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"'WILL YOU BE VERY QUIET AND STAY RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE IF I TELL YOU?'" (p. 120)

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# THE RED MOUSE

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# THE RED MOUSE

## A MYSTERY ROMANCE

BY

William Hamilton Osborne

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
1909

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**L. G. S. O.**

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# ILLUSTRATIONS


"'Will you be very quiet and stay right where you are if I tell you?'" (p. 120) *Frontispiece*

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MEPHISTOPHELES

Wherefore forsakest thou the lovely maiden
That in the dance so sweetly sang?

FAUST

Ah! In the midst of it there sprang
A red mouse* from her mouth—sufficient reason.

*Goethe here refers to an old superstition concerning one of the many forms of diabolical possession.

—*Bayard Taylor.*

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# I

For years—the best years of her life, for that matter, as she often reflected in lonely moments—Miriam Challoner had been trying to prove to her own satisfaction that her husband was no worse than the majority of young men married to rich women, but she could never find the arguments whereby she might arrive at the desired conclusion. It is not to be wondered at, then, that eventually there came a day when the information was brought to her that even in the gay and ultra-fashionable world in which they moved people spoke of him as "that mad Challoner," and were saying that he was going a pace that was rapidly carrying him far beyond the horizon of anything like respectability —going to the dogs, in truth, as fast as her money could take him there.

Now Miriam Challoner was not one of those women who deceive themselves, if not their friends, when they say that if ever they hear of their husbands doing such-and-such-a-thing they know perfectly well what they will do. It is true that, like them, she did nothing; nevertheless, she could not be persuaded to discuss with any one the humiliating position in which her husband had placed her.

In a way, this attitude of hers was unfortunate, for

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it was more or less responsible for the note of melancholy cadence which crept into her mind. And so it was that before very long she was dimly conscious of an emotion quite unlike anything that she had hitherto experienced: all the bitterness in her heart had given way to a sickening sensation that she, as well as as he, had been tried in the matrimonial furnace and found wanting. Somehow, she had fallen grievously in her own estimation!

And society's estimation? Illusions in that direction were hardly possible; there, too, doubtless she would incur the loss of a certain amount of consideration. And even the non-possession of a highly imaginative temperament did not prevent her from fancying the expressive shrugs, and "Oh, of course his wife is to blame," which, for the sake of an inference that is obvious, would be voiced by more than one impeccable dame of her acquaintance—as often as not superbly gullible souls, whose eloquence increases in direct proportion to the world's lack of belief in the fidelity of their liege lords.

Nor were comments of that kind the worst that she might expect! For, as a penalty for belonging to a set which, to a greater degree, perhaps, than any other, recognises the possibility of an up-to-date couple having a mutually implied understanding that neither shall object to the discreet—and more or less

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temporary—faithlessness of the other—she knew that it would be well-nigh miraculous if some kindly disposed persons did not go still further for an explanation of his conduct, and point to her and her husband as a conspicuous example of such a precious pair. But though her whole being rebelled at the mere thought that there could be people who would regard her in such a light, she could not bring herself to take decisive action of any kind. There was nothing that could be said, she told herself, nothing that could be done—since a most conscientious and pitiless self-analysis had failed to reveal any wifely shortcoming—except to have faith that there were some of her sex—not many, it is true, but still a few friends—who would continue to believe her incapable of doing any of the things that so many others did, for whom there was far less excuse than there would be for her.

But whatever were the opinions of the women, there was no disposition on the part of the men to hold her in any way responsible for his behaviour. Far from it. And in a favourite corner of an exclusive club, when the names of fair ladies—mostly of the stage—were bandied about as figuring in young Challoner's escapades, old cronies of his father, between sips of their Scotch and sodas, were wont to boil over with contemptuous indignation and explosively give thanks to the gods for willing that their lovable, old-time friend

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should not live to see the confirmation of his fears. And how well they recalled those fears!

For notwithstanding his very moderate circumstances, the elder Challoner had been that rarest of mortals—a man blissfully content with his lot in life, and, one who seldom missed an opportunity to deplore the insatiable craze of the rich for more riches, forever protesting that blatant commercialism, haste and artificiality were the gods of the present day; and no picture in their gallery of lasting impressions stood out more vividly than the one in which, surrounded by a group of young fellows, who had "got him going," as they phrased it, he was declaiming against—what was merely his pet hobby in another form—the egregious folly of poor young men seeking riches through marriage.

" . . . and I, young gentlemen," he would conclude with great earnestness, "will always maintain that such a union will make a man lose all incentive to work out what the good Lord has put in him."

Little wonder, then, that on the announcement that a marriage had been "arranged" between Challoner's son and a daughter of a man whose name the world over was significant of fiscal potency, the day bid fair to be a memorable one at the club, his contemporaries preparing to make merry at the old fellow's expense. But in a sense his "showing up" there had

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been a disappointment; one look at the face, which showed symptoms of distress and a desire to be reassured, was sufficient to cause the banter to die in their hearts before it had reached their lips.

It soon came out that there had been a scene between father and son. These two, for many years, had been the only members of the family; and probably better than any one in the world the father had known the son's weaknesses: hypersensitive to new influences, vanity and inability to say no; and he had pointed out to him the many disadvantages—dangers to one of his temperament—which he could see in such an alliance. To the father's thinking, the boy would have no home—only establishments, yachts, racing-stables and motor-cars; and he had contended that there were far more desirable things in life than the possession of these—from which it can easily be surmised that J. Lawrence Challoner, senior, was a man little in sympathy with the ideas of modern fashionable society.

Now to appreciate the mental anguish of another organism—even if that organism is one's own parent—is never an easy matter; and of all men, the modern lover is apt to be the last to succumb to an argument that predicts a blighted future because of an intention to marry an heiress. And so it was only natural that Lawrence should have regarded his father as an old

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fogy, have resented his warnings and have replied that he was competent to look after his own affairs and that, anyhow, the consent of the girl's parents had been obtained and no interference was possible. And with that the father's manner had completely changed: he had wished the boy the best of luck; sent him away happy. Obviously, all this was years ago; parents on both sides had passed away; and yet things had turned out pretty much as the old man had dreaded. Indeed, matters had come to this pass: how long this indulgent wife would continue to keep her eyes shut to her husband making ducks and drakes of her fortune, and why she did it, were questions which interested all who knew this couple, but which Challoner apparently thought wholly unnecessary to ask himself.

An automobile—Mrs. Challoner's automobile—was largely instrumental in bringing matters to a climax. As trouble-makers the "machines" rank high; in fact, there are moments when it would seem as if the arch-fiend himself were in them; otherwise, how account for the mysterious influence that makes people lose command of themselves once they are in command of them; that leads astray, as some one has said, the great and the good as well as those of lesser clay; that produces the extraordinary state of mind that rejoices in riding rough-shod over the rights and feelings of

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others; while one and all claim to recognise his handicraft in the ingenuity which the "machines" display in selecting the most inopportune times and least accessible places for an exhibition of their mechanical ailments.

But be that as it may, in this particular instance the devil was not lurking in, tampering with the improvements and refinements of detail in the big, red body of Mrs. Challoner's Mastodon model—no, it was not with the machine that he was concerned, but with the man himself, befuddling whatever brains he had left; and the devil it was and no other that incited Challoner to leave a certain establishment,—about which we shall have something to say later on,—take the wheel from the chauffeur and embark on a sensational, bacchic career up the Avenue at an hour when the view of that fashionable thoroughfare through the silken, shimmery curtains falling over a window in a corner house facing the Park was too alluring not to be irresistible.

And so it came about that the comments on the passing throng made by two women, indulging in afternoon tea in Mrs. Challoner's white and gold drawing-room, were interrupted in a manner that was as unexpected as it was embarrassing.

"Look, Miriam!" Shirley Bloodgood was saying to

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her hostess, apropos of a woman passing by whom they both knew, "did you ever see anything more atrocious than that gown?"

The other smiled her appreciation; and again the voluble Miss Bloodgood went on:—

"And do look at the Heath girls in those huge hats —what frights!"

But whatever were her thoughts on the subject, Miriam Challoner did not answer, for precisely at that moment her attention was attracted by something strangely familiar in an unusually insolent and insistent honking of a motor-horn, which was causing a wave of apprehension to sweep down the long line of vehicles. And a moment later they saw that chauffeurs were rudely interrupting the purring of automobiles lazing over their allotted miles; that drivers were swerving their horses into closer relations with the curb; that hardly had these attained a position of comparative safety than there flashed by them and fetched up in front of Mrs. Challoner's house a big machine, which a distinguished though dissipated looking man had been recklessly forcing with utter disregard of the right of way, a performance which called forth a volley of expletives not only from cabbies singularly unappreciative of his dexterity in executing perilously close shaves, but likewise from angry pedestrians, who had halted on hearing the

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groan with which the machinery protested his sudden braking.

For a moment that seemed minutes the atmosphere in the drawing-room was electric, the tension almost unbearable, for it was impossible for either of the women to doubt that the other saw what she had seen: the condition that the man was in who had leaped from the car and was now crossing the sidewalk apparently oblivious to the exclamations of wonder and lament that he had escaped authoritative vigilance.

Rising quickly, Shirley Bloodgood put out her hand. "Good-bye—thank you so much, Miriam!" There was an amazement of question in the eyes that involuntarily sought those of her friend; but her one thought was to escape what she wisely interpreted as an oncoming scene between husband and wife.

But though there was a mist before her eyes, a surging in her ears, not a muscle of Miriam Challoner's face moved; and she permitted the girl before her to perceive no emotion other than gentle surprise.

"Surely, my dear, you're not going?— What?— So soon?"

Conventional though they were, there could be no mistaking the tone of sincerity in Mrs. Challoner's words as she took the girl's hand in both of hers with an affectionate movement. Indeed, for the barest fraction of a second it almost succeeded in convincing

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Shirley that the distressing incident of the motor had entirely escaped her; at any rate, it augmented the doubt whether the woman before her had even an inkling of the stories in circulation concerning the doings of her husband. Nor was such a conclusion at all illogical. Shirley Bloodgood could recall not a word that Miriam Challoner had ever uttered during all the years of her married life, nor a look that could be construed as implying a knowledge of his dissipations; on the contrary, there had been times when the girl had been so exasperated over the wife's outspoken admiration for qualities in the man which Shirley knew that he did not possess, that she had been sorely tempted to enlighten her friend as to his escapades. But gratifying as was the thought of the wife's possible ignorance, it by no means lessened the necessity of a hasty departure on Shirley's part; and somewhat confusedly but affectionately she kissed her hostess good-bye.

"Oh, my dear Miriam, but I must—your tea is perfectly delicious though. If only I had time . . . " Shirley stopped abruptly; her endeavour to conceal her anxiety to be gone was making her uncertain of her words.

"One's tea, like one's friends, my dear, should be of the best," Miriam returned with a sweet smile. And apparently thinking of nothing but her somewhat in-

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sipid little compliment, she laughed pleasantly, passed her arm lovingly round the girl's waist, and accompanied her to the door of the drawing-room.

Miriam's smile and manner touched Shirley deeply. The inclination to offer words of comfort was strong in this tall, rangy girl, whose every movement was as graceful as it was impulsive. How sweet, how easy it would be, she thought, if Miriam would only give a hint that they would be welcome. But like many another woman, Miriam Challoner had schooled herself to face the world with a smile; had learned that to lay bare one's heart, even to one's friends, is to court surprise, perhaps ridicule; and that to dissimulate though it kills is to play well one's part; and she gave no sign.

On reaching the hall below, Shirley was able to see through the open door Challoner ascending swiftly but uncertainly the grey, stone steps. With a quick movement she drew to one side while he sullenly pushed by his wife's young butler, Stevens, and began to stumble up the soft-carpeted, wide stairway; then, unnoticed and with a sigh of relief, she fled out into the street.

Left rather abruptly alone, Mrs. Challoner went back into the drawing-room, and resting her arms on the mantel, bowed her head upon them and gave way to the misery of her reflections. It was not the first

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time, to be sure, that Lawrence had returned in this condition, but heretofore he had been gracious enough to have had it occur at night; and she had cherished the belief that she was his only witness. Now, there was an element connected with his home-coming that was still harder to bear: the sympathy which pleaded for recognition on the face of her friend, and which told more plainly than words that she had seen all, understood all. Presently, lifting her head, she crossed the room and seated herself; then raising her hands she let them drop despairingly along the arms of the chair while the unbidden tears overflowed. In this position she remained until the sound of footsteps warned her of her husband's approach; then a moment of struggle for self-control; a brushing away of tears, and finally, rising, she left her seat for one behind the tea-table. And it was in this unquestioned point of vantage, apparently cool and collected, in the act of pouring herself out a cup of tea, that Challoner's gaze first rested upon his wife as, lurching in his walk but his eyes holding a purpose, he came into her presence.

"Well, Miriam, here I am . . . I've come home, you see!" he blurted out in a don't-care-what-happens sort of manner, and without waiting for an answer slumped into a chair and added sneeringly: "You're not over-demonstrative, my dear!"

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Mrs. Challoner winced. During the long days and nights of suspense and wonder as to his whereabouts, she had solaced herself with inventing plausible excuses for his absence; how useless they were, his looks, manner, and more than anything else the intonation of his voice now showed; she dared not trust herself to speak lest she should give way to foolish invective.

Challoner came to the point at once.

"Miriam, I must have some money!" It was not a request; it was a command.

Up to this time the young wife had not lifted her eyes from the tea-cup in her hand. She was a woman with brown eyes and very attractive brown hair, but upon the face that still should have held the freshness of youth deep lines were beginning to appear. Pretty she was, in a way, though she had never been beautiful; and yet there was something that spelt beauty in the brown eyes which she now fixed upon him.

"For three days you have been away—where have you been?" The necessity for saying something alone was responsible for the question. Many days afterward in reviewing the painful scene, she was positive that she had not inquired nor had he volunteered the information.

"I don't know," he answered dully, half-truthfully. "All I know is that I landed at Cradlebaugh's." And after a moment, noting the look of mystification on

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her face, he snapped out: "Cradlebaugh's gambling rooms—gambling rooms, there—now you know."

With the last words he rose excitedly, stalked over to a table and smote it with his clenched hand.

"I tell you I must have som[illegible]ey!"

Miriam Challoner would not have been human if again bitter words had not risen to her lips. But one quick glance at the puffy face, the red-rimmed eyes was sufficient to warn her of the danger of exciting his anger while in his present condition; and instead she merely inclined her head—an action which instantly caused hope to surge into the eyes of Challoner.

"I want—I must have a thousand dollars." Here again, the attitude was not that of a suppliant; in the demand was more of the highwayman than of the beggar.

Mrs. Challoner's dark eyes met those of the man, held them steady; then she said firmly, decisively:—

"Lawrence, much as it hurts me to refuse you, I feel that I must. It is for your own good." The soft gown that clung to her figure seemed to take more rigid lines as she drew herself up and went on with: "I can give you nothing more—this sort of thing has gone quite far enough."

For an instant Challoner was stunned. His wife had never looked at him like that; there was something in

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the catch of her breath, too, as she ended, that meant denial, he was certain. But he took courage and renewed his attack; and meeting with no success, he turned to imploring, begging for the money. Did she not know that he would not ask her if he did not *have* to have it? Women never could understand why men had to have money—she didn't understand. If she would only let him have the money, he would pledge himself to mend his ways, anything—but he must have money. When men had to have money, they *had* to have it—that was all there was to it. And then a violent irresistible impulse to be perfectly truthful, to lay bare his mind before her, took hold of him; and that mind was so warped, his need so desperate, that he came perilously near to blurting out the real reason why he needed the money. For an instant he actually thought that his wife would see, understand, appreciate the reason as some of his male friends doubtless would.

"I'll tell you how it is, Miriam . . . " he had begun, and then suddenly stopped.

What was he about to do! Was there not something queer, something not exactly right, in his telling Miriam about the other woman? After all, that was the one thing in his life that he had never told her. She was welcome to the rest, but that—she mustn't know that; and he ended by pleading:—

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"Surely, Miriam, you're not going to refuse me—come . . . "

"I am sorry, Lawrence, but I must." There was a sob in the refusal as she turned away.

And still like a spoiled child the husband would not abandon his plea. Besides, he had detected the sob. Once more his attitude underwent a change: he moved toward her, holding out his arms as though to gather her into them. It was a charm that always worked with Miriam; it would now, he told himself.

But Challoner was doomed to disappointment. It was the last touch needed to complete her humiliation; and waving him back, she cried:—

"Laurie, Laurie, anything but that!" There was a flood of tears behind her look of pain.

"But I must . . . Cradlebaugh . . . " he came to a helpless pause.

Mrs. Challoner slowly repeated the name:—

"Cradlebaugh! I wish you had never seen that man—that class of men! Your money—my money very likely has been going to them! Well, if you want money you will have to . . . " The tension snapped and she drew her hand across her eyes, then broke down completely.

"A sign of weakening," Challoner said to himself, and promptly started toward her.

"No, no,—go!" she cried, drawing her hands up to

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her face as if to shut out the sight of him from her gaze.

A moment later Challoner was seated in the motor-car. As the chauffeur threw in the clutch some instinct told Challoner to look back. He had a fleeting impression that he had seen a woman's face in the doorway. "Surely that's Miriam," he thought, and lifted his hat; but when he looked again there was no one there. Yet if his senses had been perfectly normal, he would have known that it was her face that he had seen. But the fates had no intention of letting him *know* that with his departure his wife's resolution had *gone*, and that she had come to the door to beseech *him to come back*; for even then they were cunningly *spinning* the web which was to encompass him about.

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## II

**CRADLEBAUGH'S,—Cradlebaugh's house of a thousand chances,—rearing its four stories of brown stone, spreading itself out liberally on the north side of one of the side streets which is fast being given over to fashionable clubs and restaurants, is a thoroughly up-to-date establishment. Here, the *jeunesse dore* of the city are made welcome—once the critical eye of the sentinel behind the triple steel doors at the top of the brown stone steps has recognised in them the essential qualifications. In appointments, the house is luxurious and gorgeous, and is so closely shuttered that not a ray of light from outside is permitted to penetrate it: Cradlebaugh's day and night, night and day, is lit within by the glow of artificial lights; the sunlight has no chance in Cradlebaugh's. In addition to the main hall of play, there are accommodations for parties wishing to indulge in quiet games among themselves. Meals are served at all hours,—supper being the specialty of the house,—and notwithstanding that no charge whatever is made for them, the cuisine and service are beyond reproach. It can truly be said of Cradlebaugh's, that it has all the cheerfulness of the hearth, the quiet of the sanctuary, mingled with the glare of irresistible recklessness.**

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It was to this establishment, then, that Challoner directed a cabby to take him after hours of unsuccessful attempts to borrow money from his friends—unsuccessful, because they had come to know his irresponsibility, and to realise that his obligations were not the obligations of his wife. The consequence was that man after man invented an excuse or refused him emphatically. And finally, in desperation, he had offered to sell the Mastodon. But the dealers knew who owned the car—one of the handsomest cars in town—and on Challoner disgustedly ordering his chauffeur home, a dealer more daring than the others had said to him with aggressive familiarity:—

"Get your wife's bill of sale, Challoner we'll buy it then, all right."

A spark of anger immediately lit up Challoner's eyes, resentment was deep down in his inmost soul; but his brain had been absinthiated for days, his sensibilities blunted, and indignities fell from him like the proverbial water from a duck's back. Nor was it solely with his mentalities that the dissipations of the last five years had played havoc: his face, his body, were unnaturally thin, and his glance had become fixed and strained. Nevertheless, over-indulgence had not grossened him, he was still good-looking, and there was an air about him that few men had. In all his recklessness, whenever he wanted money he had

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not forgotten that fact. It had always counted with Miriam—until now. It counted still with Miss Letty Love of the Frivolity!

There had been moments, it is true, when rushing madly about town for funds, that he had felt it would surely have been better for him if he had never gone to Cradlebaugh's; but then like a flash would come the thought that if he had not gone to Cradlebaugh's he would never have known Letty Love! And by no means had he arrived at the state where he could have wished that . . .

With the thought of Letty Love there came another indissolubly connected with it: Was Colonel Hargraves slowly undermining, ousting him out of her affections? Not without reason he argued that Colonel Hargraves had plenty of money, and the man with money was going to win out in the graces of the Frivolity actress! Challoner could see it, could feel it, and now in this crisis he could not raise a paltry thousand or two . . .

Suddenly a voice from overhead broke in upon his thoughts with:—

"Front entrance, sir?"

Challoner started. The query was pertinent, frequently important, sometimes vital. But in all the times that Challoner had driven to Cradlebaugh's, never until now had this question been put to him.

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The entrance on the street above, he was quite well aware, was for those whose livelihood supplied sufficient reason for preferring the more secret way, while the man-about-town,—such as he flattered himself that he still was,—the credential-bearing stranger, even those whose reputation might suffer, found that the arrangement of the main entrance furnished them with ample protection. Nevertheless, far from feazing him, Challoner felt that in some subtle way the question fitted in with his scheme of things. For a shadowy purpose was slowly forming in his mind—a purpose that required thought. His answer was of paramount importance, he must make no mistake . . .

"The rear—no," he quickly corrected, "the front entrance."

Before the main street door the driver pulled up his horse, and Challoner hurriedly walked—as one whose nose was straight and who followed his nose—into the whited sepulchre called Cradlebaugh's.

No one greeted Challoner as he passed into the main hall: it happened there was no one present at the table that he knew. In the old days it had been the custom of Cradlebaugh, the human spider, frankly to exhibit himself in the middle of his net, his grim smile and dry hand extended to each guest who came or went. But of late years—since he had shuffled off this mortal coil—there had been no one to make these obsequious

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greetings; for, though Cradlebaugh's still was Cradlebaugh's, its ownership remained a mystery. And whether it was a syndicate, an association, a reincarnated spirit, or a man, no one could tell. Of one thing, however, its patrons were certain: there was but one Cradlebaugh's!

For fully half an hour Challoner stood at the buffet, every now and then unsteadily tilting the decanter. And while this course of refreshment may have dulled his wits, it certainly strengthened his courage, for presently he said to himself:—

"I'll try him, yes, why not?"

And a moment later, still optimistic, he called a servant and asked:—

"Where is Pemmican?"

"Faro, sir."

Challoner ascended swiftly to the second floor, and paused at one room whose door was open.

"How long?" he inquired, thrusting in his head, by way of greeting to the group at the table.

Four of the men there did not glance up from their cards; hollow-eyed, cigars between their teeth, they were alive only to the hundredth chance that still eluded them. The fifth man, a railroad president, coatless, alone nodded to Challoner, and said sententiously:—

"Forty hours—for me."

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Half way down the corridor Challoner met Pemmican, head card-dealer of Cradlebaugh's, a man with a pasty face, a low brow and shifty eyes—a man who knew his business. This Pemmican seemed the all-and-all of Cradlebaugh's, apparently general factotum; but though he simulated the appearance of an owner, in reality he was a servile servant stamped with a dread of the pseudo-Cradlebaugh, of the man higher up. Nevertheless, whoever controlled the destinies of this gambling-house had chosen him wisely.

Challoner came at once to the point.

"Pemmican, I want some money—about—" and broke off abruptly, for the other was eyeing him coldly.

Instinctively Pemmican of the low brow knew that the game was up with Challoner; moreover, he saw that, although the man seemed sober, in reality he was very drunk. He walked away quickly, dismissing him with:—

"I'm sorry, sir, but it's against the rules. I can't——"

"What rot!" interrupted Challoner.

But by this time Pemmican had reached the end of the hall, leaving the other to gather what he could of his mumbled excuses.

In anything but an amiable mood, Challoner resumed his position at the buffet. Suddenly he was conscious

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of a light touch on the arm. Turning slowly, he found himself face to face again with Pemmican.

"Why don't you try Colonel Hargraves?" whispered the latter.

"What?" came from the clogged brain of Challoner.

"Try Hargraves," the other went on. "He's been down to Gravesend for two days; and he's back . . . "

Pemmican's meaning was lost on Challoner, for he merely exclaimed:—

"Well?"

Before answering, Pemmican of the low brow shrugged his shoulders and spread out his palms, then he said pointedly:—

"Only that he pulled out ten thousand on Flora McQueen—that's all!"

"What?" Challoner began to understand.

Pemmican nodded.

"Sure thing—ten thousand dollars!"

Slowly and deliberately Challoner refilled his glass to the brim. For a moment there was silence, then Pemmican repeated tantalisingly:—

"Ten thousand dollars—not a cent less!"

Challoner thought for a moment.

"How did you come out?" he asked, much to the other's surprise.

Pemmican shook his head.

"I lost a cool thousand because I did not back the

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mare. I played on Tigerskin. I've got to get that thousand back, somehow."

Challoner emptied his glass.

"Was Colonel Hargraves down there alone?" His voice was thick, hoarse.

"Where?" returned Pemmican, as if he had misunderstood.

"At Gravesend?"

Pemmican looked long and quizzically into Challoner's eyes.

"He was . . . not," was his simple but significant answer, and moved away.

But Challoner followed him up, and seizing his arm, said somewhat gruffly:—

"Look here, Pemmican, if Hargraves comes in—I want to see him—tell him to wait for me."

For the first time Pemmican's eyes lost their curious tiredness, an enigmatical smile played about the corners of his mouth.

"Yes," he said simply, and nodding, went his way.

Left alone, Challoner found himself a prey to all the black fiends of rage, jealousy and desire for revenge. For a time everything was blotted out from his vision except the face of Letty Love and the face of Colonel Hargraves. "This small world," he muttered to himself, "is much too small for me and Colonel Hargraves!" With that there loomed up out of the mists

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of his mind the brilliantly lighted and ornate entrance of a certain apartment-house a short distance away; and a few minutes later, obedient to his subconscious will, his feet carried him down the stairs to a door evidently leading to the outside. A few words of explanation from Challoner to the man on duty there were necessary before he would proceed to undo the complicated system of bolts; and then he passed out and was under the starry skies. Challoner was not the first man of social prominence in the community that could directly trace the beginning of his life as an outcast to passing through that door!

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## III

HIRAM EDGAR LOVE—so read a faded yellow card on the door-panel of Suite 10 in the "Drelincourt," an apartment hotel in a section of the city which has ever been popular with a class that has been well termed the "fringe of society." The name was not printed, not engraved, but written in ancient India ink in copper-plate perfection by the careful, cleanly, genteel Englishman that Hiram Edgar Love had been—Hiram Edgar Love, that long since had been laid to rest in a quiet Surrey churchyard leagues distant, though his name still did yeoman service, for it spelt respectability; it covered a multitude of peccadilloes; his soul went marching on! For was it not the shade of Hiram Edgar Love that had rented the Love suite in the "Drelincourt," his shade that paid the rent, his pipe and his slippers that lay near the fireplace for the world to see?—Hiram Edgar Love the myth, the constantly expected but never-coming master of the house!

Before the entrance of this suite Challoner came to a halt.

"I wonder if she's alone?" he mused, as with something like the palpitating deference of a stranger he pressed the button underneath the faded card and

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waited to learn his fate at the hands of the one woman in all the world for him. Nor was it by any means the first time that he had asked himself that question; all the way through the streets it had been in his mind every moment, and so absorbed was he with the thought, that he failed to see the familiar nod with which the diminutive god of the "Drelincourt" lift acknowledged his advent as he proceeded to carry upward his human freight.

"Same, sir, I suppose?" asked the boy.

Challoner made no answer; but leaving the car at the desired landing, he had turned to the right and directed his steps to the extreme end of the corridor.

It was a new experience to Challoner to wait among the shadows of the dimly lighted hall; hitherto his custom had been to let himself in, *sans* ceremony; but the apparently successful campaign of the racing Colonel had changed that—put him on a different footing.

"If *he's* there," he assured himself as he pressed the button again impatiently, "I'll know what to do, all right . . . "

But if Hargraves were not there! That was the contingency that sent a chill over him. He could deal with a man—but the woman! A woman who had never cared and who, he was only too well aware,

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would never even pretend to care for him unless he had the wherewithal with which to lure her back.

"If it were not for Hargraves—" he broke off abruptly, for the door had opened with such unexpected suddenness that it required not a little effort to pull himself together, and demand of the trim, little maid who stood there:—

"Your mistress—is she at home?"

"Miss Love is not at home, sir."

Challoner was not so sure about that; in a trice he was past her, going through room after room until he had covered the entire apartment; and she had barely recovered from the shock that his strange behaviour had given her than he was back again in the small, square hall, eyeing her suspiciously.

"I want to see your mistress."

"Miss Love is not in, sir," she told him, just as if he did not already know it.

"But you know where she went?" he asked meaningly.

"Indeed, sir, I do not," she replied, not at all disconcerted by his manner; and her eyes as they fixed their gaze on his were as steady as the lips that said: "She should be with her father, sir."

Challoner raged inwardly; he thought he detected a gleam of mockery in her eyes. Once more he plunged through the apartment, seeking some incriminating

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scrap of paper, some evidence that would betray his divinity's whereabouts. But after a few minutes he was back again, standing over the girl, menacingly.

"I want you to tell me where Letty is?" he said in a tone that told plainly that such lies were not for him; but it had little effect on the maid: long practice in fencing with Miss Love's admirers had made trickery her forte.

"You might try Atlantic City, sir," she suggested blandly; "it's quite possible that they went there."

At this, Challoner looked ugly, and seizing her roughly by the arm, he led her to her mistress' boudoir, where, pointing to a Verne-Martin cabinet that stood in a corner, he exclaimed:—

"Who put him there?"

For answer the girl shrugged her shoulders. She made no attempt to disengage herself from his grasp, merely watched Challoner as his gaze rested angrily on a plain gold frame in which was an unconventional half-length photograph—Colonel Richard Hargraves, his arms akimbo upon a table, his shoulders forward, his smug, full, self-satisfied face thrust into the face of the world—of Challoner.

Even on paper Hargraves's lazy eyes seemed to insult and tantalise him, and an insane desire to crush, batter and destroy this counterfeit presentment came over him. For an instant he had a vague sensation of

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suffocation, almost to choking, and releasing the girl, his hand sought his throat; it encountered a scarf-pin —a trifle that his wife had given him long ago. Tearing it quickly from his scarf, he extended it toward the maid.

"That may fetch the truth from her," he said to himself, and aloud: "Tell me where Letty is, and . . . no"—the girl was reaching for the jewel, but he held it from her—"no, tell me first," he added hoarsely, toying with the pin.

"Well, then, if you must know, sir," she stammered, "she went to Gravesend—the races, sir."

Challoner's mind received this information with a certain morbid exultation; and thrusting his face into hers and pointing with the pin to the portrait, he cried:—

"Then she *is* with him?"

The girl was silent; she was figuring the value of the pin. It was worth fifty dollars, she finally decided, and looking up at Challoner, admitted the truth with a nod.

The pin fell into her ready grasp.

When Challoner spoke again his voice was calm and steady.

"Sit down there." He motioned to a seat and he took the one opposite. "We'll wait until they come back —just wait."

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For minutes that seemed hours they sat facing each other, Challoner dogged but quiescent, the girl with a growing unrest upon her—a cat with a cornered mouse.

At last a buzzer sounded.

"Stay where you are!" Challoner commanded, as the girl made a movement to go. "If it's somebody else," he added quickly, still looking at her, but with a changed eye, "we don't care about them; they can go away."

Again the buzzer sounded.

"Has she a key?" he whispered.

"Yes," she answered, matching his tone.

"Has he?" persisted Challoner.

The girl held up her hand for reply: the jingling of keys in the outer hall, followed by the clink of metal in the lock, had reached their ears; then came the closing of the door, the click of high heels, the swish of skirts, the odour of violets, and then Letty Love, in all her pink and white loveliness, tall, supreme, her face flushed, her lips parted, her eyes sparkling, stood framed in the doorway. At the sight of the man and the girl sitting there like two culprits, she burst into laughter—a long peal of laughter that was her stock in trade, and which ran the gamut of her deep, contralto voice. And still neither the man nor the girl spoke, but continued to look ill at ease. To Miss

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Love the situation was amusing—too amusing for words.

"Inconstant!—Naughty Lawrence!" she exclaimed, leaving his name stranded in the air—a coquettish way she had in speaking—and pointing her tiny gloved finger at him: "Perhaps I interrupt?" And now turning to the girl: "Patricia, I didn't know you could be so interesting . . . "

The maid gasped with relief as she left the room in obedience to a dismissing wave of her mistress' hand.

"Well, why don't the rest of you come in?" Challoner growled, fastening his eyes on the woman.

Letty Love opened her blue eyes wide—eyes that could look the innocence of a child or the wisdom of the ages—and feigned not to understand. And then as if his meaning had dawned upon her, she said with a good-natured smile:—

"Oh—why, I'm alone!"

"It's a good thing you are," he told her pointedly.

At once a hardness crept into her voice, and she asked coldly:—

"For whom?" And for a moment she delayed pulling off her wraps.

"For the other man."

"Silly boy! How ridiculous you are!" she returned lightly, as she tossed her wraps over a chair and began to pull off her gloves.

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Challoner went over to the photograph, picked it up and wheeling round said threateningly:—

"Did you put *him* in that frame?"

"I did," she answered sweetly. "I'm very domestic, you know," and she smiled one of her most bewildering smiles; "I always arrange these little things myself."

"And what did you do with mine?"

Letty looked dubious. She touched a button, and to the maid who entered asked with mock anxiety:—

"Patricia, what did you do with the half-tone of this gentleman that I gave you?"

The maid regarded first one and then the other somewhat curiously.

"It's in my room, Madam."

"With the other notables?" And Letty Love lifted her eyebrows. "Patricia's room is quite a picture-gallery," she went on gaily. "You may investigate it, if you like—no?" And dismissing the maid, went over to the piano and began to strum the refrain of a popular song.

Challoner's lips emitted:—

"You—" They closed on a gasp of rage, disappointment, despair and impotent admiration. Had he dared, he would have gone on his knees to her then and there, taken her in his arms and kissed her; but the woman's indifference

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"'DID YOU PUT *HIM* IN THAT FRAME?'"

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appalled him, and instead he gritted his teeth, dug his nails into the palms of his hand. Then, for the first time, it dawned on him that she had worn for Hargraves the gown that he, Challoner, had selected for her—a gown white, immaculate, simple, which followed religiously the lines of the superb figure, that left nothing to be desired, of Letty Love, full-throated, full-bosomed, with her jet-black hair that gave no sign of fastening, with her blue eyes and dark eyebrows, with her milk-white flesh, which, artificial though it were, concealed nothing, revealed nothing but the loveliness of the woman.

The man's eyes shone with pride as he observed her finished appearance; for was it not he who had taught her to gown herself like that, showed her how to live, lifted her into the high places?

"And this is how she repays me!" he muttered to himself, and then aloud: "What's the matter with you, Letty—is it because my money has given out . . . "

This startled the woman into earnestness, and rising to her feet, she drew herself to her full height, and pointing to the door declared with an injured air:—

"No man can talk to me of money in this house!"

Challoner's face was a study, but he did not move.

"Especially when it's all gone!" he sneered, searching her countenance. Never until now had he realised the monumental, stupendous power of money.

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Now that he had none and the car of juggernaut was slowly crushing him, he could understand that he belonged in the ditch with the maimed, the lame, the dying. There was no necessity for a reply from Letty. The woman's face revealed the contempt with which she regarded him. What mattered it to her that the man had surrendered everything that was worth while in life, that he had sacrificed himself at her shrine! She was one who demanded the firstlings of the flock; he was nothing save carrion for daws to peck at. The fruit was devoured; of what value was the rind?

"You had better go," she said superciliously; "there is no need of coming any more."

In a sort of daze Challoner was shambling toward the door when the telephone-bell rang. Instantly it roused all the deviltry and cunning that had oozed from him the moment before. Seizing the receiver, he thrust it silently against his ear.

"Hello!" began the voice at the other end.

Challoner did not answer.

"Is that you, Letty?" the voice went on.

Still Challoner did not answer. Then, as the woman stepped forward, he handed the receiver to her, at the same time placing his left hand over the mouthpiece, and said:—

"It's Hargraves—tell him to come up, will you?"

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She shook her head.

Again the voice at the other end of the wire sounded, but she could not answer, for the thickness of Challoner's hand lay between her and communication. The suspense was unbearable—getting on her nerves. There was nothing to do but to comply with his wish; and upon her eyes suddenly yielding to his, he released the mouthpiece, standing on guard the while she obeyed him. Then he drove her, literally drove her into a far corner of the room.

"Now, let him come! We'll see . . . " he exclaimed, holding a revolver in his right hand; and as he stood there watching her as a tiger does a tigress, it was with a certain sense of gratification that he noted written across her face the altogether new sensation of fear, terror, and therefore respect for him. And he rejoiced in the knowledge that the hand that could no longer count out banknotes to her or sign cheques was a hand that held life and death within its grasp. Letty Love realised this, too, as she stood there cowed, trembling, listening, watching the door. Suddenly there flashed through her mind a way out of the situation, and smiling, she said lightly:—

"Oh, pshaw, Lawrence, the heavy is not your line! Come—suppose we have something to drink."

And without waiting for him to answer, she crossed the room and pressed the button there. Somewhat

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sheepishly Challoner slipped the revolver back into his pocket and dropped into a chair, while she ordered the maid to fetch some Bengal—a cordial, a distilled delight that had come down to her from a period so remote that the memory of man runneth not to the contrary. In his lifetime Hiram Edgar Love had possessed gallons of it; it had come to him in the night from the mysterious East, in the teeth of the revenue guns. And Challoner knowing it for the thing it was, his face flushed with the pleasure of anticipation. Letty took her place beside a small table, and presently a silver-topped, cut-glass decanter was in her hand, which she held over a glass, saying:—

"Will you help yourself or shall I . . . "

Challoner nodded.

"Go ahead—fill it for me, Letty."

Challoner drank—drank. He forgot Hargraves, forgot everything but the face of Letty Love, a kiss that he wanted, but that somehow he could not get, an utterance in a thick voice, a momentary hand-to-hand struggle, not with Hargraves, but with her, then, somehow, she eluded him and he was left alone—alone in the darkness that the Bengal had cast upon him!

But in all this there was no Hargraves.

* * * * *

A few hours later when he awoke, he was still sitting

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at the table, but he was alone. He rose hastily, even steadily, and scoured the other rooms; there was no one there. He looked for the Bengal; but that, too, had disappeared. All of a sudden the jewels that were on her dressing-table—jewels that he had given her—caught his attention, and for the moment the temptation was strong to take them for the money that was in them. But even his dull wits soon recognised the folly of such a proceeding, since it was for her that he needed the money, and somewhat reluctantly he put them back in their case, muttering to himself as he left the house:—

"Letty must believe in me—things are bound soon to come my way."

In a little while he was back again at Cradlebaugh's, wandering about the rooms looking for Pemmican. Finally he saw him coming out of one of the rooms and hailed him with:—

"Hargraves showed up yet?"

The unwholesome looking factotum shook his head; at the same time he noted that Challoner was in a different mood than when he had talked with him earlier in the evening. Pemmican wondered as he turned away; but then it was not given to him to know that Challoner's experience that night had served immeasurably to strengthen a desperate purpose. True, that the joy that had been Challoner's—"his by rights,"

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as he told himself—had been wrested away from him, for he was satisfied that Hargraves's absence from Cradlebaugh's meant that he was with Letty Love. But little by little the agony of jealousy was becoming a pleasurable sensation—a passion that obsessed him. So that far from brooding, he felt as feels the man of destiny: Whatever was to happen would happen. He would wait days, weeks, months, if necessary, for Hargraves.

A day rolled round. Night again at Cradlebaugh's, and Challoner still at his post of observation, waiting. It was past midnight when Colonel Hargraves finally appeared. Challoner felt his presence even before he stepped up to the buffet; and summoning to his aid all the suavity of manner that he possessed, for he knew he must be careful, as the other, doubtless, would be on his guard, he called out:—

"Colonel Hargraves!"

Hargraves turned quickly, and seeing it was Challoner, a flicker of a self-congratulatory smile broke over his large, round face, as he answered:—

"Why, hello, Challoner!"

The momentary gleam of triumph did not escape the other, and it required a supreme effort to force back the blood that was rushing to his temple.

"I want a word with you, Colonel!" And with a wave of the hand: "Room A—will that suit you?"

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Colonel Hargraves hesitated for a moment; he moved a bit to one side and stared hard; but the other bore his look of keen suspicion with perfect serenity. The Colonel shrugged his shoulders. Finally he said:—

"Oh, very well, Challoner—that suits me."

To Room A they went; Pemmican followed with decanters. Possibly he suspected, feared, realised that the air was charged with electricity. In any event Pemmican was in charge of Cradlebaugh's; it was for Pemmican to see and to know.

There was a table in Room A, with chairs about the table; and a stand against the wall. There were also two large, heavy leather lounging chairs with arms. Pemmican placed his burden upon the stand against the wall, lingered for an instant, and then went softly out. Neither of the men spoke until after he had left the room and closed the door. When each had seated himself at the table, Challoner got down to business.

"Hargraves," he began with sinister familiarity, "you have ten thousand dollars in your pocket, I believe?"

Colonel Hargraves repressed a movement of impatience with difficulty. He nodded, and unconsciously took the attitude of the counterfeit presentment in the apartment of Letty Love.

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"Ten thousand dollars," repeated Challoner with provoking coolness, as he likewise planted both elbows on the table, and added somewhat ominously: "And I'm broke!"

There was a pause in which the men looked straight into each other's eyes; then Challoner rose, walked over to the table, half filled two glasses, and placing them on the table, leaned far over it, declaring:—

"And yet, Colonel Hargraves, you and I are going to sit in a ten thousand dollar game to-night!"

Challoner drained his glass; his example, however, was not followed by the Colonel. Instead, he put his arms akimbo, his fists resting on his hips, and tilting back his head, he said with an air of contempt:—

"Indeed! What with?"

"With your ten thousand!" It was well said. Challoner's cool, passionless voice gave to the declaration the character of infallibility.

"And you—" Hargraves muttered in a puzzled way.

"Not a dollar," admitted Challoner.

Colonel Hargraves rose; he threw into his glance all his knowledge of Challoner's past.

"You must take me for a fool!" he burst out, and started for the door.

But he had gone only a few steps when he felt Challoner's clutch; turning, he felt the power of Chal-

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loner's eyes; and presently under their compelling influence he found himself once more taking his seat. He made no attempt to analyse his sensations, but he realised that Challoner had made a new impression. In all the eventualities he had foreseen, he calculated on Challoner's being a weakling, a wreck. But to his astonishment he saw within those eyes nothing but success. Challoner had become a man not to be disregarded—a man of strength.

"My proposition is a perfectly fair one," went on Challoner. "You put up ten thousand cash——"

"And then—go on——"

Challoner lifted his arm and pointed silently in the direction of the "Drelincourt."

Incredulity shone in the eyes of Hargraves; his scorn found vent in an attempt at levity.

"Rather like putting up something that doesn't belong to you, eh, Challoner?"

Challoner was not feazed; it was the answer he expected.

"It looks that way, Hargraves," and suddenly thrusting himself forward, "but I can make it uncommonly disagreeable for the other claimant. You don't know me—I'm an uncertain quantity—and women are blamed queer. If I win, I keep the ten thousand—and my chances."

"And if you don't win?" a bit breathlessly.

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"If you win," went on Challoner, "you keep your ten thousand, and—I'll quit without a murmur."

In the pause Hargraves thought hard—never in his life had he thought harder. The more he studied Challoner, the better he liked the proposition. The moment was fraught with something new and significant. In more ways than one he feared Challoner, for he was by no means certain of his own place in the woman's affections. And then in his mind there was one certainty—Hargraves knew that the game was already his; knew that Challoner, steady though he seemed, was unquestionably drunk. Never was victory more certain than at the present time.

"If I win," at last he said with great earnestness, "you will swear to leave me—you will leave *us* alone?"

Challoner nodded.

Hargraves seized his glass and extended it to bind the bargain. Challoner seized his, but found it empty. He left his seat and came back with it filled.

"It's a go!" he said, and pressed a button.

With the same sense of responsibility upon him, Pemmican responded; and on Challoner's order he went out and returned with ten new packs of cards, tossing them on the table with their wrappers unbroken.

"Cold hands," announced Challoner, "five hundred a throw."

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Hargraves pulled forth his roll of bills and placed it on the table; then, placing a hand on the arm of Challoner, he exclaimed vehemently, so that the other should not forget it:—

"It's understood now, Challoner, that if I win you're to leave us alone—sure?"

Pemmican left the room and closed the door behind him. Challoner smiled across the table, and a new, strange expression crossed his features that Hargraves did not, could not understand.

"Sure," repeated Challoner, placing the decanter upon the table. Then they started in to play.

* * * * *

Twenty minutes later Pemmican rushed pell-mell into Room A.

"There's a big row on," he said to himself; "a row over a lady and a game of cards."

And so it proved.

There was a row on between the men who occupied Room A, and but for the isolation of the room it was a row that might well have roused the house.

"You've lost, I tell you!" one of the men exclaimed; the other laughed boisterously, defiantly, victoriously.

"If I've lost, so have you!" he answered.

What followed happened in an instant and before Pemmican had been in Room A thirty seconds. For suddenly one of the men there had whipped from his

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coat-pocket a weapon that glinted in the white light; as suddenly he had taken aim, and then came a flash, a report, a cloud of smoke.

Pemmican looked on, speechless.

Presently one of the men crossed the room and sank into a chair in a dazed sort of fashion, his head lolling across the upholstered arm; while the other glanced about him for an instant, looked at Pemmican, looked at the figure lying on the chair, and then started suddenly toward the door.

Three minutes later Pemmican switched off the lights and plunged the room in darkness.

"A row over a lady," he murmured breathlessly, "a row over a lady and a game of cards."

At two o'clock that morning, Officer Keogh of the night squad, patrolling a dimly lighted thoroughfare in the rear of Cradlebaugh's, stumbled over an object lying in deep shadow.

"Good Lord! It's a man!" said Keogh, stooping down suddenly and as suddenly drawing back. He drew himself together, bent down again, felt cautiously about, wiped his hands and shuddered, and drew back once again, as he whispered to himself:—

"A dead man—shot to death!"

He rapped wildly with his night-stick—the wild, irregular tattoo that makes the slumberer rise suddenly in bed and tremble, and then crouch between the bed-

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clothes shivering—and pending the arrival of assistance he stooped once more and fumbled in the pockets of the dead man. Presently from the breast-pocket of the coat he drew forth a yellow pigskin wallet, and upon its corner in glaring gold, that even in the dim light glittered garishly, appeared the letters, "R. H."

In this wise the body of Colonel Richard Hargraves, man-about-town, was found lying in the gloom at two o'clock that morning.

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## IV

Officer Keogh, an hour later, under the white light of the desk lamps over at the —— Precinct, was telling his story to the desk-sergeant behind the rail. The desk-sergeant listened disinterestedly until he heard mentioned the name Cradlebaugh. At that juncture he held up his hand, placed a warning finger on his lips, nodded toward the drowsy doorman and toward two of the reserve squad in the room, and looking Keogh in the eyes, whispered:—

"Officer, speak low."

Keogh, taken aback for the moment, dropped his voice as he went on with his story. Once more the sergeant stopped him.

"The most important thing is just where the body was found. Be exact now, if possible; it's important."

Keogh went on to give a minute description, and wound up by saying:—

"The man was dragged, all right, after he was dead."

The desk-sergeant's eyes narrowed to pin points as he demanded:—

"In which direction?"

"To the west."

The desk-sergeant shook his head portentously, and observed:—

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"Looks for sure like this was pulled off in Cradlebaugh's."

"*That's* what *I've* been telling everybody," returned Keogh, the pride of proper diagnosis resting cheerfully upon him.

The desk-sergeant shot out his forefinger and exclaimed:—

"The least you have to say about the matter the better. This is not a case for you or for me, but for the captain in the morning."

The captain appeared unusually early in the morning with some half-dozen papers in his hand. Slapping the morning editions, scareheads, uppermost in front of the sergeant, he blurted out:—

"What's this here?"

The sergeant glanced at the topmost sheet and skimmed rapidly over the details.

"Don't know where they got the facts, but it looks like they got 'em *right*."

The captain scratched his head, then for the next few minutes he looked out of the window and watched the passing throng; he was pondering deeply. Finally he inquired:—

"What did you do?"

The desk-sergeant grinned.

"Not a bloomin' thing," he answered.

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The captain shot a glance of surprised approval at his inferior.

"For once, by gum," he conceded, "you hit the nail upon the head. This isn't a case for the police—not yet."

"Then for who?" The desk-sergeant looked dubious.

"For Peter Broderick," said the captain, nodding.

"What's Peter Broderick got to do with it?" inquired the desk-sergeant, still doubtful.

The captain seized the telephone, but paused to explain:—

"Peter Broderick has got everything to do with it, since the people put this blatherskite Murgatroyd into the prosecutor's office. You know as well as I do that there's been too many rumpuses in Cradlebaugh's—and Murgatroyd sent word from the court-house that the place would be closed up, cleaned out, if there was any more trouble there."

"And Broderick?" persisted the sergeant.

"Broderick gave me orders to be tipped off hard when anything happens to Cradlebaugh's—no matter what. And that," concluded the captain, "is enough for you and me; we've got to obey orders—see?"

He removed the receiver from its hook and was about to talk to Central, but changed his mind, hung

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up the receiver, wheeled round on the sergeant and asked:—

"Were you going home?"

The other stretched his arms and yawned.

"Yes. Why?"

The captain passed over two black cigars.

"Smoke 'em—they'll keep you awake. And say," he went on, placing his hand soothingly upon the other's arm, "you wouldn't mind looking up Chairman Peter Broderick, would you? It isn't everybody I can trust."

He seized a pad and wrote hastily for a moment, and finally handing the slip of paper to the sergeant, added:—

"First, try these four addresses. If he's not at any of these, then try his home; you'll be sure to find him there. But see him—don't take no for an answer, and after you have told him the whole story, get his orders—see?"

It took an hour and a half to locate Chairman Peter Broderick; the sergeant found him home—in his rooms on the ground floor of the Iroquois Club. He waited for some time before he could gain access to that estimable gentleman, for Peter Broderick's hour for rising was high noon. The boy who aroused him awakened a slumbering lion; the Iroquois Club cowered when Broderick woke up; others cowered, too.

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Broderick's word was law everywhere, and yet he wore no badge of authority, held no office—he did not even want one. He was higher than authority, stronger than civic force: he was power personified. He had attained that mystical position in the universe, known wherever men cast ballots as Chairman of the County Committee, which meant to owe no man a duty, but to demand servitude and fealty from every man. It meant more—it meant to hold the bag! It meant that whatever Peter Broderick wanted he got.

"Well!" roared Broderick to the sergeant; "what in thunder do you want?"

The desk-sergeant briefly set forth his credentials and authority, and then plunged boldly into the purpose of his presence.

"The captain wants to know what he's to do about this Hargraves murder?"

Broderick stared hard at him.

"Hargraves murder?" he repeated. "What Hargraves?"

The sergeant told him.

"Great Scott! So he's dead. Confound him! He bled me like thunder at draw the last time I met him!"

The sergeant went on to give him the facts; Broderick the while was thinking deeply. Finally he interrupted the other with the question:—

"Look here, sergeant, what was there to prevent

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Hargraves being shot down by a highwayman or a thug? Can you tell me that?"

"Officer Keogh says——"

"Hang Officer Keogh!" yelled Broderick. "Keogh is going to say nothing but what he's told to say. Look here—do you know who killed Hargraves?"

"No."

"Does anybody know?"

"Not yet."

"So far so good. Now, then, that's a dark street, isn't it? And other houses as well as Cradlebaugh's have an opening on that street, haven't they? I say that this thing wasn't pulled off inside of Cradlebaugh's; it was the work of an unknown assassin—a thug. Do you understand?" he declared emphatically.

"You want the captain to work it out on that theory! Isn't that it?"

"I don't want the captain to work it out on any theory!" yelled Broderick. "Let the captain sit still—do nothin'!—say nothin'! I'm doin' this thing—I'll work out all the necessary theories! Do you hear?"

"The captain told me to remind you that Prosecutor Murgatroyd——"

Broderick sprang to his feet and stood glowering over the sergeant.

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"Murgatroyd! Nobody has to remind me of Murgatroyd—confound him! I'm always being reminded of him. He's the only office-holder in this burgh that hasn't got the decency to know that what *I* say goes! Sergeant," he went on confidentially, "this is a blamed important thing, and before I do anything I'm going down-town to consult Mr. Graham Thorne. I'll bring him up to Cradlebaugh's; you tell your captain to meet us there in an hour and a half. That's all he's got to do—all you've got to do—I'll do the rest. Now go!"

Twenty minutes later Broderick waddled into the private office of Graham Thorne, Esquire, counsellor at law.

"Thorne," he exclaimed, lounging back comfortably in a chair, "have you seen about this thing? Do you know what happened *there* last night?"

Thorne smiled grimly and pointed to the pile of morning papers on his desk.

"I knew about it at six o'clock this morning. I've been waiting for you to turn up for the last four hours." There was a note of superiority in his voice, which, strange to say, Broderick in nowise resented.

Broderick ever since he had met Thorne, had felt an admiration for this tall, handsome, dignified young man, with the grey just commencing to creep in his hair. Thorne possessed all the qualities that go to

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make up a clever, astute counsellor at law. Of his antecedents, it is true, no one knew aught; he had merely arrived a few short years before, opened his big law office, stalked into the courts and out of them, into the clubs and out of them. It cannot be denied that he made his best impression upon laymen and not upon the lawyers, although even the members of the Bar conceded that Thorne had ability. That he earned a great deal of money was quite manifest, for he spent it with a free hand, if a trifle too ostentatiously. He was not a politician in any sense of the word, and yet unquestionably he had the air and the earmarks of the man who some day might become a statesman. He hobnobbed with the best people, knew everybody worth while, and everybody worth while knew him. Broderick felt that if fate could regenerate him he should like to be Thorne.

"Well," blurted out the politician, "what are you going to do about it?"

"What are *we* going to do about it?" asked the lawyer in turn.

"I can handle the police," Broderick affirmed.

"That goes without saying; but we're up against something more than the police."

"If Tom Martin or Sam Apgar was the prosecutor now," wailed Broderick, "we'd have no trouble. They used to come to me regularly for instructions——"

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Thorne rose slowly, paced the entire length of his long private office, treading noiselessly the thick, green carpet like a cat.

"But," he protested, "Martin isn't prosecutor, neither is Apgar. Murgatroyd is prosecutor, and——"

"Confound the man!" interrupted Broderick. "He's so straight that he leans over backwards. It was he who said six weeks ago that the Tweedale suicide was the last straw; that if another fracas occurred inside of Cradlebaugh's it would be good-bye to Cradlebaugh's. And now there's this blamed murder!"

Thorne looked Broderick in the eye for a moment and asked:—

"Do you know that this murder happened inside of Cradlebaugh's?"

"No; but I'm satisfied it did."

"Have you talked to Pemmican?"

Broderick stared in surprise.

"No; but haven't you?"

Thorne shook his head.

"You forget that I waited here for you. Now that you're here, my idea is to see Pemmican and get the facts."

"The captain of the —— Precinct will be there," explained Broderick. "He understands that you're counsel for Cradlebaugh's—see?"

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"Come on," repeated Thorne; "we'll go and see Pemmican."

Broderick remained seated. Presently he said hesitatingly:—

"Just a second, counsellor—I wish you'd draw a cheque for five for me."

"Dollars?"

"No."

"Hundreds?"

"No."

"Five thousand!" Thorne whistled. "Coming it just a bit strong, Broderick."

Broderick vigorously shook his head.

"Now, look here, Thorne, I've got no complaint to make of you, and you've got no complaint to make of me. You've paid me well, but you've had blamed good returns for it, haven't you? Come now!"

"Yes," admitted Thorne. "But——"

"No buts," interrupted Broderick. "This is a crisis."

Thorne drew down the corners of his mouth.

"Do you think that I don't know it's a crisis?" He went back to his desk, drew forth a cheque-book and wrote a cheque. Before passing it over to Broderick, he looked him squarely in the eye, and added:—

"Peter, I've always paid you by cheque and taken your receipt."

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"Sure!" returned Broderick. "I'm no office-holder. You could publish it in the newspapers; nobody could find fault."

"The point is," continued Thorne, referring to a memorandum, "that I've passed over to you a sight of money."

"And you got a sight of influence in return," retorted Broderick.

Thorne passed over the five thousand dollar cheque, seized Broderick by the arm, marched him out, then he began to relieve his mind.

"Broderick, I want more influence. I've got a pet scheme, a great ambition that is overweening, overwhelming. It won't down; it owns me body and soul." He paused a moment before finally coming to the point. "I want some day to sit in the Senate of the United States."

"Phew!" whistled Broderick. "Nothing stingy about you!"

"I shall want every iota of your influence," Thorne went on; "I shall need it. And, Peter, I want to know whether I'm going to have it. I want to know that *now*."

Broderick stopped him in the middle of the sidewalk and shook him by the hand.

"Thorne," he exclaimed, "there isn't a man I'd rather send to the United States Senate than you! I mean it;

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there's my hand on it." And pushing Thorne into the waiting taxicab he commanded the driver to take them to Cradlebaugh's back entrance.

"Quick as you can!" he added, as they drove off.

Once in Cradlebaugh's, the domineering influence of Broderick again asserted itself.

"Where's Pemmican?" he inquired gruffly; and without waiting for an answer: "send him along right away!"

The liveried man who did his bidding bowed a bit familiarly to him, but very deferentially to Thorne. The latter he knew as a patron of the place, but one who did not play.

Almost instantly Pemmican came. His face was haggard, pale, his eyes heavy with sleeplessness, and upon him generally was the air of a man who had passed through some nightmare that with the dawn had turned out to be hideously true. He took them at once to the private room where the captain of police was waiting.

"Captain," said Broderick, "this is my counsel. He's a rattler for advice when a man's in a tight hole, and I thought I'd just fetch him along. Captain Whally —Counsellor Thorne." And turning at once upon Pemmican, Broderick proceeded to interrogate him.

"Now just where did this thing happen?"

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Pemmican looked at the captain, at Broderick and then at Thorne before answering. Then he said:—

"Room A."

"Then it *was* pulled off in here?"

"Yes."

"And how did he get out there on the street?"

Pemmican rubbed his hands together, looking first to Thorne and then to the captain for approval.

"I dragged him out."

"Good work!" was Broderick's brief comment.

"Who did this thing?" asked Thorne.

Pemmican gulped. After a second he answered:—

"Challoner."

"Laurie Challoner? You don't say!" ejaculated Broderick. That was all the surprise manifested. Challoner's proclivities were too well known to everybody in the room; besides, Cradlebaugh's was always expecting the unexpected to happen.

"Challoner," exclaimed Thorne with a show of satisfaction, "is a client of mine!"

Broderick's eyes brightened.

"Great! That simplifies matters. You'll defend him?"

"I shall," admitted Thorne, "if he be apprehended."

"But we must fix it so that he won't be," remarked Broderick.

"Or, if apprehended," continued Thorne, "so that he

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won't be brought to trial." And turning again to Pemmican: "Where is Challoner?"

Pemmican spread his hands apart, shrugged his shoulders and finally answered:—

"Gone—nobody knows where."

Just then the telephone bell rang. Pemmican answered it, listened for an instant and then resigned the receiver as he called:—

"Captain, it's for you."

The captain with some trepidation seized the instrument, and talked in low tones while the rest remained silent. Finally he hung up the receiver and announced:—

"It's my office. Murgatroyd is there now." The captain looked worried as he declared: "He wants to talk to me."

"Let him wait!" Broderick blustered out. Nevertheless a shadowy gloom settled down upon them all. Thorne was the first to break the silence.

"If Murgatroyd drags Cradlebaugh's into this murder case there'll be the devil to pay."

"He's got to keep it out," insisted Broderick. "Confound it! If he drags Cradlebaugh's into it, he'll drag into it his own organisation! He doesn't know the men who are behind it—its party affiliations, its patrons. If he makes this case a handle for his confounded investigations—well——"

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"He will!" interrupted the captain of police. "See if he don't . . . "

"What if he does?" protested Broderick. "There isn't a grand jury ever been picked that would indict Cradlebaugh's! And there you are!"

"So long as public opinion don't get to work," ventured the captain.

Broderick started.

"You've hit the nail upon the head, captain," he assented, as he smote the table with his clenched fist. "That's why I'm worried. If public opinion gets to work, why say, it will——"

"Keep cool now, keep cool," counselled Thorne. "I'll see Murgatroyd," he went on; "this is the time of all times that he's got to do what we tell him to do; and if he don't—we'll break him on the wheel!"

Thorne smiled and jerked his head toward Pemmican.

"We even have the sole witness to this tragedy in the hollow of our hands."

There was a gentle tap on the door. Pemmican opened it and held a whispered conversation with one of the attendants of the house. Then he came back into the room and looking at the captain, he said:—

"They say downstairs that two of the prosecutor's men were seen leaving the 'Elevated' a few minutes ago, and that they were working their way over to the West."

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"Jumpin' Jerusalem!" exclaimed the captain, leaping to his feet. "They're coming here. That ends me—I'm off!" He caught up his cap and disappeared.

Pemmican once more locked the door; then Broderick resumed the conversation.

"By George, that's so!" he said to Thorne. "Pemmican is *the* witness; we can keep him muzzled."

Pemmican edged forward from his position near the wall. Advancing to the table he placed both hands upon it and looked at the two men belligerently.

"But you won't keep me muzzled!" he exclaimed.

Broderick gasped:

"W—what?"

Pemmican drew himself together. Hitherto his attitude had been one of fearful deference toward Thorne; now he was defiant.

"You can't keep me muzzled!" he repeated.

Broderick took a long breath and rose as though to throttle Pemmican. Thorne waved him to his seat.

"Pemmican," said Thorne, "you need some sleep."

"I don't need sleep nor coaching either," retorted Pemmican. "I'm going to tell the truth about this murder."

"Well," said Broderick soothingly; "you've told it—to us."

Thorne fastened Pemmican with his cold, penetrating

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glance of displeasure. Pemmican shivered, but was game.

"This murder," Pemmican maintained desperately, "was committed by Challoner in Room A of this gambling house! I don't care if the house does pay me my salary, I don't care if I am in charge here, the house can't make me lie!" He paused for a moment and then went on:—

"This killing followed a row over a game of cards. I heard the row; I saw the shooting; and it's up to me to lay my cards down on the table. I'll give up what I know!"

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" said Thorne threateningly.

"I'll do nothing else!" retorted Pemmican hotly.

"If Murgatroyd comes here," suggested Broderick, "or sends for you, you keep mum—do you understand? That's your game! We'll take care of you the same as we are going to take care of the captain. He's true blue; and you've got to be true blue." And pointing toward Thorne, he added:—

"There's Thorne—he's your counsel, too. You do as he says, and he'll take care of you."

"I can take care of myself," returned Pemmican, doggedly, "and I'm going to do it. I'm going to tell the truth about this thing to Murgatroyd!"

There was another knock upon the door—a short,

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sharp, curt, commanding knock. Pemmican sprang to the door, unlocked it and threw it open.

Three men entered: One was Mixley; another McGrath—both detectives in the employ of the prosecutor's office in the court-house; and the third man was William Murgatroyd, the newly elected prosecutor of the pleas.

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## V

THE yellow light of the early June afternoon grew softer as it sank into, and was absorbed by, the deepening dusk; but to Miriam Challoner, propped up with red silk cushions in a strange attitude of expectancy, these things had ceased to matter; for out of her life a living presence had gone, leaving a void more harsh than death. For weeks now she had patiently waited, her ear strained at every sound, trying to associate it somehow with her husband's return; the servants seemed to tread on tiptoe, as they went about their duties; the house was curiously hushed as though listening, always listening.

The room that she was in was beautifully proportioned and panelled in dull red; there were numerous divans well furnished with cushions and upholstered in the same hue as the walls; and as her eyes wandered over its rare pictures, bronzes and costly knick-knacks, she was reminded of the early days of her married life, when it had been her purpose to make this—Lawrence's room—as attractive and pleasing to him as money could make it. Fate, indeed, had played havoc with their lives; nothing was left but the memory of the happiness that once had been hers.

"Oh, why doesn't he come!" she cried, an agony of

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despair in her voice, and began to pace the room in nervous agitation.

At that moment a man noiselessly entered the room. She did not hear him until, suddenly looking round, she saw Stevens, the butler, advancing respectfully toward her. For an instant it startled her; disappointment and embarrassment struggled within her; finally she asked somewhat fretfully:—

"What are you doing here, Stevens—I did not ring —I——"

Stevens held the silver salver before her, on which were several letters. Taking them apathetically from him, she sank back limp among the cushions, her nerves on edge as she proceeded to scan each in turn. There were nine in all—the last of which she quickly tore open as the sole missive fraught with possibility. But she was doomed to disappointment; and handing them back to him, she told him to put them on the desk.

The man complied, and then stood quietly at attention.

"And, Stevens," she added falteringly, "send Foster to me at once."

Stevens turned on the instant and found Foster in a passage-way, shuddering.

"What's the matter with you?" he whispered, at the same time placing his arm about her.

"What are you doing?" exclaimed Foster with in-

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dignation, but made no attempt to release herself from his embrace. "Don't you hear the newsboys? What are they saying?" she went on, nestling closer to him. "Listen!"

They did not have long to wait, for just then the hoarse, raucous voices of the newsboys calling early specials reached their ears; but such words as were at first distinguishable seemed of no importance to them. Then like a bolt from the blue rang out the words:

CHALLONER

CAUGHT IN CHICAGO!

"They've caught him!" the maid almost shrieked, pushing Stevens violently away from her; and starting in obedience to her mistress' commands, she added sympathetically:—

"I hope she hasn't heard——"

And as fortune would have it Mrs. Challoner had not heard, but went on to inform the maid that she was going to her room to lie down for a while, ending with:—

"There are some things which I wish you to attend to first, Foster."

On reaching her room, however, Mrs. Challoner abandoned her intention to lie down; apparently calm and collected, she took a seat near the light and started

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mentally to place her house once more in order. Item after item she checked off from her memorandum upon her household pad until at last, with her finger upon one hasty entry, she looked up and said:—

"Foster, ask Stevens if the stone masons have finished patching up the cellar wall; and then you may fetch me those letters I left on Mr. Challoner's desk."

Meanwhile, the French window looking on the rear porch in Challoner's room slowly opened, and a man quickly but stealthily entered, directed his steps to the table-desk, switched on the green-shaded light there, picked up several letters and proceeded to scan each carefully in turn—just as Mrs. Challoner had done a few moments previous. Suddenly the sound of footsteps reached his ears, and with the same movement that characterised his entrance he retreated to the balcony and disappeared, leaving the French window open behind him. The night was cool, there was a strong breeze from the east, and the chill, spring air poured into the room.

When Foster came into the room a little while later, she saw at once that the green-shaded light on the table-desk had been switched on, and that the letters that her mistress sent for were not there. Then all of a sudden she noticed that the window was open and there was a general air of mystery about the room. She fled into the hall and called:—

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"Stevens! Stevens!"

Stevens, who dogged the maid's footsteps and who was generally to be found in her vicinity, was soon on the scene.

"See! The window's open!" she whispered tremblingly.

Stevens shook his head.

"I locked it myself," he said, going over to it to examine the lock.

"It has been forced," he informed her, and beckoned to her to come and look at it.

With the gloom which the newsboys' cry had cast over them, the sight of the broken fastening filled them with horror.

"Who did it?" wailed Foster.

Stevens stepped out upon the porch; there was no one there. He glanced into the restricted space below; he saw nothing, heard nothing. So he stepped back into the room and closed the window, and looked at Foster with significance. Finally he answered:—

"One of those stone masons must have done it. He looked queer, acted queer; that is, to me."

Foster caught him by the arm.

"Could he have anything to do—with the case?" she gulped.

Stevens pointed hastily about the room at various objects of value easily appropriated.

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"Just like as not," he answered. "If it was a thief, he'd have taken that an' that an' that——"

"Isn't it terrible!" gasped Foster; "and isn't it shivery and cold!" She seized a match, crossed over to the fireplace and lit the fire.

"What's that?" she started suddenly.

There was an almost unheard tinkle of an altogether unseen bell; and before its sound died away Stevens had stolen from the room and plunged almost headlong down the stairs. Foster quickly followed him to the door, where she encountered Mrs. Challoner coming down the hall.

"I thought I heard the door-bell just now?" she asked; for while oblivious to the noises of the street, there was little that occurred indoors these days that escaped her notice.

"Yes, ma'am," Foster stammered; "Stevens is answering it."

One glance at the maid's face, however, had sufficed to convince her mistress that something had happened; and for a moment it took all the courage she could summon to her aid to keep her from breaking down completely.

"What is it? Speak!" she exclaimed in a tremulous voice; and then without waiting for an answer, for the sound of voices in the hall below reached her ears: "If that's somebody to see me, I don't want to see them—

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I don't want to see anybody—I can't see anybody—I won't! . . . " she ended almost hysterically; and gathering her trailing skirts in her hands, she fled to her room.

But no sooner had she reached the door than Shirley Bloodgood followed on her heels.

"It's I, Miriam," she began; "and how are you, dear?" And without further ceremony she pulled off her gloves, tossed off her hat and planted herself in a chair.

"I just simply couldn't stay away from you any longer," she declared. "I know you don't want me here, but I can't leave you."

Miriam Challoner sank weakly at a table and covered her face with her hands. Alone with the servants, she had borne up, but in the presence of the strong, sympathetic girl, Mrs. Challoner's courage vanished. Finally she leaned toward her visitor, and asked, a world of pathos in the question:—

"Is—is there any news outside?"

Shirley glanced at the fire sputtering in the grate; she hesitated imperceptibly, then she answered:—

"None—I—I haven't seen the papers—no, there's nothing new."

Mrs. Challoner rose, staggered across the room to the girl and threw her arms about her.

"Shirley, Shirley, I'd have gone mad, I think, if you

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hadn't come!" she cried, and fell to sobbing; but after a moment she straightened up again. There was a defiant look in her face now, a tremor in the voice that said: "I don't care what he's done—I want Laurie to come back, do you understand? I want him back—I want him . . . "

Shirley Bloodgood bit her lips.

"I know, I know, Miriam—I do understand——"

"Oh, but you can't understand," she persisted; "you haven't a husband and you don't know . . . "

"Yes, yes, Miriam, I know," were the only words that rose to the girl's lips to comfort her, for at that moment the faint sound of the insistent door-bell broke in upon them.

Mrs. Challoner's slight frame shook with sudden agitation as she exclaimed:—

"That door-bell will drive me crazy!" And almost instantly recovering her composure she gasped:—

"If it should be Laurie!"

The girl glanced at the smouldering fire in the grate, where to her excited fancy in all their hideousness rose before her the headlines she had read in the evening papers: "Challoner Caught In Chicago!"

"It isn't Laurie," Miriam went on; "no, of course not; but whoever it is, Shirley, you must see them for me—unless it should be —" she faltered. "Then come

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back, but don't leave me to-night—you'll stay, won't you?"

"Yes," the girl assured her. "But you must promise me that you'll rest for a little while—there—on that sofa. Then we'll have a bite together, and——"

Without a word Miriam Challoner went over to the sofa, and soon gave way to the first sleep she had had in many days.

"How are we ever going to break the news to her," sighed Shirley, as she noiselessly crept from the room. Just ouside of the door she encountered Stevens, and quickly placing her finger on her lips, she motioned him to be silent. When they were well out of hearing he announced in a confidential tone:—

"Mr. Murgatroyd, Miss Bloodgood."

"Mr. Murgatroyd! William Murgatroyd? What does he want, Stevens?" She was plainly excited.

"Sh-h-h!" warned Stevens gently; "he's the prosecutor of the pleas."

"Oh, then it *is* Mr. William Murgatroyd. But what does he want?"

Stevens shook his head, for they were now well in hearing. The next moment Shirley Bloodgood had entered the drawing-room and stood gazing into the face of William Murgatroyd.

For an instant the man started back; he could not believe his own eyes.

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"Shirley Bloodgood!" The name fell incredulously from his lips. "You here?"

Shirley held out her hand.

"And you—what are you doing here?" she asked quickly. "I didn't know that you were a friend of the family?"

Tall, well-built, with a smooth-shaven face, a square chin and a nose that stood well out into the air, Murgatroyd was a man who appeared to be without enthusiasm; but although sharp and business-like, his manner was easy. Turning to Shirley, he came to the point at once.

"I want to see Mrs. Challoner," he announced. "But I'm glad you're here, for I don't know her very well, and——"

"You can't very well see her now," Shirley interrupted, shaking her head. "She's frightfully unstrung—she's ill. You know it's almost three weeks now since Laurie first went away, and——"

"I know," he broke in just a bit impatiently.

"What?" Shirley gasped, the truth at last dawning upon her; "you don't mean to say that you're here in —in your official capacity?"

Murgatroyd smiled grimly.

"It's the only capacity in which I'm likely to be here, Shirley," he reminded her.

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"But," she protested, "I thought they left these things to——"

"The police," he finished; and again smiled grimly. "They do, but there are reasons— You see," he went on to explain, "since I was appointed prosecutor of the pleas, I've turned up a thing or two in the Police Department, and, well, the Police Department and I are somewhat out of tune. This case they have put up to me and my men——"

"Surely you can't mean to imply that you have to do this kind of thing yourself?" The girl looked askance.

Murgatroyd raised his eyebrows.

"Yes, it's up to me . . . "

Shirley shifted her position. She didn't like Murgatroyd in this new rôle, and yet there was something in the grim determination of the man that pleased her.

"I am sorry to remind you," he went on, the full responsibility of his office upon him, "that I am here to see Mrs. Challoner; to find out where Challoner is; to persuade her to persuade him to come back." Murgatroyd chopped out the sentences as though he were a machine.

"Then he wasn't caught in Chicago!" Shirley exclaimed almost jubilantly; and then touching him on the arm a bit familiarly, she added:—

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