressing that natural pity for one suffering physical pain would have made it impossible to talk to him with the essential show of indifference.

At last, in despair, she left Lady Saxondale and her companion in the courtyard and started up the stairs, resolved to be as far as possible from the sound of that cough. Quentin met her at the foot of the steps.

“I'm going to lie down awhile,” he said, wearily. “They seem to be worried about this confounded cold, and I'll satisfy them by packing myself away in bed.”

“You should be very careful, Phil,” she said, a suffocating feeling in her throat. “Your cough is frightful, and they say you have a fever. Do be reasonable.”

“Dorothy,” he said, pausing before her at the steps, his voice full of entreaty, “tell me you don't despise me. Oh! I long to have you say one tender word to me, to have one gentle look from your eyes.”

“I am very sorry you are suffering, Philip,” she said, steeling her heart against the weakness that threatened.

“Won't you believe I have done all this because I love you and——” he was saying, passionately, but she interposed.

“Don't! Don't, Phil! I was forgetting a little—yes, I was forgetting a little, but you bring back all the ugly thoughts. I cannot forget and I will not forgive. You love me, I know, and you have been a kind jailer, but you must not expect to regain my respect and love—yes, it was love up to the morning I saw you in the dining-room of this castle.”

“I'll create a new love in your heart, Dorothy,” he cried. “The old love may be dead, but a new one shall grow up in its place. You do not feel toward me to-day as you did a week ago. I have made some headway against the force of your hatred. It will take time to win completely; I would not have you succumb too soon. But, just as sure as there is a God, you will love me some day for the love that made me a criminal in the eyes of the world. I love you, Dorothy; I love you!”

“It is too late. You have destroyed the power to love. Phil, I cannot forgive you. Could I love you unless full forgiveness paved the way?”

“There is nothing to forgive, as you will some day confess. You will thank and forgive me for what I have done.” A fit of coughing caused him to lean against the stair rail, a paroxysm of pain crossing his face as he sought to temper the violence of the spell.

“You should have a doctor,” she cried, in alarm. He smiled cheerlessly.

“Send for the court physician,” he said, derisively, “The king of evil-doers has

the chills and fever, they say. Is my face hot Dorothy?”

She hesitated for a moment, then impulsively placed her cool hand against his flushed forehead. Despite her will, there was a caress in the simple act, and his bright eyes gleamed with gladness. His hand met hers as it was lowered from the hot brow, and his lips touched the fingers softly.

“Ah, the fever, the fever!” he exclaimed, passionately.

“You should have a doctor,” she muttered, as if powerless to frame other words.

XXVII. THE FLIGHT WITH THE PRIEST

Eleven o'clock that night found Castle Craneycrow wrapped in the stillness of death. Its inmates were awake, but they were petrified, paralyzed by the discovery that Dorothy Garrison was gone. Scared eyes looked upon white faces, and there was upon the heart of each the clutch of an icy hand. So appalling was the sensation that the five conspirators breathed not nor spoke, but listened for the heartbeats that had stopped when fears finally gave way to complete conviction. They were as if recovering from the fright of seeing a ghost; spirits seemed to have swept past them with cold wings, carrying off the prisoner they thought secure; only supernatural forces could be charged with the penetration of their impregnable wall.

The discovery of the prisoner's flight was not made until Baker knocked on Lady Saxondale's door and inquired for Miss Garrison at bedtime. Then it was recalled that she had left the others at nine o'clock, pleading a headache, but she did not go to her room. Investigation revealed the fact that her jewelry, a cape and a traveling hat were missing. Remembering her first attempt to escape and recalling the very apparent nervousness that marked her demeanor during the day, Lady Saxondale alarmed the house.

Ten minutes later the conspirators and a knot of sleepy servants stood in the courtyard, staring at the great gate. It was closed but unlocked. There were but two known keys to the big lock, and since the arrival of the party at the castle they had not been out of Lord Saxondale's possession. The girl could not have used either of them and the lock had not been forced; what wonder, then, that in the first moments of bewilderment they shrank back as if opposed by the supernatural?

No one present had seen her leave the castle, and there was no way of telling how long she had been gone, except that it was not longer than two hours. After the first shock of realization, however, the men came to the conclusion that assistance had come from the outside, or that there was a traitor on the inside. They were excitedly questioning the long-trusted servants when Lady Jane made a second discovery.

“Where is Turk?” she cried, and every eye swept through the group.

“Gone, by God!” exclaimed Quentin, in helpless amazement. No one had given thought to his illness in the excitement of the moment. He had been called

forth with the rest, and when he coughed not even he took note of the fact. This was no time to think of colds and fevers and such a trifling thing as death. He shivered, but it was not with the chill of a sick man; it was the shiver of fear.

“Good Lord, he can't be the one! Turk would die for me!” he cried, almost piteously.

“He is gone, and so is she,” grated Lord Bob. “What are we to infer? He has sold us out, Quentin; that's the truth of it.”

“I'm damned!” almost wept Dickey Savage. “They'll have a pack of officers here before morning. I don't give a hoot for myself, but Lady Saxondale and—”

“Great heaven! what have I brought you to in my folly?” groaned Quentin, covering his face with his hands.

“Open the gate!” called a hoarse voice outside the wall, and every heart stopped beating, every face went white. A heavy boot crashed against the gate.

“The officers!” whispered Lady Jane, in terror. Dickey Savage's arm went round her.

“Let me in! Git a move on!'

“It's Turk!” roared Quentin, springing toward the gate. An instant later Turk was sprawling inside the circle of light shed by the lantern, and a half-dozen voices were hurling questions at him.

The little man was in a sorry plight. He was dirt-covered and bloody, and he was so full of blasphemy that he choked in suppressing it.

“Where is she? Where have you been?” cried Quentin, shaking him violently in his agitation.

“Gimme time, gimme time!” panted Turk. “I've got to git my breath, ain't I? She's flew th' coop, an' I couldn't head her off. Say, has a priest been loafin' aroun' here lately?”

“A priest!” cried Lord Bob. “There hasn't been one here since Father Bivot came three years ago to—”

“I mean this week, not t'ree years ago. She's gone with a priest, an' I'm nex' to who he is, too. He ain't no more priest 'n I am. It's that French detective, Courant, an' he's worked us to a fare-you-well. He's th' boy!”

This startling news threw the party into deeper consternation than before. The little ex-burglar was not a fluent talker at best, but he now excelled himself in brevity. In three minutes he had concluded his story, and preparations were well under way for the pursuit.

He was, according to his narrative, sitting in the lower end of the courtyard about nine o'clock, calmly smoking his pipe, when his attention was caught by the long, shrill call of a night bird. No such sound had come to his ears during his stay at the castle, and his curiosity was aroused. Not dreaming of what was to follow, he slowly walked toward the front of the castle. A woman stood in the shadow of the wall near the gate. Hardly had his eyes made out the dim figure when the whistle was repeated. Before he fully grasped the situation, the big gate swung slowly inward and another figure, at first glance that of a woman, stood inside the wall. He heard the woman call softly: “Is that you, Father?” A man's voice replied, but the words were too low to be distinguished. The woman drew back as if to return to the house, but the newcomer was at her side, and his hand was on her arm.

There was a moment of indecision, then resistance, two or three sharp words from the man, and then the two seemed to fade through the wall. The ponderous gate was closing before the dumbfounded watcher could collect his wits. Like a shot he was across the stones, now alive to the meaning of the strange proceeding. With desperate hands he grasped the bar of the gate and pulled, uttering a loud shout of alarm at the same time. Surprised by the sudden interference, the man on the other side gave way and Turk was through the opening and upon him. A stunning blow on the head met him as he hurled himself forward, and he plunged headlong to the ground. As he struggled to his feet another blow fell, and then all was darkness.

When he opened his eyes again two figures were careening down the steep path, a hundred yards away. They were running, and were plainly distinguishable in the moonlight. Turk knew that the woman was Dorothy Garrison. He had heard her cry, after the first blow, “Don't! Don't kill him, Father! It is Turk!” Crazed with anger and determined to recapture her single-handed, Turk neglected to call for help. With the blood streaming down his face, he dashed off in pursuit. There was in his heart the desire to kill the man who had struck him down. Near the foot of the hill he came up with them and he was like a wildcat.

Miss Garrison had fallen to her knees and was moaning as if in pain. The priest crouched behind her, protecting his person from a possible shot from the pursuer. “For God's sake, don't shoot him!” screamed the girl, but a moment later there was a flash of light, a report, and a pistol ball whizzed by Turk's ear. He was unarmed, but he did not stop. Throwing himself forward, he stretched out his arms to grasp the crouching priest, hoping to prevent the firing of another shot. But he had not reckoned on the cleverness of the man at bay. The priest dropped flat to the ground and Turk plunged over his body, wildly clutching for

the prostrate man as he went. With the cunning of a fox, the priest, on realizing that he could not avoid a personal conflict, had looked about for means to end the pursuit effectually.

Retarded in his progress by the tired, trembling girl, he saw that a stand against the oncomer was unavoidable. He cleverly selected the spot for this stand, and braced himself as for the onslaught. Scarcely a yard beyond his position there was a sharp declivity among the rocks, with a clear drop of a dozen feet or more to the bottom of a wide crevasse. His shot went wild and he could not repeat it, for Dorothy was frantically clutching his arm. The strategem worked well, and he had the satisfaction of hearing a mighty oath as Turk, unable to check himself, slipped from the edge and went crashing to the rocks below.

With the speed of a hunted animal, the priest leaped to his feet, dragging the girl after him, and a harsh laugh came from his throat as they dashed onward. A quick glance behind showed there had been but one pursuer, and the man in the robes of holiness chuckled exultantly. But, if Dorothy Garrison believed him to be the priest his robes declared, the moonlight told the fallen Turk the truth. Indeed, it was the intentness with which the little ex-burglar gazed upon the white face of Courant that prevented him from seeing the ledge as he dashed up to the couple.

How long it was afterward that Turk came to his senses and crawled back to the roadway, dizzy, weak and defeated, he knew not. He could only groan and gnash his teeth when he stood erect again and saw that he was utterly alone. Courant and the girl were gone. In shame and humiliation he climbed the hill to call for help.

Just as the searching party was about to rush recklessly from the courtyard, servants having been instructed to bring out the horses, Lady Jane espied a white piece of paper on the ground near the gate. And then it was that they read the parting message from the girl who was gone. With a trembling voice Lady Saxondale read:

“I have found a way, and I am going, if nothing prevents. With the help of my good angel I shall soon be far from this place. A holy man in passing saw my signal of distress and promised rescue. You have been good to me, and I can only repay you by refusing to expose you. This priest does not know who you are. I shall not tell him or any who may be with him. No one shall ever know from me that you were my abductors. God grant that you may never have to pay the penalty. Go, while you may, for the truth may become known without my help, and I may not be able to save you. Save yourselves, all of you. I mean

Philip Quentin, too, because I know he loves me.

“Dorothy.”

Philip Quentin took the forlorn, even distressed, message from the hands of Lady Saxondale, kissed it devoutly, and placed it in his pocket.

“Philip is too ill to go out on this desperate chase,” cried Lady Saxondale.

“Ill! I'll die if I am not gone from here in five minutes! Great Lord, Bob, those fools have been an hour getting the horses!” groaned Quentin, pacing back and forth like a caged animal.

“Don't get excited, Phil; keep your head. You're not fit to be running about in a business like this, but all Christendom couldn't stop you. It may be a wild goose chase, after all,” said Lord Bob.

“She's been carried back to the accursed villain who employs Courant, and I'll die before I'll let him have her. Oh, what fools we've been!”

“Here's a puzzler, old man,” said Dickey. “Why was not Ugo here to help Courant if he knew anything about the fellow's actions? By cracky, I don't believe Ugo knows anything about the Frenchman's find.”

“He owns Courant, body and soul!”

“That jacky is out for the hundred thousand francs, and he's working on his own hook this time, my boy. He's after the reward, and he's the only one that has been keen enough to find us out. Mark me, he is working alone.

“Sure, he is,” added Turk. “He's got no pardners in th' job, er he'd a' had em along to-night. S'pose he'd run into a gang like this alone if he had anybody t' fall back on? Not on your life. We're a mighty tough gang, an' he takes no chances with us if he's workin' fer anybody else.”

“We're not a tough gang!” wailed Lady Jane, in tears. “Oh, what will become of us!”

“The Lord only knows, if we fail to get both Dorothy and Courant,” said Quentin, in real anguish.

“They may be in Luxemburg by this time,” said Saxondale. “Gad, this is working in the dark!”

“That road down there don't go t' Luxemburg direct, m' lord,” quickly interposed Turk. “It goes off into th' hills, don't you remember? An' then out th' valley some place 'way to th' north. If he'd been goin' to th' city he'd 'a' taken th' road back here an' kep' from goin' down th' hill.”

“You're right, Turk,” exclaimed Lord Bob. “He has gone up the valley, headed

for one of the little towns, and will steer clear of the Luxemburg officers for fear they may demand a part of the reward."

"God, Saxondale, are those horses never coming?" fumed Quentin. "I won't wait!" and he was off like a madman through the gate and down the steep. Behind him tore Turk, the faithful.

XXVIII. THE GAME OF THE PRIEST

When Turk pitched over the crouching form of the priest and into the dark chasm beyond Dorothy for the first time began to appreciate the character of her cowled rescuer. Panting and terrified, she looked into his hideously exultant face as he rose and peered over the ledge after the luckless pursuer. It was not the face of a holy man of God, but that of a creature who could laugh in the taking of a human life.

“Come on!” he cried, grasping her by the wrist with no gentle regard. “He's out of the way, but we have no time to lose. The others may miss you at any moment, and we must be in the wood if we hope to fool them.”

“I have changed my mind—” she began, holding back as he dragged her after him down the slope.

“It is too late,” he said, harshly. “You will soon be with your friends, my child. Do not lose heart, but trust to me.”

“Who are you? You are not a priest. Why have you disguised yourself—”

“Not so loud, my child, not so loud! They may have guards even here. If I am not a priest, then may heaven shut its gates on me forever. Because I am a man and have undone one of your enemies, you should not question my calling. It is no time for prayer. When we are safe from pursuit, you will regret the doubt you have just expressed. Trust to me, my child. But run, for God's sake, run! Don't hang back when all depends on our speed in the next half-hour.”

“Where are you taking me? Answer, or I shall refuse to go another step with you!” she exclaimed, now thoroughly aroused and determined.

“My wagon is hitched in the wood over there. In it we will go to a town up the valley, where I have the promise of help. I could have brought a big force of men with me, but don't you see what a mistake it would have been? Rather than surrender you to a force they would have killed you and secreted your body in the passages under the castle. It is commonly known that the cellars are paved with skeletons.” Here Dorothy shuddered in recollection. “Strategy was the only means of getting you out safely.”

“They would not have killed me,” she cried, breathlessly. They were moving rapidly along the level roadway now, and his grip on her wrist was like a clasp of iron.

“To save themselves? Of course, they would—as they would a dog!” he said.

“They are my friends, and they are the best, the truest in the world,” she gasped, eager to keep the promise of protection made in the farewell note.

“You think they are, madam, but how could they treat you as they have if they are friends?” He had turned into the wood, and it was necessary to proceed more cautiously on account of the darkness. She realized that she had erred in saying they were friends, and turned cold with apprehension.

“I mean, they treated me well—for criminals,” she managed to say.

“Criminals!” he snarled. “Bah! Of course they are criminals of the worst kind, but they will never be punished.”

“I'm afraid they are so clever that no one will ever find out who they really are.”

He stopped with a lurch, and she could feel that he was looking at her in amazement.

“I know who they are, and you know them, too,” he said, slowly. “Perhaps nobody else knows, but we know that my Lord and Lady Saxondale and the two Americans were your abductors. The man I dumped into the ravine was that little villain Turk.”

Her heart almost stopped beating with the shock of knowing that nothing could now shield her captors from exposure.

“But—but it will be very hard to prove,” she said, hoarsely, almost defiantly.

“You have only to take oath,” he said, meaningly.

“I don't know the name or face of a person in that castle,” she said, deliberately. He was silent for a full minute.

“You intend to shield them?” he demanded. There was no answer to the question. Now she was positive that the man was no priest, but some one who knew the world and who had made it his business to trace her and her captors to the very gates of the castle. If he knew, then others must also be in possession of the secret.

“Who are you?” she demanded, as he drew her deeper into the wood. There was now the wild desire to escape from her rescuer and to fly back to the kindly jailers on the hill.

“A poor priest, by the grace of God,” he said, and she heard him chuckle.

“Take me back to the road, sir!” she commanded.

“I will take you to your mother,” he said, “and to no one else.”

“But I am afraid of you,” she exclaimed, her courage going. “I don't know you —I don't know where you are taking me.”

“We will not go far to-night. I know a place where you can hide until I secure help from the city.”

“But you said you had a wagon.”

“The horse must have strayed away, worse luck!” said he, with a raucous laugh.

She broke from his grasp suddenly, and like a frightened deer was off through the darkness knowing not whither she went or what moment she might crash against a tree. The flight was a short one. She heard him curse savagely as he leaped upon her from behind after a chase of a few rods, and then she swooned dead away.

When she regained consciousness a faint glow of light met her eyes as the lids feebly lifted themselves from their torpor. Gradually there came to her nostrils a dank, musty odor and then the smell of tobacco smoke. She was lying on her back, and her eyes at last began to take in broad rafters and cobwebby timbers not far above her head. The light was so dim that shadows and not real objects seemed to constitute the surroundings. Then there grew the certainty that she was not alone in this dismal place. Turning her head slightly, she was able, with some effort, to distinguish the figure of a man seated on the opposite side of the low, square room, his back against the wall, his legs outstretched. At his elbow, on a box, burned a candle, flickering and feeble in its worthlessness. He was smoking a pipe, and there was about him an air of contentment and security.

Slowly past events crowded themselves into the path of memory, and her brain took them up as if they were parts of a dream. For many minutes she was perfectly quiet, dumbly contemplating the stranger who sat guard over her in that wretched place. In her mind there was quickly developed, as one brings the picture from the film of a negative the truth of the situation. She had escaped from one set of captors only to give herself into the clutches of others a thousand times more detestable, infinitely more evil-hearted.

“You've come back to life, have you?”

She started violently and shivered as with a mighty chill at the sound of these words. They came from the slouching smoker.

“Where am I?” she cried, sitting up, a dizzy whirling in her head. Her bed was no more than a heavy piece of old carpet.

“In the house of your friends,” laconically responded the voice, now quite

familiar. Her eyes swept the room in search of the priest. His robes lay in a heap across her feet. “Where is Father Paul?” she demanded. “He is no more,” said the man, in sombre tones. “I was he until an hour ago.”

“And you are no priest? Ah, God help me, what have I done? What have I come to in my miserable folly?” she cried, covering her face with her hands.

“Look here, Miss Garrison,” said the man, quietly. “I am no priest, but you have nothing to fear because of that fact. The truth is, I am a detective. For a month I was in the employ of Prince Ravorelli, and it was no honest business, I can tell you. What I have done to-night is straight and honest. I mean you no harm, and you have but to follow my instructions in order to find yourself safe in Brussels once more. I have been interested in a number of queer transactions but let me say this in my own defence: I was never employed in any game so detestable, so low, as the one your noble prince was playing when you were snatched away from him. The only regret I have in taking you back to your mother comes from the fear that you may go ahead and marry that knave.”

Dorothy was listening, with wide eyes and bated breath, to the words of the lounging smoker.

“I will never, never marry him,” she cried, vehemently.

“Stick to that resolve, my child,” said Courant, with mock benevolence. “He is a scoundrel, and I cut loose from him to do this little job down here on my own responsibility.”

“Tell me, if you know, did he plan to kill Mr. Quentin? I must have the truth,” she cried, eagerly.

“He did worse than that. He made the attempt, or rather his agents did. You see, Quentin was a dangerous rival because he knew too much.”

“I don't understand.”

“Well, he knew all about the prince when he was with the opera company in Brazil. I can't tell you much about it, but there was a murder committed over there and your prince was believed to be guilty. A woman was killed, I believe. Quentin knew all about it, it seems.”

“And never told me?” she cried.

“He was not positive, I suppose. There was the danger of being mistaken, and this American friend of yours seems honest. He only told you what he knew to be a fact, I conclude.”

“Yesterday I heard that a woman had been murdered in Brussels, a woman who came to warn me against the prince. Do you know who killed her?”

“Good God! Has she been killed? Ah, I knew it would come; he was obliged to get rid of her. I did not know of her death, but I leave you to guess who was responsible for it. God, he is a devil! You owe a great deal, Mademoiselle, to the clever men who stole you from him.”

“Alas, I am beginning to know it, now that it is too late. And he was ill when I stole away to-night. I implore you, take me back to the castle!” she pleaded, her heart wrung by the anguish in her soul.

“So he is in the castle, eh? Just as I thought. I'd like to take you to him, especially as he is ill, but I must take care of number one. When I dropped out of one villain's employment I went into business for myself. You see, there is about 100,000 francs reward for you, and there is the same for the bodies of the abductors. If I turn you over to your mother or her agents—not the prince, by the way—I earn the reward. If I can procure the arrest of your abductors I get double the amount. You see how unbusiness-like it would be if I were to let my sympathies get the better of me.”

“But I will give you 100,000 francs if you will take me back to the castle,” she cried, standing before him.

“Have you the money with you?”

“Of course I have not, but it shall be yours as soon as I can—”

“Pardon. You are worth nothing to me in that castle, and you will bring a fortune in Brussels.”

In vain she pleaded with the stubborn detective, finally threatening him with dire punishment if he refused to accede to her demands. Then he arose in sudden wrath, cursing her roundly and vowing she should not leave the room alive if she persisted in such threats. He told her that she was in a cave beneath the ruins of an old church, long the haunt of robbers, now the home of snakes and bats. Indeed, as he spoke a flittermouse scurried through the air within a foot of her ear.

“We rest here until to-morrow night, and then we start out to walk. You cannot be seen in that dress, either. I have clothing here in this box for you to wear. My dear young lady, you must make believe that you are my younger brother for a day or two, at least.”

A look of horror came into her face, succeeded by the deep red of insulted modesty, and then the white of indignation.

“I will die first, you wretch!” she exclaimed. In that moment she believed she could have killed the smiling rogue with her own hands.

“We shall see,” he said, roughly. “Look at them; they are respectable in cut and they are clean.” He drew the garments from the box, piece by piece, and held them before her flaming face. “I'm going out to take a look about the valley. You are quite safe here. No one knows where you are, and the robbers have been dead for twenty years. One of them still has his skeleton in the room just off this one, but he is a harmless old fellow. In an hour I will return, and we will eat. It is now three o'clock, and the sun will soon be rising. To-night we venture forth as brothers, remember.”

He pulled his cap down over his eyes, buttoned his coat about his throat, changed a revolver from one pocket to another, and deliberately stalked across the room to the narrow door. An instant later she heard the key rasp in the lock and she was alone.

“Oh, heaven, if Philip Quentin could see me now! If he could but hear my sobs and see my tears! How he would rejoice, how he would laugh, how he would pity me. This is your triumph, Philip Quentin, but you are not here to claim the wretched victory. Fool! Fool! Fool!”

She had thrown herself face downward on the patch of carpet and was writhing in the agony of fear and regret. Suddenly there came to her ears the distant report of a firearm, the rush of feet and then something heavy crashed against the little door. She was on her feet in an instant, cowering in the far corner of the room, her face among the cobwebs. Panic seized her, and she screamed aloud in her terror. Outside the door there were sounds of a savage struggle, but they rapidly became indistinct, and finally passed beyond hearing altogether. She ran to the door and pounded on it with hands that knew not the bruises they were acquiring, and she moaned in the fear that the rescuers, for such they surely must be, were leaving her behind.

“Phil! Phil!” she cried again and again. But there suddenly came to her a terrifying thought, and she fell back, cold and voiceless. Ugo! What if he had at last run the treacherous Courant to earth? What if the rescuer were he?

She slunk away from the door, the dampness of dread sending a chill to her heart. And when again the rush of footsteps brought a heavy body against the door, she had not the voice to cry out, so sure was she that Ugo Ravorelli was coming to her in that dismal hole.

Then the door gave way, and Philip Quentin came plunging into the room, hatless, coatless, his shirt in shreds. The mighty draft of air from the open door killed the sickly candle-flame, but not before they had seen each other. For the second time that night she lost consciousness.

At the bottom of a deep ravine lay the body of Courant. He had fled from before the two adversaries after a vain attempt to reenter the room below the church and had blindly dashed over the cliff. Turk, with more charity than Courant had shown not many hours before, climbed down the dangerous steep, and, in horror, touched his quivering hand. Then came the last gasp.

XXIX. DOROTHY'S SOLUTION

Quentin carried her forth into the night. When Turk came upon him in the darkness a few minutes later, he was wandering about the hilltop, the limp figure of the woman he loved in his arms, calling upon her to speak to him, to forgive him. The little man checked him just in time to prevent an ugly fall over a steep embankment.

“My God, she's dead, Turk!” he groaned, placing her tenderly on the grassy sward and supporting her head with his arm. “The wretch has killed her.”

“He's paid for it, if he did. I guess it's nothin' but a faint er a fit. Does she have fits?” demanded Turk, earnestly. Quentin paid no heed to him, but feverishly began working with her, hope springing from Turk's surmise.

“Turk, if she dies, I swear to God I'll kill myself this night!” cried he.

“You're talkin' crazy, sir. She's comin' around all right, all right. Hear that? Her eyes'll be busy in a minute, and she'll be askin' where she's at. Just keeled over, that's all. All women does that w'en they git's as glad as she wuz. They faint 'cause it's easier'n it is to tell how much obliged they are. I know 'em. They pass up hard jobs like that ontil they gits time t' look all pale an' interestin' an' tuckered-out, an' then they ain't no use sayin' much obliged, 'cause th' man won't stand fer it a minute.”

Turk was kneeling opposite Quentin and was scratching match after match, holding them above the pale face until they burnt his finger tips. When Dorothy at last opened her eyes she looked into the most terrifying face she had ever seen, and, as the lids closed again spasmodically, a moan came from her lips. Turk's bristled face was covered with blood that had dried hours ago, and he was a most uncanny object to look upon. “Darn me, she's askeert of my mug! I'll duck ontil you puts her nex'.”

“Look up Dorothy! It is Phil! Don't be afraid, dearest; you are safe!” He knew that her eyes were open again, although it was too dark to see them.

“Is it you, Phil?” she whispered.

“Yes, yes!”

“Where is—where is he?” in terror.

“He cannot harm you now. He is gone.”

“But I saw his face just now. Oh, you are not telling me the truth!”

“You saw Turk's face, dearest. What a time we had in finding you! But you are safe now, thank God!”

She lay very still, striving to convince herself that she was awake and that she was really listening to Philip Quentin's voice, hoarse and eager. Her hand went to his face, impulsively searching for the features her eyes could not see. Strong ringers seized it, and dry, burning lips kissed it again and again—lips parched with fever. The heart of the woman asserted itself at once, and concern succeeded perplexity.

“Oh, Phil, you are ill—you should not be here!” she cried, in distress, and, before he could prevent she was on her feet, swaying dizzily.

“Then you are not hurt!” he cried. “Thank God for that!” His arm was about her waist, and a wave of security and contentment rolled through her being.

“Take me back to the castle, Phil,” she said, simply. “You will never know how unhappy I have been, how I have blamed myself for running away as I did. But, oh, I thought he was a priest, and I wanted to prove that you could not keep me there.”

“You do not have to stay there, Dorothy,” he said, slowly.

“What do you mean?”

“I have been a fool, an ingrate, a brute, but I will atone if it is possible. In your note you said you would forgive the others. I don't ask pardon for myself, but I implore you to shield them. Perhaps it is too late; this detective has exposed us —”

“He swore to me that he had not, but he knows everything, and may carry the word to the authorities,” she interrupted, in distress.

“The secret is safe if he worked alone, for he is dead. Don't be frightened; he fell over a cliff in the darkness. Turk!”

“Here, sir.”

“We must get back to the castle as soon as possible. It is five miles, at least. Try to find a trap of some sort at once. Miss Garrison cannot walk that distance.”

“But I can and will,” she objected. “I am not hurt and I am stronger than you.”

“Nonsense! I'm all right. I will return with you to Brussels to-morrow. Your imprisonment is at an end. There is no need for you to think again of escape, for you are free to go at this moment. Come back to Lady Saxondale for a while, though, and when you are able to go with me we will take the train for Brussels. Believe me, I am sorry, but I am not fool enough to ask you to forgive. I don't deserve pardon, perhaps, but I know that my heart was in the right and that I

saved you from a much worse bondage than that which you have spent in Castle Craneycrow.”

As if in a dream, she walked with him through the first faint light of the dawning day, stunned by the unexpected words he had uttered. In her mind there began to grow, rebelliously, the fear that he would do as he said! Turk, following close behind, suddenly gave a loud shout and sped away like a flash in front of them.

“It's Mr. Savage,” he yelled back to the startled couple, “an' he's on horseback! Hi, there!”

As Dickey Savage came plunging up the slope, roaring with excited joy, she said to Ouentin, her voice low and intense:

“I know now that you saved me from a worse fate than death, Phil, and, if you ask, I will forgive as I hope you will forgive me. Courant was Ugo's tool, and I had the truth from him. You are the truest, the best of friends, and I should—”

“Stop, Dorothy! Not now, some day, when you are home, after you have had time to think over all that I have done, right and wrong, I may come to you with the question I will not ask now. What I have sinned for, if you want to call it that, I will sue for some other day when the world is looking on. I will not make my prisoner pay penalty without a trial.”

“I want you to know that I do not hate you,” she argued, persistently.

“But you hated me yesterday.”

“I did not.”

Just then Dickey pounced upon them, and, as they hurried to the spot where Turk was holding the newcomer's horse, Phil briefly told how he and the little ex-burglar had accidentally stumbled upon the hiding-place of the pseudo priest after hours of hopeless search. The two pursuers, tired and despairing, were lying on the ground in front of the church ruins, taking a few moments of rest before climbing to the summit of the hill, when the luckless Courant ventured forth. With quick intuition, Turk called out the detective's name, and the ruse worked. The man they could not see gave a snort of dismay and turned to reenter the door. And then came his undoing.

Turk was the general who planned the return to the castle. He insisted that Quentin, who was very weak, take Miss Garrison upon the horse's back and ride, while he and Savage walked. In this way they reached the gates of Craneycrow. It was like the home-coming of loved ones who had been absent for years. Three women were in tears, and all of the men were in smiles. Quentin's was the smile

of one bordering on delirium, however. A chill broke over him, and the fever in his body renewed its disputed sway. An hour later he was in bed, and Turk, dispatched by Dorothy Garrison, was riding to the nearest town for a physician, much against the wishes of the sick man. He stubbornly insisted that he would start with her for Brussels within twenty-four hours, and it was not until the doctor told him that he was in extreme danger of pneumonia that he consented to keep to his bed.

Resolutely he checked all desire to cry his love into the ear of the gentle nurse who sat with him for hours. He would not grant himself the slightest deviation from the course he had sworn to follow, and he suffered more from restraint than from fever. She found herself longing for the moment when he would call her to him and pour out the love that would not be denied. He never spoke but she hoped for signs of surrender; he never looked at her that she did not expect his lips to utter the story his eyes were telling, What he endured in that week of fever, under the strain of love's nursing, only he could have told—and he told nothing. How she hungered for the luxury of one word, only she knew—and confessed unconsciously.

Had the doctor told her that he was critically ill, she would have cast all restraint aside and wrung from him the words he was holding back. But the unromantic little doctor calmly broke the fever, subdued the congestion, relieved the cough and told them that the “young man would be quite well in a few days if he took good care of himself.”

The days of convalescence were few, for the vigorous strength of the patient had not been sapped to any great extent. They were days of happiness, however, for all who lived in Castle Craneycrow. Dickey and Lady Jane solemnly and somewhat defiantly approached Lord Bob on a very important matter. He solemnly and discreetly gave his consent, and Dickey promised to be very, very good to her so long as he lived. One day a real priest, Father Bivot, came to the castle gates to solicit alms for the poor of the neighborhood. He was admitted, refreshed and made glad by a single donation that surpassed in size the combined contributions of a whole valley. It was from him that they learned, with no little uneasiness of mind, that the body of Courant had been found, and that it had been identified by the Luxemburg authorities. The cause of his death was a mystery that defied solution, however.

The news that Courant had been found and identified made Quentin all the more eager to carry out his design to restore Dorothy to her mother. He knew, and all knew, that it was but a question of a few days until Ugo and the police would put two and two together and come racing into the valley, certain that

Courant had been killed by the abductors of Dorothy Garrison.

One morning, therefore, shortly after the visit of Father Bivot, he asked Lord Saxondale for the use of a conveyance, announcing his intention to drive with Dorothy to the nearest railway station. There was dismay in the heart of everyone who sat at what had been a cheerful breakfast table. Quentin deliberately went on to say that he would take no lackey, preferring to expose none but himself in the undertaking.

“Can you be ready in an hour, Dorothy?” he asked, after Saxondale had reluctantly consented.

“Do you insist on carrying out this Quixotic plan, Phil?” she asked, after a long pause.

“Positively.”

“Then, I can be ready in half an hour,” she said, leaving the table abruptly.

“Confound it, Phil; she'd rather stay here,” said Dickey, miserably.

“I intend to restore her to her mother, just the same. There's no use discussing it, Dickey. If they don't throw me into jail at Brussels, I may return in a day or two.”

There was a faint flush in Dorothy's cheeks as she bade good-bye to the party. Lady Saxondale sagely remarked, as the trap rolled out of sight among the trees below the castle, that the flush was product of resentment, and Dickey offered to wager £20 that she would be an engaged girl before she reached Brussels.

“Do you know the road, Phil?” asked Dorothy, after they had gone quite a distance in silence. She looked back as she spoke, and her eyes uttered a mute farewell to the grim old pile of stone on the crest of the hill.

“Father Bivot gave me minute directions yesterday, and I can't miss the way. It's rather a long drive, Dorothy, and a tiresome one for you, perhaps. But the scenery is pretty and the shade of the forest will make us think we are again in the Bois de la Cambre.

“If I were you, I would not go to Brussels,” she said, after another long period of silence, in which she painfully sought for means to dissuade him from entering the city. She was thinking of the big reward for his capture and of the greedy officials who could not be denied.

“Do you think I am afraid of the consequences?” he asked, bitterly. She looked at the white face and the set jaws and despaired.

“You are not afraid, of course, but why should you be foolhardy? Why not put me in the coach for Brussels and avoid the risk of being seized by the police? I

can travel alone. If you are taken, how can you or I explain?” she went on, eagerly.

“You have promised to shield the rest,” he said, briefly.

“I know, but I want to shield you. Haven't I told you that I forgive everything? Don't make me unhappy, Phil. It would kill me now if you were to fall into the hands of the police. They are crazy to catch my abductors, and don't you remember what the paper said? It said the people would kill without mercy. Please, Phil, for my sake, don't go to Brussels. It is so unnecessary and so hazardous.”

“Pray, tell me what explanation you could give to your mother, to the police, to the newspapers, if you suddenly appeared in Brussels, safe and sound, and yet unable to tell who had been your captors or where you have been held?” he grimly said.

“I would not offer an explanation,” she said, decisively, as if that settled everything.

“But you would be compelled to make some statement, my dear girl. You couldn't drop in there as if from the sky and not tell where you have been and with whom. The truth would be demanded, and you could not refuse. What would the world, your mother, the prince, think—”

“Don't mention that man's name to me,” she cried.

“Well, what would be the natural conclusion if you refused to give an explanation? Don't you see that the papers would make a sensation of the matter? There is no telling what they would say about you. The world would jump at the scandal bait, and you would be the most notorious of women, to be perfectly plain with you. If you refuse to expose the people who abducted you, there could be but one inference. It would simply mean that you were a party to the plot and fled to evade the wedding at St. Gudule's. Upon whom would suspicion fall? Upon the man who was supposed to have sailed for New York, and upon his friends. Where have you been during the last few weeks? If you did not answer, the world would grin and say, 'In New York, and of her own volition!' Don't you see, Dorothy, there is but one way to end this horrible mistake of mine? Only one way to protect you from humiliation, even degradation?”

“You mean by—” she began, faintly, afraid to complete the dreaded surmise.

“By the surrender of the real criminal,” he said, calmly.

“I will not agree to that!” she cried, imperatively. “If you give yourself up to

them, Philip Quentin, I will deny every word of your confession," she went on, triumphantly.

"I'm afraid they would doubt you," he responded, but his heart leaped gladly.

"And do you know what else I shall do if you persist? I'll tell the world that you were not alone in this affair, and I'll send the officers to Castle Craneycrow to arrest every—" she was crying hysterically, when he interrupted.

"But you have promised to shield them!"

"Promised! I will forget that I ever made a promise. Philip Quentin, either I go to Brussels alone or every person in Craneycrow goes to prison with you. I'll not spare one of them. Promise? What do I care for that promise? Do as you like, Phil, but I mean every word of it!"

"You wouldn't dare, Dorothy, you wouldn't dare!" he cried, imploringly. "They are not to blame. I am the guilty one. They are not—"

"One way or the other, Phil!" she cried, firmly. "It is safety for all or disgrace for all. Now, will you go to Brussels?"

"But, my heavens, how can you explain to the world?" he cried, in deepest distress.

"I have thought of all that. Providence gave me the solution," she said, her face beaming with the joy of victory.

"Not even Providence can supply an explanation," he groaned.

"You forget Courant, the dead man. He cannot deny the charge if I conclude to accuse him of the crime. He is the solution!"

XXX. LOVE IS BLIND

“But Ugo can disprove it,” he said, after a moment's thought.

“Only by confessing his own duplicity,” she said, tranquilly.

“You will not marry him, Dorothy?”

She looked him full in the eyes, and no word could have answered plainer than the disdain which swept across her lovely face.

“What do you think of me, Phil?” she asked, in hurt tones, and he answered with his eyes because he could not trust his voice.

The longing to throw her arms about the man whose burning eyes had set her heart afire was almost uncontrollable; the hope that he would throw off restraint and cry out his love, drove her timidly into silent expectancy. His whole soul surged to his lips and eyes, but he fought back the words that would have made them both so happy. He knew she loved him; the faintest whisper from him would cause her lips to breathe the passion her eyes revealed. And yet he was strong enough to bide his time.

How long this exquisite communion of thoughts lasted neither knew nor cared. Through the leafy wood they drove, in utter silence, both understanding, both revealing, both waiting. He dared not look at the glorious, love-lit face, he dared not speak to her, he dared not tempt the heart that might betray his head. It was he who at last broke that joyous calm, and his voice was husky with suppressed emotion.

“You will not forget that some day I am coming to you as Phil Quentin and not in the mask of a bandit.”

“I shall expect you, robber, to appear before a certain tribunal and there explain, if you can, what led you to commit the crime that has shocked the world,” she said, brightly.

“I implore the leniency of the high court,” he said, tenderly.

“The court can only put you on probation and exact the promise that you will never steal another girl.”

“And the length of probation?”

“For all your natural life,” demurely.

“Then I must appeal to a higher court,” he said, soberly.

“What?” she cried. “Do you object to the judgment?”

“Not at all,” he said, earnestly. “I will merely appeal to the higher court for permission to live forever.” Both laughed with the buoyancy that comes from suppressed delight. “It occurs to me, Dorothy,” said he, a few minutes later, “that we are a long time in reaching the town Father Bivot told me about. We seem to be in the wilds, and he said there were a number of houses within five miles of Craneycrow. Have we passed a single habitation?”

“I have not seen one, but I'm sorry the time seems long,” she said.

“I wonder if we have lost the way,” he went on, a troubled expression in his eyes. “This certainly isn't a highway, and he said we would come to one within three miles of the castle. See; it is eleven o'clock, and we have been driving for more than two hours at a pretty fair gait. By the eternal, Dorothy, we may be lost!”

“How delightful!” she cried, her eyes sparkling.

“I don't believe you care,” he exclaimed, in surprise.

“I should have said how frightful,” she corrected, contritely.

“This isn't getting you on a train, by any manner of means,” he said. “Could I have misunderstood the directions he gave?” He was really disturbed.

“And the poor horse seems so tired, too,” she said, serenely.

“By Jove! Didn't we cross a stream an hour or so ago?” he cried.

“A horrid, splashy little stream? We crossed it long ago.”

“Well, we shouldn't have crossed it,” he said, ruefully. “I should have turned up the hill over the creek road. We're miles out of the way, Dorothy.”

“What shall we do?” she asked, with a brave show of dismay.

“I don't know. We're in a deuce of a pickle, don't you see?” he said.

“I can't say that I do see,” she said. “Can't we drive back to the creek?”

“We could if I could turn the confounded trap about. But how, in the name of heaven, can I turn on a road that isn't wide enough for two bicycles to pass in safety? Steep, unclimable hill on our left, deep ravine on our right.”

“And a narrow bit of a road ahead of us,” she said. “It looks very much as if the crooked and narrow path is the best this time.”

That narrow road seemed to have no end and it never widened. The driving at last became dangerous, and they realized that the tired horse was drawing them up a long, gradual slope. The way became steeper, and the road rough with rocks and ruts. Her composure was rapidly deserting her, and he was the picture of

impatience.

“If we should meet anyone else driving, what would happen?” she asked, fearfully.

“We won't meet anyone,” he answered. “Nobody but a mountain goat would wittingly venture up this road. This poor old nag is almost dead. This is a pretty mess! How do you like the way I'm taking you to the train?”

“Is this another abduction?” she asked, sweetly, and both laughed merrily, in spite of their predicament. His haggard face, still showing the effects of illness, grew more and more troubled, and at last he said they would have to get down from the trap, not only to avoid the danger of tipping over the cliff, but to relieve the horse. In this sorry fashion they plodded along, now far above the forest, and in the cool air of the hilltops.

“There certainly must be a top to this accursed hill,” he panted. He was leading the horse by the bit, and she was bravely trudging at his side.

“There is a bend in the road up yonder, Phil,” she said.

When they turned the bend in the tortuous mountain road, both drew up sharply, with a gasp of astonishment. For a long time neither spoke, their bewildered minds struggling to comprehend the vast puzzle that confronted them. Even the fagged horse pricked up his ears and looked ahead with interest. Not three hundred yards beyond the bend stood the ruins of an enormous castle.

“It is Craneycrow!” gasped the man, leaning dizzily against the shaft of the trap. She could only look at him in mute consternation. It was Craneycrow, beyond all doubt, but what supernatural power had transferred it bodily from the squarrose hill on which it had stood for centuries, to the spot it now occupied, grim and almost grinning? “Is this a dream, Dorothy? Are we really back again?”

“I can't believe it,” she murmured. “We must be deceived by a strange resem __”

“There is Bob himself! Good heavens, this paralyzes me! Hey, Bob! Bob!”

A few minutes later a limping horse dragged his bones into the courtyard and two shame faced travelers stood before a taunting quartet, enduring their laughter, wincing under their jests, blushing like children when the shots went home. For hours they had driven in a circle, rounding the great row of hills, at last coming to the very gate from which they had started forth so confidently. They were tired and hungry and nervous.

“Did you telegraph your mother you were coming?” asked Dickey Savage.

“We did not even see a telegraph wire,” answered Dorothy, dismally.

“What did you see?” he asked, maliciously,

“You should not ask confusing questions, Richard,” reprimanded Lady Jane, with mock severity.

“Well, we'll try it over again to-morrow,” decided Quentin, doggedly.

“Do you expect me to let you kill every horse I own?” demanded Lord Bob. “They can't stand these round-the-world pleasure trips every day, don't you know. Glad to oblige you, my boy, but I must be humane.”

That evening Father Bivot came to the castle, just as they were leaving the dinner table. He brought startling news. Not an hour before, while on his way from the nearest village, he had come upon a big party of men, quartered on the premises of a gardener down the valley. It required but little effort on his part to discover that they were officers from the capital, and that they were looking for the place where Courant's body was found. The good Father also learned that detectives from Brussels were in the party, and that one of the men was a prince. The eager listeners in Castle Craneycrow soon drew from the priest enough to convince them that Ugo was at the head of the expedition, and that it was a matter of but a few hours until he and his men would be knocking at the gates.

“The prince did not address me,” said Father Bivot, “but listened intently, as I now recall, to everything I said in response to the Luxemburg officer's questions. That person asked me if Lord Robert Saxondale owned a place in the valley, and I said that his lordship dwelt in Castle Craneycrow. The men were very curious, and a tall Italian whispered questions to the officer, who put them to me roughly. There was no harm in telling them that his lordship was here with a party of friends—”

“Good Lord!” gasped Dickey, despairingly.

“It is all over,” said Quentin, his face rigid.

“What will they do?” demanded Dorothy, panic-stricken.

“I do not understand your agitation, good friends,” said the priest, in mild surprise. “Have I done wrong in telling them you are here? Who are they? Are they enemies?”

“They are searching for me, Father Bivot,” said Dorothy, resignedly.

“For you, my child?” in wonder.

“They want to take me back to Brussels, You would not understand, Father, if I told you the story, but I do not want them to find me here.”

A frightened servant threw open the door unceremoniously at this juncture and

controlling his excitement with moderate success, announced that a crowd of men were at the gates, demanding admission.

“My God, Bob, this will ruin you and Lady Saxondale!” groaned Quentin. “What can we do? Escape by the underground passage?”

Lord Saxondale was the coolest one in the party. He squared his shoulders, sniffed the air belligerently, and said he would take the matter in his own hands.

“Frances, will you take Miss Garrison upstairs with you? And Jane, I suspect you would better go, too The secret passage is not to be considered. If we attempt to leave the place, after the information Father Bivot has given them, it will be a clean admission of guilt. We will face them down. They can't search the castle without my permission, and they can't trespass here a minute longer than I desire. Do you care to see the prince, Quentin?”

“See him? It is my duty and not yours to meet him. It means nothing to me and it means disgrace to you, Bob, Let me talk to—”

“If you intend to act like an ass, Phil, you shan't talk to him. I am in control here, and I alone can treat with him and the officers.”

“Please, sir, they are becoming very angry, and say they will break down the gates in the name of the law,” said the servant, reentering hurriedly.

“I will go out and talk to them about the law,” said Saxondale, grimly. “Don't be alarmed, Miss Garrison. We'll take care of you. Gad, you look as if you want to faint! Get her upstairs, Frances.”

“I must speak with you, Lord Saxondale,” cried Dorothy, clutching his arm and drawing him apart from the pale-faced group. Eagerly she whispered in his ear, stamping her foot in reply to his blank objections. In the end she grasped both his shoulders and looked up into his astonished eyes determinedly, holding him firmly until he nodded his head gravely. Then she ran across the room to the two ladies and the bewildered priest, crying to the latter:

“You must come upstairs and out of danger, Father. We have no time to lose. Good luck to you, Lord Saxondale!” and she turned an excited face to the three men who stood near the door.

“He shall not have you, Dorothy,” cried Quentin. “He must kill me first.”

“Trust to Lord Saxondale's diplomacy, Phil,” she said, softly, as she passed him on her way to the stairs.

XXXI. HER WAY

The grim smile that settled on the faces of the three men after the women and the trembling priest had passed from the hall, was not one of amusement. It was the offspring of a desperate, uneasy courage.

“Quentin, the safety of those women upstairs depends on your thoughtfulness. You must leave this affair to me. We can't keep them waiting any longer. Gad, they will tear down the historic gate I had so much difficulty in building last year. Wait for me here. I go to meet the foe.”

Turk was standing in the courtyard with a revolver in his hand. Lord Bob commanded him to put away the weapon and to “stow his bellicoseness.” Mere chance caused Turk to obey the command in full; half of it he did not understand. The voices outside the gate were much more subdued than his lordship expected, but he did not know that Prince Ugo had warily enjoined silence, fearing the flight of the prey.

“Who is there?” called Lord Bob, from the inside

“Are you Lord Saxondale?” demanded a guttural voice on the outside.

“I am. What is the meaning of this disturbance?”

“We are officers of the government, and we are looking for a person who is within your walls. Open the gate, my lord.”

“How am I to know you are officers of the law? You may be a pack of bandits. Come back to-morrow, my good friends.”

“I shall be compelled to break down your gate, sir,” came from without, gruffly.

“Don't do it. The first man who forces his way will get a bullet in his head. If you can give me some assurance that you are officers and not thieves, I may admit you.” Lord Bob was grinning broadly, much to the amazement of the servant who held the lantern. There were whispers on the outside.

“Prince Ravorelli is with us, my lord. Is he sufficient guarantee?” asked the hoarse voice.

“Is Giovanni Pavesi there, also?” asked Saxondale, loudly.

“I do not know him, my lord. The prince's companions are strangers to me. Is such a person here?” Lord Bob could almost see the look on Ugo's face when the

question was put to him.

“I never heard the name,” came the clear voice of the Italian. “My friends are well known to Lord Saxondale. He remembers Count Sallaconi and the Duke of Laselli. Two men from Brussels are also here—Captains Devereaux and Ruz.”

“I recognize the prince's voice,” said Saxondale, unlocking the gate. “Come inside, gentlemen,” he said, as he stood before the group. “Sorry to have kept you waiting, you know, but it is wise to be on the safe side. So you are looking for some one who is in my castle? May I inquire the name of that person?”

“You know very well, Lord Saxondale,” said Ugo, now taking the lead. He stood boldly, defiantly before the Englishman.

“Carmenita Malban is dead, your excellency,” said Bob, coolly.

“I do not know what you are talking about, sir,” grated the prince. “Dorothy Garrison is here, held against her will, and I, her affianced husband, command you to surrender her.”

“Have you the authority to take her, if I refuse to obey?” asked the other, with exasperating coolness.

“These officers have the authority to arrest you and to take her from your hands, violently, if necessary.”

“Oh, well, that makes a difference, of course. Miss Garrison is here, Prince Ravorelli, but I doubt your authority to take her away.”

“There is a reward for her, dead or alive,” said Count Sallaconi, savagely.

“And for the abductors,” added the burly man from Luxemburg. “I shall have to place you under arrest, my lord.”

“One moment, my good man. Miss Garrison is her own mistress, I believe?” addressing the prince.

“What has that to do with it?”

“I'm sure I don't know, but it may be important. If you will kindly request your followers to remain in the courtyard, you may enter the castle and converse with Miss Garrison herself, Prince Paves—I should say Ravorelli.” There was a wild, hunted look in the Italian's eyes, and there was murder in his heart. “I will ask you and the count and the duke and Officer Luxemburg to come with me.”

With rare dignity Lord Saxondale strode across the flags and deliberately threw open the huge castle door. After a moment of indecision and not a little trepidation, Prince Ugo followed, with his two countrymen not far behind. The Luxemburg officer gave hurried instructions to his men and took his place among the favored few.

It was a sharply-drawn hiss, ending in a triumphant “ah,” that came from the lips of Ugo when he was face to face with Philip Quentin. His glittering eyes plainly said that his suspicions were confirmed. The discovery of the fact, a week before, that the two Americans had not sailed for New York provided the foundation for a shrewd guess and he had not been wrong.

“It is as I suspected,” he said, tersely. “I trust I am not too late to save Miss Garrison from outrage.”

“One moment, please,” commanded Lord Bob. “You are here through sufferance, and you must, for the time being, imagine yourself a gentleman. If you care to talk over the situation with us while we wait for Lady Saxondale and Miss Garrison, I shall be only too glad to have you do so. Will you be seated, gentlemen?”

“We are not here to be directed by you, Lord Saxondale. We have tracked this scoundrel to earth, and we are—” Ugo was saying hotly when his lordship turned on him sternly.

“Mr. Quentin is my guest. Another remark of that character and I will throw you bodily from the room. This is my house, Prince Ravorelli.” Paying no heed to the malevolent glare in the Italian's eyes, Saxondale turned and bade a servant ask Miss Garrison to come down if it pleased her to do so.

“I presume Brussels is very much excited over Miss Garrison's disappearance,” said he to the livid-faced prince.

“Brussels is horrified, but she will rejoice tomorrow. Thank God, we have not toiled in vain.”

“Sit down. May I inquire for the health of Mrs. Garrison?” The four newcomers, more or less ill at ease, sat down with Lord Bob, the two Americans standing. Quentin leaned against the big post at the foot of the steps, his face the picture of gloomy defiance.

“I am not her physician, sir.”

“Hoity-toity! She is quite well, then, I may reasonably infer. Can you tell me whether she is in Brussels?”

“She will be in Luxemburg in the morning, if my message reaches her to-night. But we are not here for the purpose of bandying words with you, sir. This house must be searched, whether you like it or not. Captain, call in your men,” cried the prince, his rage getting the better of him.

“You will find that the door is barred, captain,” said Saxondale, easily. The expression that came into the faces of the four men was one not soon to be

forgotten. For a full minute there was absolute silence.

“Do you mean that we are prisoners?” demanded Ugo, his teeth showing, but not in a smile.

“Not at all. The door has a habit of locking itself.”

“I command you to open that door!” cried the prince, looking about him like a trapped rat. He snarled with rage when he saw the smile on Quentin's face. Dickey's sudden chuckle threw dismay into the ranks of the confident besiegers.

“Do not be alarmed, gentlemen,” said Saxondale. “The door shall be opened in good time. Ah, I think the ladies are coming.”

As he spoke Dorothy and Lady Saxondale appeared at the top of the stairs. Ugo would have dashed up to meet them had not the two Americans blocked the way. Slowly Dorothy came down the oaken steps, followed by Lady Saxondale. Lady Jane and Father Bivot were not far behind them.

“Dorothy!” cried Ugo. “Thank heaven, I have found you!”

She stopped on the bottom step, within arm's length of Philip Quentin. There was a moment of indecision, a vivid flush leaped into her lovely cheek, and then her hand went quickly forth and rested on Quentin's shoulder. He started and looked at her for the first time.

“I am sorry, Ugo, for the wrong I have done you,” she said, steadily, but her hand trembled convulsively on Phil's shoulder. Mechanically he reached up and took the slim fingers in his broad, strong hand and rose to the step beside her.

“The wrong?” murmured the prince, mechanically.

“In running away from you as I did,” she said, hurriedly, as if doubting her power to proceed. “It was heartless of me, and it subjected you to the crudest pain and humiliation. I cannot ask you to forgive me. You should despise me.”

“Despise you?” he gasped, slowly. The truth began to dawn on two men at the same time. Ugo's heart sank like a stone and Quentin's leaped as if stung by an electric shock. His figure straightened, his chin was lifted, and the blood surged from all parts of his body to his turbulent heart.

“I loved him, Prince Ravorelli, better than all the world. It was a shameless way to leave you, but it was the only way,” she said, her voice full. Then she lifted her eyes to Quentin's and for the moment all else was forgotten.

“My God, you—you did not leave Brussels of your own free will!” cried the prince, his eyes blazing, Sallaconi and Laselli moved toward the door, and the police officer's face was a study.

“I ran away with the man I love,” she answered, bravely.

“It is a lie!” shrieked the Italian. Saxondale seized his hand in time to prevent the drawing of a revolver from his coat pocket. “'Damn you! This is a trick!”

“You have Miss Garrison's word for it, your excellency. She was not abducted, and your search has been for naught,” said the big Englishman. “There are no abductors here. The famous abduction was a part of the game and it was abetted by the supposed victim.”

“But there is a reward for her return to Brussels,” interrupted the Luxemburg official, speaking for the first time. “I must insist that she come with me.”

“The reward is for Dorothy Garrison, is it not?” demanded Saxondale.

“Yes, my lord.”

“Well, as you cannot get out of the castle and your friends cannot get into it until we open the doors, there is absolutely no possibility of your taking Dorothy Garrison to Brussels.”

“Do you mean to oppose the law?” cried Ugo, panting with rage.

“Gentlemen, as the host in Castle Craneycrow, I invite you to witness the marriage ceremony which is to make it impossible for you to take Dorothy Garrison to Brussels. You have come, gentlemen—a trifle noisily and unkindly, I admit—just in time to witness the wedding of my two very good friends who eloped with the sound of wedding bells in their ears. Father Bivot, the bride and groom await you.”

“Dorothy, my darling,” whispered Quentin. She turned her burning face away.

“It is my way, Phil. I love you,” she murmured.

THE END

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