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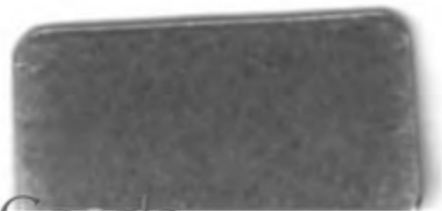

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LOVE INSURANCE

By

EARL DERR BIGGERS

Author of

SEVEN KEYS TO BALDPATE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

FRANK SNAPP

INDIANAPOLIS
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY
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CHAPTER I

A SPORTING PROPOSITION

OUTSIDE a gilt-lettered door on the seventeenth floor of a New York office building, a tall young man in a fur-lined coat stood shivering.

Why did he shiver in that coat? He shivered because he was fussed, poor chap. Because he was rattled, from the soles of his custom-made boots to the apex of his Piccadilly hat. A painful, palpitating spectacle, he stood.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the door, the business of the American branch of that famous marine insurance firm, Lloyds, of London—usually termed in magazine articles "The Greatest Gambling Institution in the World"—went on oblivious to the shiverer who approached.

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The shiverer, with a nervous movement, shifted his walking-stick to his left hand, and laid his right on the door-knob. Though he is not at his best, let us take a look at him. Tall, as has been noted, perfectly garbed after London's taste, mild and blue as to eye, blond as to hair. A handsome, if somewhat weak face. Very distinguished — even aristocratic — in appearance. Perhaps—the thrill for us democrats here!—of the nobility. And at this moment sadly in need of a generous dose of that courage that abounds—see any book of familiar quotations—on the playing fields of Eton.

Utterly destitute of the Eton or any other brand, he pushed open the door. The click of two dozen American typewriters smote upon his hearing. An office boy of the dominant New York race demanded in loud indiscreet tones his business there.

"My business," said the tall young man weakly, "is with Lloyds, of London."

The boy wandered off down that stenographer-bordered lane. In a moment he was back.

"Mr. Thacker'll see you," he announced.

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He followed the boy, did the tall young man. His courage began to return. Why not? One of his ancestors, graduate of those playing fields, had fought at Waterloo.

Mr. Thacker sat in plump and genial prosperity before a polished flat-top desk. Opposite him, at a desk equally polished, sat an even more polished young American of capable bearing. For an embarrassed moment the tall youth in fur stood looking from one to the other. Then Mr. Thacker spoke:

"You have business with Lloyds?"

The tall young man blushed.

"I—I hope to ħave—yes." There was in his speech that faint suggestion of a lisp that marks many of the well-born of his race. Perhaps it is the golden spoon in their mouths interfering a bit with their diction.

"What can we do for you?" Mr. Thacker was cold and matter-of-fact, like a card index. Steadily through each week he grew more businesslike —and this was Saturday morning.

The visitor performed a shaky but remarkable juggling feat with his walking-stick.

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"I—well—I—" he stammered.

Oh, come, come, thought Mr. Thacker impatiently.

"Well," said the tall young man desperately, "perhaps it would be best for me to make myself known at once. I am Allan, Lord Harrowby, son and heir of James Nelson Harrowby, Earl of Raybrook. And I—I have come here—"

The younger of the Americans spoke, in more kindly fashion:

"You have a proposition to make to Lloyds?"

"Exactly," said Lord Harrowby, and sank with a sigh of relief into a chair, as though that concluded his portion of the entertainment.

"Let's hear it," boomed the relentless Thacker.

Lord Harrowby writhed in his chair.

"I am sure you will pardon me," he said, "if I preface my—er—proposition with the statement that it is utterly—fantastic. And if I add also that it should be known to the fewest possible number."

Mr. Thacker waved his hand across the gleaming surfaces of two desks.

"This is my assistant manager, Mr. Richard

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Minot," he announced. "Mr. Minot, you must know, is in on all the secrets of the firm. Now, let's have it."

"I am right, am I not," his lordship continued, "in the assumption that Lloyds frequently takes rather unusual risks?"

"Lloyds," answered Mr. Thacker, "is chiefly concerned with the fortunes of those who go down to—and sometimes down into—the sea in ships. However, there are a number of non-marine underwriters connected with Lloyds, and these men have been known to risk their money on pretty giddy chances. It's all done in the name of Lloyds, though the firm is not financially responsible."

Lord Harrowby got quickly to his feet.

"Then it would be better," he said, relieved, "for me to take my proposition to one of these non-marine underwriters."

Mr. Thacker frowned. Curiosity agitated his bosom.

"You'd have to go to London to do that," he remarked. "Better give us an inkling of what's on your mind."

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His lordship tapped uneasily at the base of Mr. Thacker's desk with his stick.

"If you will pardon me—I'd rather not," he said.

"Oh, very well," sighed Mr. Thacker.

"How about Owen Jephson?" asked Mr. Minot suddenly.

Overjoyed, Mr. Thacker started up.

"By gad—I forgot about Jephson. Sails at one o'clock, doesn't he?" He turned to Lord Harrowby. "The very man—and in New York, too. Jephson would insure T. Roosevelt against another cup of coffee."

"Am I to understand," asked Harrowby, "that Jephson is the man for me to see?"

"Exactly," beamed Mr. Thacker. "I'll have him here in fifteen minutes. Richard, will you please call up his hotel?" And as Mr. Minot reached for the telephone, Mr. Thacker added pleadingly: "Of course, I don't know the nature of your proposition—"

"No," agreed Lord Harrowby politely.

Discouraged, Mr. Thacker gave up.

"However, Jephson seems to have a gambling

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streak in him that odd risks appeal to," he went on. "Of course, he's scientific. All Lloyds' risks are scientifically investigated. But—occasionally—well, Jephson insured Sir Christopher Conway, K. C. B., against the arrival of twins in his family. Perhaps you recall the litigation that resulted when triplets put in their appearance?"

"I'm sorry to say I do not," said Lord Harrowby.

Mr. Minot set down the telephone. "Owen Jephson is on his way here in a taxi," he announced.

"Good old Jephson," mused Mr. Thacker, reminiscent. "Why, some of the man's risks are famous. Take that shopkeeper in the Strand—every day at noon the shadow of Nelson's Monument in Trafalgar Square falls across his door. Twenty years ago he got to worrying for fear the statue would fall some day and smash his shop. And every year since he has taken out a policy with Jephson, insuring him against that dreadful contingency."

"I seem to have heard of that," admitted Harrowby, with the ghost of a smile.

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"You must have. Only recently Jephson wrote a policy for the Dowager Duchess of Tremayne, insuring her against the unhappy event of a rainstorm spoiling the garden party she is shortly to give at her Italian villa. I understand a small fortune is involved. Then there is Courtney Giles, leading man at the West End Road Theater. He fears obesity. Jephson has insured him. Should he become too plump for Romeo roles, Lloyds—or rather Jephson—will owe him a large sum of money."

"I am encouraged to hope," remarked Lord Harrowby, "that Mr. Jephson will listen to my proposition."

"No doubt he will," replied Mr. Thacker. "I can't say definitely. Now, if I knew the nature—"

But when Mr. Jephson walked into the office fifteen minutes later Mr. Thacker was still lamentably ignorant of the nature of his titled visitor's business. Mr. Jephson was a small wiry man, crowned by a vast acreage of bald head, and with the immobile countenance sometimes

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lovingly known as a "poker face." One felt he could watch the rain pour in torrents on the dowager duchess, Courtney Giles' waist expand visibly before his eyes, the statue of Nelson totter and fall on his shopkeeper, and never move a muscle of that face.

"I am delighted to meet your lordship," said he to Harrowby. "Knew your father, the earl, very well at one time. Had business dealings with him—often. A man after my own heart. Always ready to take a risk. I trust you left him well?"

"Quite, thank you," Lord Harrowby answered. "Although he will insist on playing polo. At his age—eighty-two—it is a dangerous sport."

Mr. Jephson smiled.

"Still taking chances," he said. "A splendid old gentleman. I understand that you, Lord Harrowby, have a proposition to make to me as an underwriter in Lloyds."

They sat down. Alas, if Mr. Burke, who compiled the well-known *Peerage*, could have seen Lord Harrowby then, what distress would have

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been his! For a most unlordly flush again mantled that British cheek. A nobleman was supremely rattled.

"I will try and explain," said his lordship, gulping a plebeian gulp. "My affairs have been for some time in rather a chaotic state. Idleness —the life of the town—you gentlemen will understand. Naturally, it has been suggested to me that I exchange my name and title for the millions of some American heiress. I have always violently objected to any such plan. I—I couldn't quite bring myself to do any such low trick as that. And then—a few months ago on the Continent—I met a girl—"

He paused.

"I'm not a clever chap—really," he went on. "I'm afraid I can not describe her to you. Spirited —charming—" He looked toward the youngest of the trio. "You, at least, understand," he finished.

Mr. Minot leaned back in his chair and smiled a most engaging smile.

"Perfectly," he said.

"Thank you," went on Lord Harrowby in all

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seriousness. "It was only incidental—quite irrelevant—that this young woman happened to be very wealthy. I fell desperately in love. I am still in that—er—pleasing state. The young lady's name, gentlemen, is Cynthia Meyrick. She is the daughter of Spencer Meyrick, whose fortune has, I believe, been accumulated in oil."

Mr. Thacker's eyebrows rose respectfully.

"A week from next Tuesday," said Lord Harrowby solemnly, "at San Marco, on the east coast of Florida, this young woman and I are to be married."

"And what," asked Owen Jephson, "is your proposition?"

Lord Harrowby shifted nervously in his chair.

"I say we are to be married," he continued. "But are we? That is the nightmare that haunts me. A slip. My—er—creditors coming down on me. And far more important, the dreadful agony of losing the dearest woman in the world."

"What could happen?" Mr. Jephson wanted to know.

"Did I say the young woman was vivacious?" inquired Lord Harrowby. "She is. A thousand

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girls in one. Some untoward happening, and she might change her mind—in a flash."

Silence within the room; outside the roar of New York and the clatter of the inevitable riveting machine making its points relentlessly.

"That," said Lord Harrowby slowly, "is what I wish you to insure me against, Mr. Jephson."

"You mean—"

"I mean the awful possibility of Miss Cynthia Meyrick's changing her mind."

Again silence, save for the riveting machine outside. And three men looking unbelievingly at one another.

"Of course," his lordship went on hastily, "it is understood that I personally am very eager for this wedding to take place. It is understood that in the interval before the ceremony I shall do all in my power to keep Miss Meyrick to her present intention. Should the marriage be abandoned because of any act of mine, I would be ready to forfeit all claims on Lloyds."

Mr. Thacker recovered his breath and his voice at one and the same time.

"Preposterous," he snorted. "Begging your

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lordship's pardon, you can not expect hard-headed business men to listen seriously to any such proposition as that. Tushery, sir, tushery! Speaking as the American representative of Lloyds—"

"One moment," interrupted Mr. Jephson. In his eyes shone a queer light—a light such as one might expect to find in the eyes of Peter Pan, the boy who never grew up. "One moment, please. What sum had you in mind, Lord Harrowby?"

"Well—say one hundred thousand pounds," suggested his lordship. "I realize that my proposition is fantastic. I really admitted as much. But—"

"One hundred thousand pounds." Mr. Jephson repeated it thoughtfully. "I should have to charge your lordship a rather high rate. As high as ten per cent."

Lord Harrowby seemed to be in the throes of mental arithmetic.

"I am afraid," he said finally, "I could not afford one hundred thousand at that rate. But I could afford—seventy-five thousand. Would that be satisfactory, Mr. Jephson?"

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"Jephson," cried Mr. Thacker wildly. "Are you mad? Do you realize—"

"I realize everything, Thacker," said Jephson calmly. "I have your lordship's word that the young lady is at present determined on this alliance? And that you will do all in your power to keep her to her intention?"

"You have my word," said Lord Harrowby. "If you should care to telegraph—"

"Your word is sufficient," said Jephson. "Mr. Minot, will you be kind enough to bring me a policy blank?"

"See here, Jephson," foamed Thacker. "What if this thing should get into the newspapers? We'd be the laughing-stock of the business world."

"It mustn't," said Jephson coolly.

"It might," roared Thacker.

Mr. Minot arrived with a blank policy, and Mr. Jephson sat down at the young man's desk.

"One minute," said Thacker. "The faith of you two gentlemen in each other is touching, but I take it the millennium is still a few years off." He drew toward him a blank sheet of pa-

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per, and wrote. "I want this thing done in a businesslike way, if it's to be done in my office." He handed the sheet of paper to Lord Harrowby. "Will you read that, please?" he said.

"Certainly." His lordship read: "I hereby agree that in the interval until my wedding with Miss Cynthia Meyrick next Tuesday week I will do all in my power to put through the match, and that should the wedding be called off through any subsequent direct act of mine, I will forfeit all claims on Lloyds."

"Will you sign that, please?" requested Mr. Thacker.

"With pleasure." His lordship reached for a pen.

"You and I, Richard," said Mr. Thacker, "will sign as witnesses. Now, Jephson, go ahead with your fool policy."

Mr. Jephson looked up thoughtfully.

"Shall I say, your lordship," he asked, "that if, two weeks from to-day the wedding has not taken place, and has absolutely no prospect of taking place, I owe you seventy-five thousand pounds?"

"Yes." His lordship nodded. "Provided, of

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course, I have not forfeited by reason of this agreement. I shall write you a check, Mr. Jephson."

For a time there was no sound in the room save the scratching of two pens, while Mr. Thacker gazed open-mouthed at Mr. Minot, and Mr. Minot light-heartedly smiled back. Then Mr. Jephson reached for a blotter.

"I shall attend to the London end of this when I reach there five days hence," he said. "Perhaps I can find another underwriter to share the risk with me."

The transaction was completed, and his lordship rose to go.

"I am at the Plaza," he said, "if any difficulty should arise. But I sail to-night for San Marco —on the yacht of a friend." He crossed over and took Mr. Jephson's hand. "I can only hope, with all my heart," he finished feelingly, "that you never have to pay this policy."

"We're with your lordship there," said Mr. Thacker sharply.

"Ah—you have been very kind," replied Lord Harrowby. "I wish you all—good day."

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And shivering no longer, he went away in his fine fur coat.

As the door closed upon the nobleman, Mr. Thacker turned explosively on his friend from oversea.

"Jephson," he thundered, "you're an idiot! A rank unmitigated idiot!"

The Peter Pan light was bright in Jephson's eyes.

"So new," he half-whispered. "So original! Bless the boy's heart. I've been waiting forty years for a proposition like that."

"Do you realize," Thacker cried, "that seventy-five thousand pounds of your good money depends on the honor of Lord Harrowby?"

"I do," returned Jephson. "And I would not be concerned if it were ten times that sum. I know the breed. Why, once—and you, Thacker, would have called me an idiot on that occasion, too—I insured his father against the loss of a polo game by a team on which the earl was playing. And he played like the devil—the earl did—won the game himself. Ah, I know the breed."

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"Oh, well," sighed Thacker, "I won't argue. But one thing is certain, Jephson. You can't go back to England now. Your place is in San Marco with one hand on the rope that rings the wedding bells."

Jephson shook his great bald head.

"No," he said. "I must return to-day. It is absolutely necessary. My interests in San Marco are in the hands of Providence."

Mr. Thacker walked the floor wildly.

"Providence needs help in handling a woman," he protested. "Miss Meyrick must not change her mind. Some one must see that she doesn't. If you can't go yourself—" He paused, reflecting. "Some young man, active, capable—"

Mr. Richard Minot had risen from his chair, and was moving softly toward his overcoat. Looking over his shoulder, he beheld Mr. Thacker's keen eyes upon him.

"Just going out to lunch," he said guiltily.

"Sit down, Richard," remarked Mr. Thacker with decision.

Mr. Minot sat, the dread of something impending in his heart.

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"Jephson," said Mr. Thacker, "this boy here is the son of a man of whom I was very fond. His father left him the means to squander his life on clubs and cocktails if he had chosen—but he picked out a business career instead. Five years ago I took him into this office, and he has repaid me by faithful, even brilliant service. I would trust him with—well, I'd trust him as far as you'd trust a member of your own peerage."

"Yes?" said Mr. Jephson.

Mr. Thacker wheeled dramatically and faced his young assistant.

"Richard," he ordered, "go to San Marco. Go to San Marco and see to it that Miss Cynthia Meyrick does not change her mind."

A gone feeling shot through Mr. Minot in the vicinity of his stomach. It was possible that he really needed that lunch.

"Yes, sir," he said faintly. "Of course, it's up to me to do anything you say. If you insist, I'll go, but—"

"But what, Richard?"

"Isn't it a rather big order? Women—aren't they like an—er—April afternoon—or something

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of that sort? It seems to me I've read they were —in books."

"Humph," snorted Mr. Thacker. "Is your knowledge of the ways of women confined to books?"

A close observer might have noted the ghost of a smile in Mr. Minot's clear blue eyes.

"In part, it is," he admitted. "And then again —in part, it isn't."

"Well, put away your books, my boy," said Mr. Thacker. "A nice, instructive little vacation has fallen on you from heaven. Mad old Jephson here must be saved from himself. That wedding must take place—positively, rain or shine. I trust you to see that it does, Richard."

Mr. Minot rose and stepped over to his hat and coat.

"I'm off for San Marco," he announced blithely. His lips were firm but smiling. "The land of sunshine and flowers—and orange blossoms or I know the reason why."

"Jephson trusts Harrowby," said Mr. Thacker. "All very well. But just the same if I were you

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I'd be aboard that yacht to-night when it leaves New York harbor. Invited or uninvited."

"I must ask," put in Mr. Jephson hurriedly, "that you do nothing to embarrass Lord Harrowby in any way."

"No," said Thacker. "But keep an eye on him, my boy. A keen and busy eye."

"I will," agreed Mr. Minot. "Do I look like Cupid, gentlemen? No? Ah—it's the overcoat. Well, I'll get rid of that in Florida. I'll say good-by—"

He shook hands with Jephson and with Thacker.

"Good-by, Richard," said the latter. "I'm really fond of old Jephson here. He's been my friend in need—he mustn't lose. I trust you, my boy."

"I won't disappoint you," Dick Minot promised. A look of seriousness flashed across his face. "Miss Cynthia Meyrick changes her mind only over my dead body."

He paused for a second at the door, and his eyes grew suddenly thoughtful.

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"I wonder what she's like?" he murmured.

Then, with a smile toward the two men left behind, he went out and down that stenographer bordered lane to San Marco.

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CHAPTER II

AN EVENING IN THE RIVER

THOUGH San Marco is a particularly gaudy tassel on the fringe of the tourist's South, it was to the north that Mr. Richard Minot first turned. One hour later he made his appearance amid the gold braid and dignity of the Plaza lobby.

The young man behind the desk—an exquisite creature done in Charles Dana Gibson's best manner—knew when to be affable. He also knew when not to be affable. Upon Mr. Minot he turned the cold fishy stare he kept for such as were not guests under his charge.

"What is your business with Lord Harrowby?" he inquired suspiciously.

"Since when," asked Mr. Minot brightly, "have *you* been in his lordship's confidence?"

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This was the young man's cue to wince. But hotel clerks are notoriously poor wincers.

"It is customary—" he began with perfect poise.

"I know," said Mr. Minot. "But then, I'm a sort of a friend of his lordship."

"A sort of a friend?" How well he lifted his eyebrows!

"Something like that. I believe I'm to be best man at his wedding."

Ah, yes; that splendid young man knew when to be affable. Affability swamped him now.

"Boy!" he cried. "Take this gentleman's card to Lord Harrowby."

A bell-boy in a Zenda uniform accepted the card, laid it upon a silver tray, glued it down with a large New York thumb, and strayed off down gilded corridors shouting, "Lord Harrowby."

Whereat all the pretty little débutantes who happened to be decorating the scene at the moment felt their pampered hearts go pit-a-pat and, closing their eyes, saw visions and dreamed dreams.

Lord Harrowby was at luncheon, and sent

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word for Mr. Minot to join him. Entering the gay dining-room, Minot saw at the far end the blond and noble head he sought. He threaded his way between the tables. Although he was an unusually attractive young man, he had never experienced anything like the array of stares turned upon him ere he had gone ten feet. "What the devil's the matter?" he asked himself. "I seem to be the cynosure of neighboring eyes, and then some." He did not dream that it was because he was passing through a dining-room of democrats to grasp the hand of a lord.

"My dear fellow, I'm delighted, I assure you—" Really, Lord Harrowby's face should have paid closer attention to his words. Just now it failed ignominiously in the matter of backing them up.

"Thank you," Mr. Minot replied. "Your lordship is no doubt surprised at seeing me so soon—"

"Well—er—not at all. Shall I order luncheon?"

"No, thanks. I had a bite on the way up." And Mr. Minot dropped into the chair which an eager waiter held ready. "Lord Harrowby, I

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trust you are not going to be annoyed by what I have to tell you."

His lordship's face clouded, and worry entered the mild blue eyes.

"I hope there's nothing wrong about the policy."

"Nothing whatever. Lord Harrowby, Mr. Jephson trusts you—implicitly."

"So I perceived this morning. I was deeply touched."

"It was—er—touching." Minot smiled a bit cynically. "Understanding as you do how Mr. Jephson feels toward you, you will realize that it is in no sense a reflection on you that our office, viewing this matter in a purely business light, has decided that some one must go to San Marco with you. Some one who will protect Mr. Jephson's interests."

"Your office," said his lordship, reflecting. "You mean Mr. Thacker, don't you?"

Could it be that the fellow was not so slow as he seemed?

"Mr. Thacker is the head of our office," smiled

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Mr. Minot. "It has been thought best that some one go with you, Lord Harrowby. Some one who will work night and day to see to it that Miss Meyrick does not change her mind. I—I am the some one. I hope you are not annoyed."

"My dear chap! Not in the least. When I said this morning that I was quite set on this marriage, I was frightfully sincere." And now his lordship's face, frank and boyish, in nowise belied his words. "I shall be deeply grateful for any aid Lloyds can give me. And I am already grateful that Lloyds has selected you to be my ally."

Really, very decent of him. Dick Minot bowed.

"You go south to-night?" he ventured.

"Yes. On the yacht *Lileth*, belonging to my friend, Mr. Martin Wall. You have heard of him?"

"No. I can't say that I have."

"Indeed! I understood he was very well-known here. A big, bluff, hearty chap. We met on the steamer coming over and became very good friends."

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A pause.

"You will enjoy meeting Mr. Wall," said his lordship meaningly, "when I introduce you to him—in San Marco."

"Lord Harrowby," said Minot slowly, "my instructions are to go south with you—on the yacht."

For a moment the two men stared into each other's eyes. Then Lord Harrowby pursed his thin lips and gazed out at Fifth Avenue, gay and colorful in the February sun.

"How extremely unfortunate," he drawled. "It is not my boat, Mr. Minot. If it were, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to extend an invitation to you."

"I understand," said Minot. "But I am to go—invited or uninvited."

"In my interests?" asked Harrowby sarcastically.

"As the personal conductor of the bridegroom."

"Mr. Minot—really—"

"I have no wish to be rude, Lord Harrowby. But it is our turn to be a little fantastic now.

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Could anything be more fantastic than boarding a yacht uninvited?"

"But Miss Meyrick—on whom, after all, Mr. Jephson's fate depends—is already in Florida."

"With her lamp trimmed and burning. How sad, your lordship, if some untoward event should interfere with the coming of the bridegroom."

"I perceive," smiled Lord Harrowby, "that you do not share Mr. Jephson's confidence in my motives."

"This is New York, and a business proposition. Every man in New York is considered guilty until he proves himself innocent—and then we move for a new trial."

"Nevertheless"—Lord Harrowby's mouth hardened—"I must refuse to ask you to join me on the *Lileth*."

"Would you mind telling me where the boat is anchored?"

"Somewhere in the North River, I believe. I don't know, really."

"You don't know? Won't it be a bit difficult—boarding a yacht when you don't know where to find it?"

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"My dear chap—" began Harrowby angrily.

"No matter." Mr. Minot stood up. "I'll say au revoir, Lord Harrowby—until to-night."

"Or until we meet in San Marco." Lord Harrowby regained his good nature. "I'm extremely sorry to be so impolite. But I believe we're going to be very good friends, none the less."

"We're going to be very close to each other, at any rate," Minot smiled. "Once more—au revoir, your lordship."

"Pardon me—good-by," answered Lord Harrowby with decision.

And Richard Minot was again threading his way between awed tables.

Walking slowly down Fifth Avenue, Mr. Minot was forced to admit that he had not made a very auspicious beginning in his new role. Why had Lord Harrowby refused so determinedly to invite him aboard the yacht that was to bear the eager bridegroom south? And what was he to do now? Might he not discover where the yacht lay, board it at dusk, and conceal himself in a vacant cabin until the party was well under way? It sounded fairly simple.

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But it proved otherwise. He was balked from the outset. For two hours, in the library of his club, in telephone booths and elsewhere, he sought for some tangible evidence of the existence of a wealthy American named Martin Wall and a yacht called the *Lileth*. City directories and yacht club year books alike were silent. Myth, myth, myth, ran through Dick Minot's mind.

Was Lord Harrowby—as they say at the Gaiety—spoofing him? He mounted to the top of a bus, and was churned up Riverside Drive. Along the banks of the river lay dozens of yachts, dismantled, swathed in winter coverings. Among the few that appeared ready to sail his keen eye discerned no *Lileth*.

Somewhat discouraged, he returned to his club and startled a waiter by demanding dinner at four-thirty in the afternoon. Going then to his rooms, he exchanged his overcoat for a sweater, his hat for a golf cap. At five-thirty, a spy for the first time in his eventful young life, he stood opposite the main entrance of the Plaza. Near by ticked a taxi, engaged for the evening.

An hour passed. Lights, laughter, limousines,

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the cold moon adding its brilliance to that already brilliant square, the winter wind sighing through the bare trees of the park—New York seemed a city of dreams. Suddenly the chauffeur of Minot's taxi stood uneasily before him.

"Say, you ain't going to shoot anybody, are you?" he asked.

"Oh, no—you needn't be afraid of that."

"I ain't afraid. I just thought I'd take off my license number if you was."

Ah, yes — New York! City of beautiful dreams!

Another hour slipped by. And only the little taxi meter was busy, winking mechanically at the unresponsive moon.

At eight-fifteen a tall blond man, in a very expensive fur coat which impressed even the cab starter, came down the steps of the hotel. He ordered a limousine and was whirled away to the west. At eight-fifteen and a half Mr. Minot followed.

Lord Harrowby's car proceeded to the drive and, turning, sped north between the moonlit river and the manlit apartment-houses. In the

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neighborhood of One Hundred and Tenth Street it came to a stop, and as Minot's car passed slowly by, he saw his lordship standing in the moonlight paying his chauffeur. Hastily dismissing his own car, he ran back in time to see Lord Harrowby disappear down one of the stone stairways into the gloom of the park that skirts the Hudson. He followed.

On and on down the steps and bare wind-swept paths he hurried, until finally the river, cold, silvery, serene, lay before him. Some thirty yards from shore he beheld the lights of a yacht flashing against the gloomy background of Jersey. The *Lileth!*

He watched Lord Harrowby cross the railroad tracks to a small landing, and leap from that into a boat in charge of a solitary rower. Then he heard the soft swish of oars, and watched the boat draw away from shore. He stood there in the shadow until he had seen his lordship run up the accommodation ladder to the *Lileth's* deck.

He, too, must reach the *Lileth,* and at once. But how? He glanced quickly up and down the bank. A small boat was tethered near by—he ran

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to it, but a chain and padlock held it firmly. He must hurry. Aboard the yacht, dancing impatiently on the bosom of Hendrick Hudson's important discovery, he recognized the preparations for an early departure.

Minot stood for a moment looking at the wide wet river. It was February, yes, but February of the mildest winter New York had experienced in years. At the seashore he had always dashed boldly in while others stood on the sands and shivered. He dashed in now.

The water was cold, shockingly cold. He struck out swiftly for the yacht. Fortunately the accommodation ladder had not yet been taken up; in another moment he was clinging, a limp and dripping spectacle, to the rail of the *Lilcth*.

Happily that side of the deck was just then deserted. A row of outside cabin doors in the bow met Minot's eye. Stealthily he swished toward them.

And, in the last analysis, the only thing between him and them proved to be a large commanding gentleman, whose silhouette was par-

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ticularly militant and whose whole bearing was unfavorable.

"Mr. Wall, I presume," said Minot through noisy teeth.

"Correct," said the gentleman. His voice was sharp, unfriendly. But the moonlight, falling on his face, revealed it as soft, genial, pudgy—the inviting sort of countenance to which, under the melting influence of Scotch and soda, one feels like relating the sad story of one's wasted life.

Though soaked and quaking, Mr. Minot aimed at nonchalance.

"Well," he said, "you might be good enough to tell Lord Harrowby that I've arrived."

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"I'm a friend of his lordship. He'll be delighted, I'm sure. Just tell him, if you'll be so kind."

"Did he invite you aboard?"

"Not exactly. But he'll be glad to see me. Especially if you mention just one word to him."

"What word?"

Mr. Minot leaned airily against the rail.

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"Lloyds," he said.

An expression of mingled rage and dismay came into the pudgy face. It purpled in the moonlight. Its huge owner came threateningly toward the dripping Minot.

"Back into the river for yours," he said savagely.

Almost lovingly—so it might have seemed to the casual observer—he wound his thick arms about the dripping Minot. Up and down the deck they turkey-trotted.

"Over the rail and into the river," breathed Mr. Wall on Minot's damp neck.

Two large and capable sailormen came at sound of the struggle.

"Here, boys," Wall shouted. "Help me toss this guy over."

Willing hands seized Minot at opposite poles.

"One—two—" counted the sailormen.

"Well, good night, Mr. Wall," remarked Minot.

"Three!"

A splash, and he was ingloriously in the cold river again. He turned to the accommodation

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ladder, but quick hands drew it up. Evidently there was nothing to do but return once more to little old New York.

He rested for a moment, treading water, seeing dimly the tall homes of the cave dwellers, and over them the yellow glare of Broadway. Then he struck out. When he reached the shore, and turned, the *Lileth* was already under way, moving slowly down the silver path of the moon. An old man was launching the padlocked rowboat.

"Great night for a swim," he remarked sarcastically.

"L-lovely," chattered Minot. "Say, do you know anything about the yacht that's just steamed out?"

"Not as much as I'd like ter. Used ter belong to a man in Chicago. Yesterday the caretaker told me she'd been rented fer the winter. Seen him to-night in a gin mill with money to throw to the birds. Looks funny to me."

"Thanks."

"Man came this afternoon and painted out her old name. Changed it t' *Lileth*. Mighty suspicious."

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"What was the old name?"

"The *Lady Evelyn*. If I was you, I'd get outside a drink, and quick. Good night."

As Minot dashed up the bank, he heard the swish of the old man's oars behind. He ran all the way to his rooms, and after a hot bath and the liquid refreshment suggested by the waterman, called Mr. Thacker on the telephone.

"Well, Richard?" that gentleman inquired.

"Sad news. Little Cupid's had a set-back. Tossed into the Hudson when he tried to board the yacht that is taking Lord Harrowby south."

"No? Is that so?" Mr. Thacker's tone was contemplative. "Well, Richard, the Palm Beach Special leaves at midnight. Better be on it. Better go down and help the bride with her trousseau."

"Yes, sir. I'll do that. And I'll see to it that she has her lamp trimmed and burning. Considering that her father's in the oil business, that ought not to be—"

"I can't hear you, Richard. What are you saying?"

"Nothing—er—Mr. Thacker. Look up a yacht

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called the *Lady Evelyn*. Chicago man, I think—find out if he's rented it, and to whom. It's the boat Harrowby went south on."

"All right, Richard. Good-by, my boy. Write me whenever you need money."

"Perhaps I can't write as often as that. But I'll send you bulletins from time to time."

"I depend on you, Richard. Jephson must not lose."

"Leave it to me. The Palm Beach Special at midnight. And after that—Miss Cynthia Meyrick!"

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CHAPTER III

NO matter how swiftly your train has sped through the Carolinas and Georgia, when it crosses the line into Florida a wasting languor overtakes it. Then it hesitates, sighs and creeps across the flat yellow landscape like an aged alligator. Now and again it stops completely in the midst of nothing, as who should say: "You came down to see the South, didn't you? Well, look about you."

The Palm Beach Special on which Mr. Minot rode was no exception to this rule. It entered Florida and a state of innocuous desuetude at one and the same time. After a tremendous struggle, it gasped its way into Jacksonville about nine o'clock of the Monday morning following. Reluctant as Romeo in his famous exit from Juliet's boudoir, it got out of Jacksonville an hour later.

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And San Marco was just two hours away, according to that excellent book of light fiction so widely read in the South—the time-table.

It seemed to Dick Minot that he had been looking out of a car window for a couple of eternities. Save for the diversion at Jacksonville, nothing had happened to brighten that long and wearisome journey. He wanted, now, to glance across the car aisle toward the diversion at Jacksonville. Yet it hardly seemed polite—so soon. Wherefore he continued to gaze out at the monotonous landscape.

For half a mile the train served its masters. Then, with a pathetic groan, it paused. Still Mr. Minot gazed out the window. He gazed so long that he saw a family of razor-backs, passed a quarter of a mile back, catch up with the train and trot scornfully by. After that he kept his eyes on the live oaks and evergreens, to whose topmost branches hung gray moss like whiskers on a western senator.

Then he could stand it no longer. He turned and looked upon the diversion at Jacksonville. Gentlemen of the jury—she was beautiful. The

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custodian of a library of books on sociology could have seen that with half an astigmatic eye. Her copper-colored hair flashed alluringly in that sunny car; the curve of her cheek would have created a sensation in the neighborhood where burning Sappho loved and sang. Dick Minot's heart beat faster, repeating the performance it had staged when she boarded the train at Jacksonville.

Beautiful, yes—but she fidgeted. She had fidgeted madly in the station at Jacksonville during that hour's wait; now even more madly she bounced about on that plush seat. She opened and shut magazines, she straightened her pleasant little hat, she gazed in agony out the window. Beauty such as hers should have been framed in a serene and haughty dignity. Hers happened to be framed in a frenzy of fidget.

In its infinite wisdom, the train saw fit to start again. With a sigh of relief, the girl sank back upon her seat of torture. Mr. Minot turned again to the uneventful landscape. More yellow sand, more bearded oaks and evergreens. And in a moment, the family of razor-backs, plodding

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along beside the track with a determined demeanor that said as plainly as words: "You may go ahead—but we shall see what we shall see."

Excellent train, it seemed fairly to fly. For a little while. Then another stop. Beauty wildly anxious on the seat of ancient plush. Another start—a stop—and a worried but musical voice in Dick Minot's ear:

"I beg your pardon—but what should you say are this train's chances for reaching San Marco by one o'clock?"

Minot turned. Brown eyes and troubled ones looked into his. A dimple twitched beside an adorable mouth. Fortunate Florida, peopled with girls like this.

"I should say," smiled Mr. Minot, "about the same as those of the famous little snowball that strayed far from home."

"Oh—you're right!" Why would she fidget so? "And I'm in a frightfully uncomfortable position. I simply must reach San Marco for luncheon at one. I must!" She clenched her small hands. "It's the most important luncheon of my life. What shall I do?"

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Mr. Minot glanced at his watch.

"It is now twenty minutes of twelve," he said. "My advice to you is to order lunch on the train."

"It was so foolish of me," cried the girl. "I ran up to Jacksonville in a friend's motor to do a little shopping. I should have known better. I'm always doing things like this."

And she looked at Dick Minot accusingly, as though it were he who always put her up to them.

"I'm awfully sorry, really," Minot said. He felt quite uncomfortable about it.

"And can't you suggest anything?"—pleadingly, almost tearfully.

"Not at this moment. I'll try, though. Look!" He pointed out the window. "That family of razor-backs has caught up with us four times already."

"What abominable service," the girl cried. "But—aren't they cunning? The little ones, I mean."

And she stood looking out with a wonderful tenderness in her eyes, which, considering the

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small creatures upon which it was lavished, was almost ludicrous.

"Off again," cried Minot.

And they were. The girl sat nervously on the edge of her seat, with the expression of one who meant to keep the train going by mental suggestion. Five cheerful minutes passed in rapid transit. And then—another abrupt stop.

"Almost like a football game," said Minot blithely to the distressed lady across the aisle. "Third down—five yards to go. Oh, by jove, there's a town on my side."

"Not a trace of a town on mine," she replied.

"It's the dreariest, saddest town I ever saw," Minot remarked. "So of course its name is Sunbeam. And look—what do you see—there beside the station!"

"An automobile!" the girl cried.

"Well, an automobile's ancestor, at any rate," laughed Minot. "Vintage of 1905. Say—I have a suggestion now. If the chauffeur thinks he can get you—I mean, us—to San Marco by one o'clock, shall we—"

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But the girl was already on her way.

"Come on!" Her eyes were bright with excitement. "We—oh, dear—the old train's started again."

"No matter—I'll stop it!" Minot reached for the bell cord.

"But do you dare—can't you be arrested?"

"Too late—I've done it. Let me help you with those magazines. Quick! This way."

On the platform they met an irate conductor, red and puffing.

"Say—who stopped this train?" he bellowed.

"I don't know—who usually stops it?" Minot replied, and he and the girl slid by the uniform to the safety of Sunbeam.

The lean, lank, weary native who lolled beside the passé automobile was startled speechless for a moment by the sight of two such attractive visitors in his unattractive town. Then he remembered.

"Want a taxi, mister?" he inquired. "Take you up to the Sunbeam House for a quarter apiece—"

"Yes, we do want a taxi—" Minot began.

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"To San Marco," cried the girl breathlessly. "Can you get us there by one o'clock?"

"To—to—say, lady," stammered the rustic chauffeur. "That train you just got off of is going to San Marco."

"Oh, no, it isn't," Minot explained. "We know better. It's going out into the country to lie down under a shade tree and rest."

"The train is too slow," said the girl. "I must be in San Marco before one o'clock. Can you get me—us—there by then? Speak quickly, please."

The effect of this request on the chauffeur was to induce even greater confusion.

"T — to — to San Marco," he stumbled. "W—well, say, that's a new one on me. Never had this car out o' Sunbeam yet."

"Please—please!" the girl pleaded.

"Lady," said the chauffeur, "I'd do anything I could, within reason—"

"Can you get us to San Marco by one o'clock?" she demanded.

"I ain't no prophet, lady." A humorous gleam came into his eye. "But ever since I got this car I been feelin' sort o' reckless. If you say so, I'll

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bid all my family and friends good-by, and we'll take a chance on San Marco together."

"That's the spirit," laughed Minot. "But forget the family and friends."

He placed his baggage in the front of the car, and helped the girl into the tonneau. With a show of speed, the countryman went around to the front of the car and began to crank.

He continued to crank with agonized face. In the course of a few minutes, sounds of a terrific disturbance came from inside the car. Still, like a hurdy-gurdy musician, the man cranked.

"I say," Minot inquired, "has your machine got the Sextette from *Lucia?*"

"Well, there's been a lot of things wrong with it," the man replied, "but I don't think it's had that yet."

The girl laughed, and such a laugh, Dick Minot was sure, had never been heard in Sunbeam before. At that moment the driver leaped to his seat, breathing hard, and had it out with the wheel.

"Exeunt, laughingly, from Sunbeam," said Minot in the girl's ear.

The car rolled asthmatically from the little set-

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tlement, and out into the sand and heat of a narrow road.

"Eight miles to San Marco," said the driver out of the corner of his mouth. "Sit tight. I'm going to let her out some."

Again Dick Minot glanced at the girl beside him. Fate was in a jovial mood to-day to grant him this odd ride in the company of one so charming! He could not have told what she wore, but he knew she was all in white, and he realized the wisdom of white on a girl who had, in her hair and eyes, colors to delight the most exacting. About her clung a perfume never captured in a bottle; her chin was the chin of a girl with a sense of humor; her eyes sparkled with the thrill of their adventure together. And the dimple, in repose now, became the champion dimple of the world.

Minot tried to think of some sprightly remark, but his usually agile tongue remained silent. What was the matter with him? Why should this girl seem different, somehow, from all the other girls he had ever met? When he looked into her eyes a flood of memories—a little sad—of all the

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happy times he had ever known overwhelmed him. Memories of a starlit sea—the red and white awnings of a yacht—the wind whispering through the trees on a hillside—an orchestra playing in the distance—memories of old, and happy, far-off things—of times when he was even younger, even more in love with life. Why should this be? He wondered.

And the girl, looking at him, wondered, too—was he suddenly bereft of his tongue?

"I haven't asked you the conventional question?" she said at last. "How do you like Florida?"

"It's wonderful, isn't it?" Minot replied, coming to with a start. "I can speak of it even more enthusiastically than any of the railroad folders do. And yet, it's only recent—my discovery of its charms."

"Really?"

"Yes. When I was surveying it on that stopwatch of a train, my impression of it was quite unfavorable. It seemed so monotonous. I told myself nothing exciting could ever happen here."

"And—something has happened?"

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"Yes—something certainly has happened."

She blushed a little at his tone. Young men usually proposed to her the first time they saw her. Why shouldn't she blush—a little?

"Something very fine," Minot went on. "And I am surely very grateful to fate—"

"Would you mind looking at your watch—please?"

"Certainly. A quarter after twelve. As I was saying—"

"Do you think we can make it?"

"I am sure of it."

"You see, it is so very important. I want so very much to be there by one o'clock."

"And I want you to."

"I wonder—if you really knew—"

"Knew what?"

"Nothing. I wish you would, please—but you just did look at your watch, didn't you?"

They rattled on down that road that was so sandy, so uninteresting, so lonely, with only a garage advertisement here and there to suggest a world outside. Suddenly the driver ventured a word over his shoulder.

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"Don't worry, lady," he said. "We'll get there sure."

And even as he spoke the car gave a roar of rage and came to a dead stop.

"Oh, dear—what is it now?" cried the girl.

"Acts like the train," commented Minot.

The driver got out and surveyed the car without enthusiasm.

"I wonder what she's up to now?" he remarked. "Fifteen years I drove horses, which are supposed to have brains, but this machine can think of things to do to me that the meanest horse never could."

"You promised, driver," pleaded the girl. "We must reach San Marco on time. Mr.—er—your watch?"

"Twenty-five past twelve," smiled Minot.

The native descended to the dust and slid under the car. In a moment he emerged, triumphant.

"All O. K." he announced. "Don't you worry, lady. It's San Marco or bust."

"If only something doesn't bust," Minot said.

Again they were plowing through the sand. The girl sat anxiously on the edge of the seat, her

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cheeks flaming, her eyes alight. Minot watched her. And suddenly all the happy, sad little memories melted into a golden glow—the glow of being alive—on this lonesome road—with her! Then suddenly he knew! This was the one girl, the girl of all the world, the girl he should love while the memory of her lasted, which would be until the eyes that looked upon her now were dust. A great exultation swept through him—

"What did you mean," he asked, "when you said you were always doing things like this?"

"I meant," she answered, "that I'm a silly little fool. Oh, if you could know me well—" and her eyes seemed to question the future—"you'd see for yourself. Never looking ahead to calculate the consequences. It's the old story of fools rushing in—"

"You mean of angels rushing in, don't you? I never was good at old saws, but—"

"And once more, please—your watch?"

"Twenty minutes of one."

"Oh, dear—can we"—

A wild whoop from the driver interrupted.

"San Marco," he cried, pointing to where red

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towers rose above the green of the country. "It paid to take a chance with me. I sure did let her out. Where do you want to go, lady?"

"The Hotel de la Pax," said the girl, and with a sigh of deep relief, sank back upon the cushions.

"And Salvator won," quoted Mr. Minot with a laugh.

"How can I ever thank you?" the girl asked.

"Don't try," said Minot. "That is—I mean—try, if you will, please."

"It meant so very much to me—"

"No—you'd better not, after all. It makes me feel guilty. For I did nothing that doesn't come under the head of glorious privilege. A chance to serve you! Why, I'd travel to the ends of the earth for that."

"But—it was good of you. You can hardly realize all it meant to me to reach this hotel by one o'clock. Perhaps I ought to tell you—"

"It doesn't matter," Minot replied. "That you have reached here is my reward." His cheeks burned; his heart sang. Here was the one girl, and he built castles in Spain with lightening

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strokes. She should be his. She must be. Before him life stretched, glorious, with her at his side—

"I think I *will* tell you," the girl was saying. "This is to be the most important luncheon of my life because—"

"Yes?" smiled Mr. Minot.

"Because it is the one at which I am going to announce my engagement!"

Minot's heart stopped beating. A hundred castles in Spain came tumbling about his ears, and the roar of their falling deafened him. He put out his hand blindly to open the door, for he realized that the car had come to a stop.

"Let me help you, please," he said dully.

And even as he spoke a horrible possibility swept into his heart and overwhelmed him.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, "but would you mind telling me one thing?"

"Of course not. But I really must fly—"

"The name of—the happy man."

"Why—Allan, Lord Harrowby. Thank you so much—and good-by."

She was gone now—gone amid the palms of

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that gorgeous hotel courtyard. And out of the roar that enveloped him Minot heard a voice:

"Thirty-five dollars, mister."

So promptly did he pay this grievous overcharge that the chauffeur asked hopefully:

"Now could I take you anywhere, sir?"

"Yes," said Minot bitterly. "Take me back to New York."

"Well—if I had a new front tire I might try it."

Two eager black boys were moving inside with Minot's bags, and he followed. As he passed the fountain tinkling gaily in the courtyard:

"What was it I promised Thacker?" he said to himself. "'Miss Cynthia Meyrick changes her mind only over my dead body.' Ah, well—the good die young."

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CHAPTER IV

MR. TRIMMER LIMBERS UP

AT the desk of the De la Pax Mr. Minot learned that for fifteen dollars a day he might board and lodge amid the splendors of that hotel. Gratefully he signed his name. One of the negro boys—who had matched coins for him with the other boy while he registered—led the way to his room.

It proved a long and devious journey. The Hotel de la Pax was a series of afterthoughts on the part of its builders. Up hill and down dale the boy led, through dark passageways, over narrow bridges, until at length they arrived at the door of 389.

"My boy," muttered Minot feelingly, "I congratulate you. Henry M. Stanley in the flower of his youth couldn't have done any better."

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"Yes, suh." The boy threw open the door of a narrow cell, at the farther end of which a solitary window admitted the well-known Florida sunshine. Minot stepped over and glanced out. Where the gay courtyard with its green palms waving, its fountain tinkling? Not visible from 389. Instead Minot saw a narrow street, its ancient cobblestones partly obscured by flourishing grass, and bordered by quaint, top-heavy Spanish houses, their plaster walls a hundred colors from the indignities of the years.

"We seem to have strayed over into Spain," he remarked.

The bell-boy giggled.

"Yes, suh. We one block and a half from de hotel office."

"I didn't notice any taxis in the corridors," smiled Minot. "Here—wait a minute." He tossed the boy a coin. "Your fare back home. If you get stranded on the way, telegraph."

The boy departed, and Minot continued to gaze out. Directly across from his window, looking strangely out of place in that dead and buried street, stood a great stone house that bore

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on its front the sign "Manhattan Club and Grill." On the veranda, flush with the sidewalk and barely fifteen feet away, a huge red-faced man sat deep in slumber.

Many and strange pursuits had claimed the talents of old Tom Stacy, manager of the Manhattan Club, ere his advent in San Marco. A too active district attorney had forced the New York police to take a keen interest in his life and works, hence Mr. Stacy's presence on that Florida porch. But such troubles were forgot for the moment. He slumbered peacefully, secure in the knowledge that the real business of the club would not require his attention until darkness fell. His great head fell gradually farther in the direction of his generous waist, and while there is no authentic evidence to offer, it is safe to assume that he dreamed of Broadway.

Suddenly Mr. Stacy's head took another tilt downward, and his Panama hat slipped off to the veranda floor. To the gaze of Mr. Minot, above, there was revealed a bald pate extensive and gleaming. The habitual smile fled from Minot's face. A feeling of impotent anger filled his

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soul. For a bald head could recall but one thing —Jephson.

He strode from the window, savagely kicking an innocent suit-case that got in his way. What mean trick was this fate had played him as he entered San Marco? To show to him the one girl in all her glory and sweetness, to thrill him through and through with his discovery—and then to send the girl scurrying off to announce her engagement to another man! Scurvy, he called it. But scurvier still, that it should be the very engagement he had hastened to San Marco to bring to its proper close—"I do," and Mendelssohn.

He sat gloomily down on the bed. What could he do? What save keep his word, given on the seventeenth floor of an office building in New York? No man had yet had reason to question the good faith of a Minot. His dead father, at the beginning of his career, had sacrificed his fortune to keep his word, and gone back with a smile to begin all over again. What could he do?

Nothing, save grit his teeth and see the thing

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through. He made up his mind to this as he bathed and shaved, and prepared himself for his début in San Marco. So that, when he finally left the hotel and stepped out into San Sebastian 'Avenue, he was cheerful with a dogged, boy-stood-on-the-burning-deck cheerfulness.

A dozen negroes, their smiles reminiscent of tooth powder advertisements, vainly sought to cajole him into their shaky vehicles. With difficulty he avoided their pleas, and strolled down San Marco's main thoroughfare. On every side clever shopkeepers spread the net for the eagle on the dollar. Jewelers' shops flashed, modistes hinted, milliners begged to present their latest creations.

He came presently to a narrow cross street, where humbler merchants catered to the Coney instinct that lurks in even the most affluent of tourists. There gaudy souvenir stores abounded. The ugly and inevitable alligator, fallen from his proud estate to fireside slipper, wallet, cigar case, umbrella stand, photograph album and Lord-knows-what, was head-lined in this street. Picture post-cards hung in flocks, tin-type gal-

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leries besought, news-stands, soda-water fountains and cheap boarding-houses stood side by side. And, every few feet, Mr. Minot came upon "The Oldest House in San Marco."

On his way back to the hotel, in front of one of the more dazzling modiste's shops, he saw a limousine drawn up to the curb, and in it Jack Paddock, friend of his college days. Paddock leaped blithely from the machine and grasped Dick Minot by the hand.

"You here?" he cried.

"Foolish question," commented Mr. Minot.

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Paddock. "Been here so long my brain's a little flabby. But I'm glad to see you, old man."

"Same here." Mr. Minot stared at the car. "I say, Jack, did you earn that writing fiction?"

Paddock laughed.

"I'm not writing much fiction now," he replied. "The car belongs to Mrs. Helen Bruce, the wittiest hostess in San Marco." He came closer. "My boy," he confided, "I have struck something essentially soft. Some time soon, in a room with

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all the doors and windows closed and the weather-strips in place, I'll whisper it to you. I've been dying to tell somebody."

"And the car—"

"Part of the graft, Dick. Here comes Mrs. Bruce now. Did I mention she was the wittiest—of course I did. Want to meet her? Well, later then. You're at the Pax, I suppose. See you there."

Mr. Minot moved on from the imminence of Mrs. Bruce. A moment later the limousine sped by him. One seat was generously filled by the wittiest hostess in San Marco. Seated opposite her, Mr. Paddock waved an airy hand. Life had always been the gayest of jokes to Mr. Paddock.

Life was at the moment quite the opposite to Dick Minot. He devoted the next hour to sad introspection in the lobby. It was not until he was on his way in to dinner that he again saw Cynthia Meyrick. Then, just outside the dining-room door, he encountered her, still all in white, lovelier than ever, in her cheek a flush of

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excitement no doubt put there by the most important luncheon of her life. He waited for her to recognize him—and he did not wait in vain.

"Ah, Mr.—"

"Minot."

"Of course. In the hurry of this noon I quite overlooked an introduction. I am—"

"Miss Cynthia Meyrick. I happen to know because I met his lordship in New York. May I ask—was the luncheon—"

"Quite without a flaw. So you know Lord Harrowby?"

"Er—slightly. May I offer my very best wishes?"

"So good of you."

Formal, formal, formal. Was that how it must be between them hereafter? Well, it was better so. Miss Meyrick presented her father and her aunt, and that did not tend to lighten the formality. Icicles, both of them, though stocky puffing icicles. Aunt inquired if Mr. Minot was related to the Minots of Detroit, and when he failed to qualify, at once lost all interest in him.

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Old Spencer Meyrick did not accord him even that much attention.

Yet—all was not formal, as it happened. For as Cynthia Meyrick moved away, she whispered: "I must see you after dinner—on important business." And her smile as she said it made Minot's own lonely dinner quite cheery.

'At seven in the evening the hotel orchestra gathered in the lobby for its nightly concert, and after the way of orchestras, it was almost ready to begin when Minot left the dining-room at eight. Sitting primly in straight backed chairs, an audience gathered for the most part from the more inexpensive hostelries waited patiently. Presumably these people were there for an hour with music, lovely maid. But it was the gowns of more material maids that interested the greater number of them, and many drab little women sat making furtive mental notes that should while away the hours conversationally when they got back to Akron or Terre Haute.

Minot sat down in a veranda chair and looked out at the courtyard. In the splendor of its

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evening colors, it was indeed the setting for romance. In the midst of the green palms and blooming things splashed a fountain which might well have been the one old Ponce de Leon sought. On three sides the lighted towers and turrets of that huge hotel climbed toward the bright, warm southern sky. A dazzling moon shamed Mr. Edison's lamps, the breeze came tepid from the sea, the very latest in waltzes drifted out from the gorgeous lobby. Here romance, Minot thought, must have been born.

"Mr. Minot—I've been looking everywhere—"

She was beside him now, a slim white figure in the dusk—the one thing lacking in that glittering picture. He leaped to meet her.

"Sitting here dreaming, I reckon," she whispered, "of somebody far away."

"No." He shook his head. "I leave that to the newly engaged."

She made no answer. He gave her his chair, and drew up another for himself.

"Mr. Minot," she said, "I was terribly thoughtless this noon. But you must forgive me—I was so excited. Mr. Minot—I owe you—"

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Here romance must have been born

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She hesitated. Minot bit his lip savagely. Must he hear all that again? How much she owed him for his service—for getting her to that luncheon in time—that wonderful luncheon—

"I owe you," finished the girl softly, "the charges on that taxi."

It was something of a shock to Minot. Was she making game of him?

"Don't," he answered. "Here in the moonlight, with that waltz playing, and the old palms whispering—is this a time to talk of taxi bills?"

"But—we must talk of something—oh, I mean —I insist. Won't you please tell me the figure?"

"All the time we were together this morning, I talked figures—the figures on the face of a watch. Let us find some pleasanter topic. I believe Lord Harrowby said you were to be married soon?"

"Next Tuesday. A week from to-morrow."

"In San Marco?"

"Yes. It breaks auntie's heart that it can't be in Detroit. Lord Harrowby is her triumph, you see. But father can't go north in the winter—and Allan wishes to be married at once."

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Minot was thinking hard. So Harrowby was auntie's triumph? And was he not Cynthia Meyrick's as well? He would have given much to be able to inquire.

Suddenly, with the engaging frankness of a child, the girl asked:

"Has your engagement ever been announced, Mr. Minot?"

"Why—er—not to my knowledge," Minot laughed. "Why?"

"I was just wondering—if it made everybody feel queer. The way it makes me feel. Ever since one o'clock—I ought never to say it—I've felt as though everything was over. I've seemed old! Old!" She clenched her fists, and spoke almost in terror. "I don't want to grow old. I'd hate it."

"It was here," said Minot softly, "Ponce de Leon sought the fountain of youth. When you came up I was pretending the one splashing out there was that very fountain itself—"

"If it only were," the girl cried. "Oh—you could never drag me away from it. But it isn't. It's supplied by the San Marco Water Works,

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and there's a meter ticking somewhere, I'm sure. And now—Mr. Minot—"

"I know. You mean the thirty-five dollars I paid our driver. I wish you would write me a check. I've a reason."

"Thank you. I wanted to—so much. I'll bring it to you soon."

She was gone, and Minot sat staring into the palms, his lips firm, his hands gripping the arms of his chair. Suddenly, with a determined leap, he was on his feet.

A moment later he stood at the telegraph counter in the lobby, writing in bold flowing characters a message for Mr. John Thacker, on a certain seventeenth floor, New York.

"I resign. Will stay on the job until a substitute arrives, but start him when you get this.
"RICHARD MINOT."

The telegram sent, he returned to his veranda chair to think. Thacker would be upset, of course. But after all, Thacker's claim on him was not such that he must wreck his life's happiness to serve him. Even Thacker must see that. And

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the girl—was she madly in love with the lean and aristocratic Harrowby? Not by any means, to judge from her manner. Next Tuesday—a week. What couldn't happen in a— Minot stopped. No, that wouldn't do, either. Even if a substitute arrived, he could hardly with honor turn about and himself wreck the hopes of Thacker and Jephson. He lost, either way. It was a horrible mix-up. He cursed beneath his breath.

The red glow of a cigar near by drew closer as the smoker dragged his chair across the veranda floor. Minot saw behind the glow the keen face of a man eager for talk.

"Some scene, isn't it?" said the stranger. "Sort of makes the musical comedies look cheap. All it needs is seven stately chorus ladies walking out from behind that palm down to the left, and it would have Broadway lashed to the mast."

"Yes," replied Minot absently. "This is the real thing."

"I've been sitting here thinking," the other went on. "It doesn't seem to me this place has

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been advertised right. Why, there are hundreds of people up north whose windows look out on sunset over the brewery—people with money, too —who'd take the first train for here if they realized the picture we're looking at now. Get some good hustler to tell 'em about it—" He paused. "I hate to talk about myself, but say—ever hear of Cotrell's Ink Eraser? Nothing ever written Cotrell can't erase. Will not soil or scratch the paper. If the words Cotrell has erased were put side by side—"

"Selling it?" Minot inquired wearily.

"No. But I made that eraser. Put it on every desk between New York and the rolling Oregon. After that I landed Helot's Bottled Sauces. And then Patterson's Lime Juice. Puckered every mouth in America. 'Advertising is my specialty."

"So I gather."

"Sure as you sit here. Have a cigar. Trimmer is my name—never mind the jokes. Henry Trimmer. Advertising specialist. Is your business flabby? Does it need a tonic? Try Trimmer. Quoting from my letter-head." He leaned

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closer. "Excuse a personal question, but didn't I see you talking with Miss Cynthia Meyrick a while back?"

"Possibly."

Mr. Trimmer came even closer.

"Engaged to Lord Harrowby, I understand."

"I believe so—"

"Young fellow," Mr. Trimmer's tone was exultant, "I can't keep in any longer. I got a proposition in tow so big it's bursting my brain cells—and it takes some strain to do that. No, I can't tell you the exact nature of it—but I will say this—to-morrow night this time I'll throw a bomb in this hotel so loud it'll be heard round the world."

"An anarchist?"

"Not on your life. Advertiser. And I've got something to advertise this hot February, take it from me. Maybe you're a friend of Miss Meyrick. Well, I'm sorry. For when I spring my little surprise I reckon this Harrowby wedding is going to shrivel up and fade away."

"You mean to say you—you're going to stop the wedding?"

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"I mean to say nothing. Watch me. Watch Henry Trimmer. Just a tip, young fellow. Well, I guess I'll turn in. Get some of my best ideas in bed. See you later."

And Mr. Trimmer strode into the circle of light, a fine upstanding figure of a man, to pass triumphantly out of sight among the palms. Dazed, Dick Minot stared after him.

A voice spoke his name. He turned. The slim white presence again, holding toward him a slip of paper.

"The check, Mr. Minot. Thirty-five dollars. Is that correct?"

"Correct. It's splendid. Because I'm never going to cash it—I'm going to keep it—"

"Really, Mr. Minot, I must say good—"

He came closer. Thacker and Jephson faded. New York was far away. He was young, and the moon was shining—

"—going to keep it—always. The first letter you ever wrote me—"

"And the last, Mr. Minot. Really—I must go. Good night."

He stood alone, with the absurd check in his

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trembling fingers. Slowly the memory of Trimmer came back. A bomb? What sort of a bomb?

Well, he had given his word. There was no way out—he must protect old Jephson's interests. But might he not wish the enemy—success? He stared off in the direction the advertising wizard had gone.

"Trimmer, old boy," he muttered, "here's to your pitching arm!"

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CHAPTER V

MR. TRIMMER THROWS HIS BOMB

MISS Cynthia Meyrick was a good many girls in one. So many, indeed, that it might truthfully be added that while most people are never so much alone as when in a crowd, Miss Meyrick was never so much in a crowd as when alone. Most of these girls were admirable, a few were more mischievous than admirable, but rely upon it that every single one of them was nice.

It happened to be as a very serious-minded girl that Miss Meyrick opened her eyes on Tuesday morning. She lay for a long time watching the Florida sunshine, spoken of so tenderly in the railroad's come-on books, as it danced across the foot of her bed. To-day the *Lileth* was to steam into San Marco harbor! To-day her

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bridegroom was to smile his slow British smile on her once more! She recalled these facts without the semblance of a thrill.

Where, she wondered, was the thrill? The frivolous girl who had met Lord Harrowby abroad, and dazzled by dreams of social triumphs to come had allowed her aunt to urge her into this betrothal, was not present at the moment. Had she been, she would have declared this Cynthia Meyrick a silly, and laughed her into gaiety again.

Into the room toddled the aunt who had stood so faithfully on the coaching line abroad. With heavy wit, she spoke of the coming of Lord Harrowby. Miss Cynthia did not smile. She turned grave eyes on her aunt.

"I'm wondering," she confessed. "Was it the thing to do, after all? Shall I be so very happy?"

"Nonsense. Ninety-nine out of a hundred engaged girls have doubts. It's natural." Aunt Mary sat down on the bed, which groaned in agony. "Of course you'll be happy. You'll take precedence over Marion Bishop—didn't we look that up? And after the airs she's put on when

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she's come back to Detroit—well, you ought to be the happiest of girls."

"I know—but—" Miss Meyrick continued to gaze solemnly at her aunt. She was accustomed to the apparition. To any one who knew Aunt Mary only in her public appearances, a view of her now would have been startling. Not to go too deeply into the matter, she had not yet been poured into the steel girders that determined her public form. Her washed-out eyes were puffy, and her gray hair was not so luxurious as it would be when she appeared in the hotel dining-room for lunch. There she sat, a fat little lump of a woman who had all her life chased will-o'-the-wisps.

"But what?" she demanded firmly.

"It seems as if all my fun were over. Didn't you feel that way when you became engaged?"

"Hardly. But then—I hadn't enjoyed everything money will buy, as you have. I've always said you had too much. There, dear—cheer up. You don't seem to realize. Why, I can remember when you were born—in the flat down on Second Street—and your father wearing his old

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overcoat another year to pay the doctor's bill. And now that little fluffy baby is to marry into the peerage! Bless you, how proud your mother would be had she lived—"

"Are you sure, Aunt Mary?"

"Positive." Aunt Mary's eyes filled, and with a show of real, if clumsy affection, she leaned over and kissed her niece. "Come, dear, get up. I've ordered breakfast in the rooms."

Miss Cynthia sat up. And as if banished by that act, the serious little mouse of a girl scampered into oblivion, and in her place appeared a gay young rogue who sees the future lying bright ahead.

"After all," she smiled, "I'm not married—yet." And humming brightly from a current musical comedy—"Not just yet—just yet—just yet—" she stretched forth one slim white arm to throw aside the coverlet. 'At which point it is best discreetly to withdraw.

Mr. Minot, after a lonesome if abundant breakfast, was at this moment strolling across the hotel courtyard toward yesterday morning's New York papers. 'As he walked, the pert

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promises of Mr. Trimmer filled his mind. What was the proposition Mr. Trimmer had in tow? How would it affect the approaching wedding? And what course of action should the representative of Jephson pursue when it was revealed? For in the sensible light of morning Dick Minot realized that while he remained in San Marco as the guardian of Jephson's interests, he must do his duty. Adorable Miss Meyrick might be, but any change of mind on her part must be over his dead body. A promise was a promise.

With this resolve firm, he proceeded along the hot sidewalk of San Sebastian Avenue. On his right the rich shops again, a dignified Spanish church as old as the town, a rambling lackadaisical "opera-house." On his left the green and sand colored plaza, with the old Spanish governor's house in the center, now serving Uncle Sam as post-office. A city of the past was this; "other times, other manners" breathed in the air.

At the news-stand Minot met Jack Paddock, jaunty, with a gardenia in his buttonhole and the atmosphere of prosperity that goes with it.

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"Come for a stroll," Paddock suggested. "I presume you want the giddy story of my life I promised you yesterday? Been down to the old Spanish fort yet? No? Come ahead, and there on the ramparts I'll impart."

They went down the narrow and very modern street of the souvenir venders. Suddenly the street ended, and they walked again in the past. The remnants of the old city gates restored, loomed in the sunlight. They stepped through the portals, and Minot gave a gasp.

There in the quiet morning stood the great gray fort that the early settlers had built to protect themselves from the gay dogs who roamed the seas. Its massive walls spoke clearly of romance, of bloody days of cutlass and spike, of bandaged heads and ready arms. Such things still stood! Still stood in the United States—land of steam radiators and men who marched in suffrage parades!

The old caretaker let them in, and they went up the stone steps to stand at last on the parapet looking down on the shimmering sea. To Minot, fresh from Broadway, it all seemed like a color-

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ful dream. They climbed to the highest point and sat, swinging their legs over the edge. Far below the bright blue waters broke on the lower walls.

"It's a funny country down here," Paddock said slowly. "A sort of too-good-to-be-true, who-believes-it place. Bright and gay and full of green palms, and so much like a musical comedy you keep waiting all the time for the curtain to go down and the male population to begin its march up the aisle. I've been here three months, and I don't yet think it's really true."

He shifted on the cold stones.

"Ever since white men hit on it," he went on, "it's sort of kept luring them here on fool dream hunts—like a woman. Along about the time old Ponce de Leon came over here prospecting for the fountain that nobody but Lillian Russell has located yet, another Spaniard—I forget his name—had a pipe dream, too. He came over hot-foot looking for a mountain of gold he dreamed was here. I'm sorry for that old boy."

"Sorry for him?" repeated Minot.

"Yes—sorry. He had the right idea, but he

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arrived several hundred years too soon. He should have waited until the yellow rich from the North showed up here. Then he'd have found his mountain—he'd have found a whole range of them."

"I suppose I'm to infer," Mr. Minot said, "that where he failed, you've landed."

"Yes, Dick. I am right on the mountain with my little alpenstock in hand."

"I'm sorry," replied Minot frankly. "You might have amounted to something if you'd been separated from money long enough."

"So I've heard," Paddock said with a yawn. "But it wasn't to be. I haven't seen you since we left college, have I? Well, Dick, for a couple of years I tried to make good doing fiction. I turned them out by the yard—nice quiet little tea-table yarns with snappy dialogue. Once I got eighty dollars for a story. It was hard work—and I always did yearn for the purple, you know."

"I know," said Minot gravely.

"Well, I've struck it, Dick. I've struck the deep purple with a loud if sickening thud. Hist! The graft I mentioned yesterday." He glanced

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over his shoulder. "Remember Mrs. Bruce, the wittiest hostess in San Marco?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, I write her repartee for her."

"Her—what?"

"Her repartee—her dialogue—the bright talk she convulses dinner tables with. Instead of putting my smart stuff into stories at eighty per, I sell it to Mrs. Bruce at—I'd be ashamed to tell you, old man. I remarked that it was essentially soft. It is."

"This is a new one on me," said Minot, dazed.

A delighted smile spread over Mr. Paddock's handsome face.

"Thanks. That's the beauty of it. I'm a pioneer. There'll be others, but I was the first. Consider the situation. Here's Mrs. Bruce, loaded with diamonds and money, but tongue-tied in company, with a wit developed in Zanesville, Ohio. Bright, but struggling, young author comes to her—offers to make her conversation the sensation of the place for a few pesos."

"You did that?"

"Yes—I ask posterity to remember it was I

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who invented the graft. Mrs. Bruce fell on my fair young neck. Now, she gives me in advance a list of her engagements, and for the important ones I devise her line of talk. Then, as I'm usually present at the occasion, I swing things round for her and give her her cues. If I'm not there, she has to manage it herself. It's a great life—only a bit of a strain on me. I have to remember not to be clever in company. If I forget and spring a good one, she jumps on me proper afterward for not giving it to her."

"Jack," said Minot slowly, "come way from here with me. Come north. This place will finish you sure."

"Sorry, old man," laughed Paddock, "but I've had a nip of the lotus. This lazy old land suits me. I like to sit on a veranda while a dusky menial in a white coat hands me the tinkle-tinkle in a tall cool glass. Come away? Oh, no—I couldn't do that."

"You'll marry down here," sighed Minot. "Some girl with money. And the career we all hoped you'd make for yourself will go up in a golden cloud."

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"I met a girl," Paddock replied, half closing his eyes and smiling cynically at the sea—"little thing from the Middle West, stopping at a back street boarding-house—father in the hardware business, nobody at all—but eyes like the sea there, hands like butterflies—sort of—got me— That's how I happen to know I'll never marry. For if I married anybody it would have to be her—and I let her go home without saying a word because I was selfish and like this easy game and intend to stick to it until I'm smothered in rose-leaves. Shall we wander back?"

"See here, Jack—I don't want to preach"—Minot tried to conceal his seriousness with a smile—"but if I were you I'd stick to this girl, and make good—"

"And leave this?" Paddock laughed. "Dick, you old idiot, this is meat and drink to me. This nice old land of loiter in the sun. Nay, nay. Now, I've really got to get back. Mrs. Bruce is giving a tango tea this afternoon—informal, but something has to be said— These fellows who write a daily humorous column must lead a devil of a life."

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With a laugh, Minot followed his irresponsible friend down the steps. They crossed the bridge over the empty moat and came through the city gates again to the street of the alligator.

"By the way," Paddock said as they went up the hotel steps, "you haven't told me what brought you south?"

"Business, Jack," said Minot. "It's a secret—perhaps I can tell you later."

"Business? I thought, of course, you came for pleasure."

"There'll be no pleasure in this trip for me," said Minot bitterly.

"Oh, won't there?" Paddock laughed. "Wait till you hear Mrs. Bruce talk. See you later, old man."

'At luncheon they brought Mr. Minot a telegram from a certain seventeenth floor in New York. An explosive telegram. It read:

"Nonsense nobody here to take your place, see it through, you've given your word.

"THACKER."

Gloomily Mr. Minot considered. What was

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there to do but see it through? Even though Thacker should send another to take his place, could he stay to woo the lady he adored? Hardly. In that event he would have to go away —never see her again—never hear her voice— If he stayed as Jephson's representative he might know the glory of her nearness for a week, might thrill at her smile—even while he worked to wed her to Lord Harrowby. And perhaps— Who could say? Hard as he might work, might he not be thwarted? It was possible.

So after lunch he sent Thacker a reassuring message, promising to stay. And at the end of a dull hour in the lobby, he set out to explore the town.

The Mermaid Tea House stood on the water-front, with a small second-floor balcony that looked out on the harbor. Passing that way at four-thirty that afternoon, Minot heard a voice call to him. He glanced up.

"Oh, Mr. Minot—won't you come into my parlor?" Cynthia Meyrick smiled down on him.

"Splendid," Minot laughed. "I walk forlorn through this old Spanish town—suddenly a

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lattice is thrown wide, a fair hand beckons. I dash within."

"Thanks for dashing," Miss Meyrick greeted him, on the balcony. "I was finding it dreadfully dull. But I'm afraid the Spanish romance is a little lacking. There is no moonlight, no lattice, no mantilla, no Spanish beauty."

"No matter," Minot answered. "I never did care for Spanish types. They flash like a sky-rocket—then tumble in the dark. Now, the home-grown girls—"

"And nothing but tea," she interrupted. "Will you have a cup?"

"Thanks. Was it really very dull?"

"Yes. This book was to blame." She held up a novel.

"What's the matter with it?"

"Oh—it's one of those books in which the hero and heroine are forever 'gazing into each other's eyes.' And they understand perfectly. But the reader doesn't. I've reached one of those gazing matches now."

"But isn't it so in real life—when people gaze

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into each other's eyes, don't they usually understand?"

"Do they?"

"Don't they? You surely have had more experience than I."

"What makes you think so?" she smiled.

"Because your eyes are so very easy to gaze into."

"Mr. Minot—you're gazing into them—brazenly. And—neither of us 'understand,' do we?"

"Oh, no—we're both completely at sea."

"There," she cried triumphantly. "I told you these authors were all wrong."

Minot, having begun to gaze, found difficulty in stopping. She was near, she was beautiful—and a promise made in New York was a dim and distant thing.

"The railroad folders try to make you believe Florida is an annex to Heaven," he said. "I used to think they were lying. But—"

She blushed.

"But what, Mr. Minot?"

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He leaned close, a strange light in his eyes. He opened his mouth to speak.

Suddenly he glanced over her shoulder, and the light died from his eyes. His lips set in a bitter curve.

"Nothing," he said. A silence.

"Mr. Minot—you've grown awfully dull."

"Have I? I'm sorry."

"Must I go back to my book—"

She was interrupted by the shrill triumphant cry of a yacht's siren at her back. She turned her head.

"The *Lileth*," she said.

"Exactly," said Minot. "The bridegroom cometh."

Another silence.

"You'll want to go to meet him," Minot said, rising. He stood looking at the boat, flashing gaily in the sunshine. "I'll go with you as far as the street."

"But—you know Lord Harrowby. Meet him with me."

"It seems hardly the thing—"

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"But I'm not sentimental. And surely Allan's not."

"Then I must be," said Minot. "Really—I'd rather not—"

They went together to the street. At the parting of the ways, Minot turned to her.

"I promised Lord Harrowby in New York," he told her, "that you would have your lamp trimmed and burning."

She looked up at him. A mischievous light came into her eyes.

"Please—have you a match?" she asked.

It was too much. Minot turned and fled down the street. He did not once look back, though it seemed to him that he felt every step the girl took across that narrow pier to her fiancé's side.

As he dressed for dinner that night his telephone rang, and Miss Meyrick's voice sounded over the wire.

"Harrowby remembers you very pleasantly. Won't you join us at dinner?"

"Are you sure an outsider—" he began.

"Nonsense. Mr. Martin Wall is to be there."

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"Ah—thank you—I'll be delighted," Minot replied.

In the lobby Harrowby seized his hand.

"My dear chap—you're looking fit. Great to see you again. By the way—do you know Martin Wall?"

"Yes—Mr. Wall and I met just before the splash," Minot smiled. He shook hands with Wall, unaccountably genial and beaming. "The Hudson, Mr. Wall, is a bit chilly in February."

"My dear fellow," said Wall, "can you ever forgive me? A thousand apologies. It was all a mistake—a horrible mistake."

"I felt like a rotter when I heard about it," Harrowby put in. "Martin mistook you for some one else. You must forgive us both."

"Freely," said Minot. "And I want to apologize for my suspicions of you, Lord Harrowby."

"Thanks, old chap."

"I never doubted you would come—after I saw Miss Meyrick."

"She is a ripper, isn't she?" said Harrowby enthusiastically.

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Martin Wall shot a quick, almost hostile glance at Minot.

"You've noticed that yourself, haven't you?" he said in Minot's ear.

At which point the Meyrick family arrived, and they all went in to dinner.

That function could hardly be described as hilarious. Aunt Mary fluttered and gasped in her triumph, and spoke often of her horror of the new. The recent admission of automobiles to the sacred precincts of Bar Harbor seemed to be the great and disturbing fact in life for her. Spencer Meyrick said little; his thoughts were far away. The rush and scramble of a business office, the click of typewriters, the excitement of the dollar chase—these things had been his life. Deprived of them, like many another exile in the South, he moved in a dim world of unrealities and wished that he were home. Minot, too, had little to say. On Martin Wall fell the burden of entertainment, and he bore it as one trained for the work. Blithely he gossiped of queer corners that had known him and amid the flow of his oratory the dinner progressed.

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It was after dinner, when they all stood together in the lobby a moment before separating, that Mr. Henry Trimmer made good his promise out of a clear sky.

Cynthia Meyrick stood facing the others, talking brightly, when suddenly her face paled and the flippant words died on her lips. They all turned instantly.

Through the lobby, in a buzz of excited comment, a man walked slowly, his eyes on the ground. He was a tall blond Englishman, not unlike Lord Harrowby in appearance. His gray eyes, when he raised them for a moment, were listless, his shoulders stooped and weary, and he had a long drooping mustache that hung like a weeping willow above a particularly cheerless stream.

However, it was not his appearance that excited comment and caused Miss Meyrick to pale. Hung over his shoulders was a pair of sandwich boards such as the outcasts of a great city carry up and down the streets. And on the front board, turned full toward Miss Meyrick's dinner party, was printed in bold black letters:

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I
AM
THE
REAL
LORD
HARROWBY

With a little gasp and a murmured apology, Miss Meyrick turned quickly and entered the elevator. Lord Harrowby stood like a man of stone, gazing at the sandwich boards.

It was at this point that the hotel detective sufficiently recovered himself to lay eager hands on the audacious sandwich man and propel him violently from the scene.

In the background Mr. Minot perceived Henry Trimmer, puffing excitedly on a big black cigar, a triumphant look on his face.

Mr. Trimmer's bomb was thrown.

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CHAPTER VI

TEN MINUTES OF AGONY

"ALL I ask, Mister Harrowby, is that you consent to a short interview with your brother."

Mr. Trimmer was speaking. The time was noon of the following day, and Trimmer faced Lord Harrowby in the sitting-room of his lordship's hotel suite. Also present—at Harrowby's invitation—were Martin Wall and Mr. Minot.

His lordship turned his gray eyes on Trimmer's eager face. He could make those eyes fishy when he liked—he made them so now.

"He is not my brother," he said coldly, "and I shall not see him. May I ask you not to call me Mr. Harrowby?"

"You may ask till you're red in your noble face," replied Trimmer, firm in his disrespect.

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"But I shall go on calling you 'Mister' just the same. I call you that because I know the facts. Just as I call your poor cheated brother, who was in this hotel last night between sandwich boards, Lord Harrowby."

"Really," said his lordship, "I see no occasion for prolonging this interview."

Mr. Trimmer leaned forward. He was a big man, but his face was incongruously thin—almost ax-like. The very best sort of face to thrust in anywhere—and Trimmer was the very man to do the thrusting without batting an eye.

"Do you deny," he demanded with the air of a prosecutor, "that you had an older brother by the name of George?"

"I certainly do not," answered Lord Harrowby. "George ran off to America some twenty-two years ago. He died in a mining camp in Arizona twelve years back. There is no question whatever about that. We had it on the most reliable authority."

"A lot of lies," said Trimmer, "can be had on good authority. This situation illustrates that. Do you think, Mr. Harrowby, that I'd

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be wasting my time on this proposition if I wasn't dead sure of my facts. Why, poor old George has the evidence in his possession. Incontrovertible proofs. It wouldn't hurt you to see him and look over what he has to offer."

"Your lordship," Minot suggested, "you know that I am your friend and that my great desire is to see you happily married next week. In order that nothing may happen to prevent, I think you ought to see—"

"This impostor," cut in his lordship haughtily. "No, I can not. This is not the first time adventurers have questioned the Harrowby title. The dignity of our family demands that I refuse to take any notice whatsoever."

"Go on," sneered Trimmer. "Hide behind your dignity. When I get through with you you won't have enough left to conceal your stick-pin."

"Trimmer," said Martin Wall, speaking for the first time, "how much money do you want?"

Mr. Trimmer kept his temper admirably.

"Your society has not corrupted me, Mr. Wall," he said sweetly. "I am not a blackmailer.

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I am simply a publicity man. I'm working on a salary which Lord Harrowby—the real Lord Harrowby—is to pay me when he comes into his own. I've handled successfully in publicity campaigns prima donnas, pills, erasers, perfumes, holding companies, race horses, soups and society leaders. It isn't likely that I shall fall down on this proposition. For the last time, Mr. Allan Harrowby, will you see your brother?"

"Lord Harrowby, if I were you—" Minot began.

"My dear fellow." His lordship raised one slim hand. "It is quite impossible. Which, I take it, terminates our talk with Mr. Trimmer."

"Yes," said Mr. Trimmer, rising. "Except for one thing. Our young friend here, when he urges you to grant my request, is giving a correct imitation of a wise head on youthful shoulders. He's an American, and he knows about me—about Henry Trimmer. I guess you never heard, Mr. Harrowby, what I did for Cotrell's Ink Eraser—"

"Come on," said Mr. Wall militantly, "erase yourself."

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"For the moment, I will," smiled Mr. Trimmer. "But I warn you, Mr. Harrowby, you are going to be sorry. You aren't up against any piker in publicity—no siree. That little sandwich-board stunt of mine last night was just a starter. I'm going to take the public into partnership. Put it up to the people—that's my motto."

"Good day, sir," snapped Lord Harrowby.

"Put it up to the people. And when I pull off the little trick I thought of this morning, you're going to get down before me on your noble knees, and beg off. I warn you. Good day, gentlemen. And may I add one simple request on parting? Watch Trimmer!"

He went out, slamming the door behind him. Mr. Wall rose and walked rapidly toward a decanter.

"Rather tough on you, Lord Harrowby," he remarked, pouring himself a drink. "Especially just now. The fresh bounder! Ought to have been kicked out of the room."

"An impostor," snorted Harrowby. "A' rank impostor."

"Of course." Mr. Wall set down his glass.

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"But don't worry. If Trimmer gets too obstreperous, I'll take care of him myself. I guess I'll be going back to the yacht."

After Wall's departure, Minot and Harrowby sat staring at each other for a long moment.

"See here, your lordship," said Minot at last. "You know why I'm in San Marco. That wedding next Tuesday must take place without fail. And I can't say that I approve of your action just now—"

"My dear boy," Harrowby interrupted soothingly, "I appreciate your position. But there was nothing to be gained by seeing Mr. Trimmer's friend. The Meyricks were distressed, naturally, by that ridiculous sandwich-board affair last evening, but they have made no move to call off the wedding on account of it. The best thing to do, I'm sure, is to let matters take their course. I might be able to prove that chap's claims false—and then again I mightn't, even if I knew they were false. And—there is a third possibility."

"What is that?"

"He might really be—George."

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"But you said your brother died, twelve years ago."

"That is what we heard. But—one can not be sure. And, delighted as I should be to know that George is alive, naturally I should prefer to know it after next Tuesday."

Anger surged into Minot's heart.

"Is that fair to the young lady who—"

"Who is to become my wife?" Lord Harrowby waved his hand. "It is. Miss Meyrick is not marrying me for my title. As for her father and aunt, I can not be so sure. I want no disturbance. You want none. I am sure it is better to let things take their course."

"All right," said Minot. "Only I intend to do every thing in my power to put this wedding through."

"My dear chap—your cause is mine," answered his lordship.

Minot returned to the narrow confines of his room. On the bureau, where he had thrown it earlier in the day, lay an invitation to dine that night with Mrs. Bruce. Thus was Jack Paddock's hand shown. The dinner was to be in

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Miss Meyrick's honor, and Mr. Minot was not sorry he was to go. He took up the invitation and reread it smilingly. So he was to hear Mrs. Bruce at her own table—the wittiest hostess in San Marco—bar none.

The drowsiness of a Florida midday was in the air. Mr. Minot lay down on his bed. A hundred thoughts were his: the brown of Miss Meyrick's eyes, the sincerity of Mr. Trimmer's voice when he spoke of his proposition, the fishy look of Lord Harrowby refusing to meet his long lost brother. Things grew hazy. Mr. Minot slept.

On leaving Lord Harrowby's rooms, Mr. Martin Wall did not immediately set out for the *Lileth,* on which he lived in preference to the hotel. Instead he took a brisk turn about the spacious lobby of the De la Pax.

People turned to look at him as he passed. They noted that his large, placid, rather jovial face was lighted by an eye sharp and queer, and a bit out of place amid its surroundings. Mr. Wall considered himself the true cosmopolite, and his history rather bore out the boast. Many

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and odd were the lands that had known him. He had loaned money to a prince of Algiers (on excellent security), broken bread with a sultan, organized a baseball nine in Cuba, and coming home from the East via the Indian ports, had flirted on shipboard with the wife of a Russian grand duke. As he passed through that cool lobby it was not to be wondered at that middle west merchants and their wives found him worthy of a second glance.

The courtyard of the Hotel de la Pax was fringed by a series of modish shops, with doors opening both on the courtyard and on the narrow street outside. Among these, occupying a corner room was the very smart jewel shop of Ostby and Blake. Occasionally in the winter resorts of the South one may find jewelry shops whose stock would bear favorably competition with Fifth Avenue. Ostby and Blake conducted such an establishment.

For a moment before the show-window of this shop Mr. Wall paused, and with the eye of a connoisseur studied the brilliant display within. His whole manner changed. The air of boredom

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with which he had surveyed his fellow travelers of the lobby disappeared; on the instant he was alert, alive, almost eager. Jauntily he strolled into the store.

One clerk only—a tall thin man with a sallow complexion and hair the color of a lemon—was in charge. Mr. Wall asked to be shown the stock of unset diamonds.

The trays that the man set before him caused the eyes of Mr. Wall to brighten still more. With a manner almost reverent he stooped over and passed his fingers lovingly over the stones. For an instant the tall man glanced outside, and smiled a sallow smile. A little girl in a pink dress was crossing the street, and it was at her that he smiled.

"There's a flaw in that stone," said Mr. Wall, in a voice of sorrow. "See—"

From outside came the shrill scream of a child, interrupting. The tall man turned quickly to the window.

"My God—" he moaned.

"What is it?" Mr. Wall sought to look over his shoulder. "Automobile—"

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"My little girl," cried the clerk in agony. He turned to Martin Wall, hesitating. His sallow face was white now, his lips trembled. Doubtfully he gazed into the frank open countenance of Martin Wall. And then—

"I leave you in charge," he shouted, and fled past Mr. Wall to the street.

For a moment Martin Wall stood, frozen to the spot. His eyes were unbelieving; his little Cupid's bow mouth was wide open.

"Here—come back—" he shouted, when he could find his voice.

No one heeded. No one heard. Outside in the street a crowd had gathered. Martin Wall wet his dry lips with his tongue. An unaccountable shudder swept his huge frame.

"My God—" he cried in a voice of terror, "I'm alone!"

For the first time he dared to move. His elbow bumped a hundred thousand dollars' worth of unset diamonds. Frightened, he drew back. He collided with a show-case rich in emeralds, rubies and aquamarines. He put out a plump

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hand to steady himself. It rested on a display case of French, Russian and Dutch silver.

Mr. Wall's knees grew weak. He felt a strange prickly sensation all over him. He took a step—and was staring at the finest display of black pearls south of Maiden Lane, New York.

Quickly he turned away. His eyes fell upon the door of a huge safety vault. It was swinging open!

Little beads of perspiration began to pop out on the forehead of Martin Wall. His heart was hammering like that of a youth who sees after a long separation his lady love. His eyes grew glassy.

He took out a silk handkerchief and passed it slowly across his damp forehead.

Staggering slightly, he stepped again to the trays of unset stones. The glassy eyes had grown greedy now. He put out one huge hand as the lover aforesaid might reach toward his lady's hair.

Then Mr. Wall shut his lips firmly, and thrust both of his hands deep into his trousers pockets.

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He stood there in the middle of that gorgeous room—a fat figure of a man suffering a cruel inhuman agony.

He was still standing thus when the tall man came running back. Apprehension clouded that sallow face.

"It was very kind of you." The small eyes of the clerk darted everywhere; then came back to Martin Wall. "I'm obliged—why, what's the matter, sir?"

Martin Wall passed his hand across his eyes, as a man banishing a terrible dream.

"The little girl?" he asked.

"Hardly a scratch," said the clerk, pointing to the smiling child at his side. "It was lucky, wasn't it?" He was behind the counter now, studying the trays unprotected on the show-case.

"Very lucky." Martin Wall still had to steady himself. "Perhaps you'd like to look about a bit before I go—"

"Oh, no, sir. Everything's all right, I'm sure. You were looking at these stones—"

"Some other time," said Wall weakly. "I only wanted an idea of what you had."

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"Good day, sir. And thank you very much."

"Not at all." And the limp ex-guardian passed unsteadily from the store into the glare of the street.

Mr. Tom Stacy, of the Manhattan Club, half dozing on the veranda of his establishment, was rejoiced to see his old friend Martin Wall crossing the pavement toward him.

"Well, Martin—" he began. And then a look of concern came into his face. "Good lord, man —what ails you?"

Mr. Wall sank like a wet rag to the steps.

"Tom," he said, "a terrible thing has just happened. I was left alone in Ostby and Blake's jewelry shop."

"Alone?" cried Mr. Stacy. "You—alone?"

"Absolutely alone."

Mr. Stacy leaned over.

"Are you leaving town—in a hurry?" he asked.

Gloomily Mr. Wall shook his head.

"He put me on my honor," he complained. "Left me in charge of the shop. Can you beat it? Of course after that, I—well—you know,

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somehow I couldn't do it. I tried, but I couldn't."

Mr. Stacy threw back his head, and his raucous laughter smote the lazy summer afternoon.

"I can't help it," he gasped. "The funniest thing I ever — you — the best stone thief in America alone in charge of three million dollars' worth of the stuff!"

"Good heavens, man," whispered Wall. "Not so loud!" And well might he protest, for Mr. Stacy's indiscreet and mirthful tone carried far. It carried, for example, to Mr. Richard Minot, standing hidden behind the curtains of his little room overhead.

"Come inside, Martin," said Stacy. "Come inside and have a bracer. You sure must need it, after that."

"I do," replied Mr. Wall, in heartfelt tones. He rose and followed Tom Stacy.

Cheeks burning, eyes popping, Mr. Minot watched them disappear into the Manhattan Club.

Here was news indeed. Lord Harrowby's

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boon companion the ablest jewel thief in America! Just what did that mean?

Putting on coat and hat, he hurried to the hotel office and there wrote a cablegram:

"Situation suspicious are you dead certain H. is on the level?"

An hour later, in his London office, Mr. Jephson read this message carefully three times.

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CHAPTER VII

CHAIN LIGHTNING'S COLLAR

THE Villa Jasmine, Mrs. Bruce's winter home, stood in a park of palms and shrubbery some two blocks from the Hotel de la Pax. Mr. Minot walked thither that evening in the resplendent company of Jack Paddock.

"You'll enjoy Mrs. Bruce to-night," Paddock confided. "I've done her some rather good lines, if I do say it as shouldn't."

"On what topics?" asked Minot, with a smile.

"International marriage—jewels—by the way, I don't suppose you know that Miss Cynthia Meyrick is to appear for the first time wearing the famous Harrowby necklace?"

"I didn't even know there was a necklace," Minot returned.

"Ah, such ignorance. But then, you don't

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wander much in feminine society, do you? Mrs. Bruce told me about it this morning. Chain Lightning's Collar."

"Chain Lightning's what?"

"Ah, my boy—" Mr. Paddock lighted a cigarette. "You should go round more in royal circles. List, commoner, while I relate. It seems that the Earl of Raybrook is a giddy old sport with a gambling streak a yard wide. In his young days he loved the Lady Evelyn Hollowway. Lady Evelyn had a horse entered in a derby about that time—name, Chain Lightning. And the Earl of Raybrook wagered a diamond necklace against a kiss that Chain Lightning would lose."

"Wasn't that giving big odds?" inquired Minot.

"Not if you believe the stories of Lady Evelyn's beauty. Well, it happened before Tammany politicians began avenging Ireland on Derby Day. Chain Lightning won. And the earl came across with the necklace. Afterward he married Lady Evelyn—"

"To get back the necklace?"

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"Cynic. And being a rather racy old boy, he referred to the necklace thereafter as Chain Lightning's Collar. It got to be pretty well known in England by that name. I believe it is considered a rather neat piece of jewelry among the English nobility—whose sparklers aren't what they were before the steel business in Pittsburgh turned out a good thing."

"Chain Lightning's Collar," mused Minot. "I presume Lady Evelyn was the mother of the present Lord Harrowby?"

"So 'tis rumored," smiled Paddock. "Though I take it his lordship favors his father in looks."

They walked along for a moment in silence. The story of this necklace of diamonds could bring but one thing to Minot's thoughts—Martin Wall drooping on the steps of the Manhattan Club while old Stacy roared with joy. He considered. Should he tell Mr. Paddock? No, he decided he would wait.

"As I said," Paddock ran on, "you'll enjoy Mrs. Bruce to-night. Her lines are good, but somehow—it's really a great problem to me—she doesn't sound human and natural when she

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gets them off. I looked up her beauty doctor and asked him if he couldn't put a witty gleam in her eye, but he told me he didn't care to go that far in correcting Mrs. Bruce's Maker."

They had reached the Villa Jasmine now, a great white palace in a flowery setting more like a dream than a reality. The evening breeze murmured whisperingly through the palms, a hundred gorgeous colors shone in the moonlight, fountains splashed coolly amid the greenery.

"Act Two," muttered Minot. "The grounds surrounding the castle of the fairy princess."

"You have to come down here, don't you," replied Paddock, "to realize that old Mother Nature has a little on Belasco, after all?"

The whir of a motor behind them caused the two young men to turn. Then Mr. Minot saw her coming up the path toward him—coming up that fantastic avenue of palms—tall, fair, white, a lovely figure in a lovely setting—

Ah, yes—Lord Harrowby! He walked at her side, nonchalant, distinguished, almost as tall as a popular illustrator thinks a man in evening clothes should be. Truly, they made a handsome

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couple. They were to wed. Mr. Minot himself had sworn they were to wed.

He kept the bitterness from his tone as he greeted them there amid the soft magic of the Florida night. Together they went inside. In the center of a magnificent hallway they found Mrs. Bruce standing, like stout Cortez on his Darien peak, triumphant amid the glory of her gold.

Mr. Minot thought Mrs. Bruce's manner of greeting somewhat harried and oppressed. Poor lady, every function was a first night for her. Would the glare of the footlights frighten her? Would she falter in her lines—forget them completely? Only her sisters of the stage could sympathize with her understandingly now.

"So you are to carry Cynthia away?" Minot heard her saying to Lord Harrowby. "Such a lot of my friends have married into the peerage. Indeed, I have sometimes thought you English have no other pastime save that of slipping engagement rings on hands across the sea."

A soft voice spoke in Minot's ear.

"Mine," Mr. Paddock was saying. "Not bad,

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eh? But look at that Englishman. Why should I have sat up all last night writing lines to try on him? Can you tell me that?"

Lord Harrowby, indeed, seemed oblivious of Mrs. Bruce's little bon mot. He hemmed and hawed, and said he was a lucky man. But he did not mean that he was a lucky man because he had the privilege of hearing Mrs. Bruce.

Mr. Bruce slipped out of the shadows into the weariness of another formal dinner. Mrs. Bruce glittered, and he wrote the checks. He was a scraggly little man who sometimes sat for hours at a time in silence. There were those unkind enough to say that he sought back, trying to recall the reason that had led him to marry Mrs. Bruce.

When he beheld Miss Cynthia Meyrick, and knew that he was to take her in to dinner, Mr. Bruce brightened perceptibly. None save a blind and deaf man could have failed to. Cocktails consumed, the party turned toward the dining-room. Except for the Meyricks, Martin Wall, Lord Harrowby and Paddock, Dick Minot knew none of them. There were a couple of colorless

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men from New York who, when they died, would be referred to as "prominent club men," a horsy girl from Westchester, an ex-ambassador's wife and daughter, a number of names from Boston and Philadelphia with their respective bearers. And last but not least the two Bond girls from Omaha—blond, lovely, but inclined to be snobbish even in that company, for their mother was a Van Reypan, and Van Reypans are rare birds in Omaha and elsewhere.

Mr. Minot took in the elder of the Bond girls, and found that Cynthia Meyrick sat on his left. He glanced at her throat as they sat down. It was bare of ornament. And then he beheld, sparkling in her lovely hair, the perfect diamonds of Chain Lightning's Collar. As he turned back to the table he caught the eye of Mr. Martin Wall. Mr. Wall's eye happened to be coming away from the same locality.

The girl from Omaha gossiped of plays and players, like a dramatic page from some old Sunday newspaper.

"I'm mad about the stage," she confided. "Of course, we get all the best shows in Omaha. Why,

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Maxine Elliott and Nat Goodwin come there every year."

Mr. Minot, New Yorker, shuddered. Should he tell her of the many and active years in the lives of these two since they visited any town together? No. What use? On the other side of him a sweet voice spoke:

"I presume you know, Mr. Minot, that Mrs. Bruce has the reputation of being the wittiest hostess in San Marco?"

"I have heard as much." Minot smiled into Cynthia Meyrick's eyes. "When does her act go on?"

Mrs. Bruce was wondering the same thing. She knew her lines; she was ready. True, she understood few of those lines. Wit was not her specialty. Until Mr. Paddock took charge of her, she had thought colored newspaper supplements humorous in the extreme. However, the lines Mr. Paddock taught her seemed to go well, and she continued to patronize the old stand.

She looked up now from her conversation with her dinner partner, and silence fell as at a curtain ascending.

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"I was just saying to Lord Harrowby," Mrs. Bruce began, smiling about her, "how picturesque our business streets are here. What with the Greek merchants in their native costumes—"

"Bandits, every one of them," growled Mr. Bruce, bravely interrupting. His wife frowned.

"Only the other day," she continued, "I bought a rug from a man who claimed to be a Persian prince. He said it was a prayer-rug, and I think it must have been, for ever since I got it I've been praying it's genuine."

A little ripple of amusement ran about the table. The redoubtable Mrs. Bruce was under way. People spoke to one another in undertones —little conversational nudges of anticipation.

"By the way, Cynthia," the hostess inquired, "have you heard from Helen Arden lately?"

"Not for some time," responded Miss Meyrick, "although I have her promise that she and the duke will be here—next Tuesday."

"Splendid." Mrs. Bruce turned to his lordship. "I think of Helen, Lord Harrowby, because she, too, married into your nobility. Her father made his money in sausage in the Middle

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West. In his youth he'd had trouble in finding a pair of ready-made trousers, but as soon as the money began to roll in, Helen started to look him up a coat of arms. And a family motto. I remember suggesting at the time, in view of the sausage: 'A family is no stronger than its weakest link.' "

Mrs. Bruce knew when to pause. She paused now. The ripple became an outright laugh. Mr. Paddock sipped languorously from his wine-glass. He saw that his lines "got over."

"Went into society head foremost, Helen did," Mrs. Bruce continued. "Thought herself a clever amateur actress. Used to act often for charity—though I don't recall that she ever got it."

"The beauty of Mrs. Bruce's wit," said Miss Meyrick in Mr. Minot's ear, "is that it is so unconscious. She doesn't appear to realize when she has said a good thing."

"There's just a chance that she doesn't realize it," suggested Minot.

"Then Helen met the Duke of Lismore," Mrs. Bruce was speaking once more. "Perhaps you know him, Lord Harrowby?"

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"No—er—sorry to say I don't—"

"A charming chap. In some ways. Helen was a Shavian in considering marriage the chief pursuit of women. She pursued. Followed Lismore to Italy, where he proposed. I presume he thought that being in Rome, he must do as the Romeos do."

"But, my dear lady," said Harrowby in a daze, "isn't it the Romans?"

"Isn't what the Romans?" asked Mrs. Bruce blankly.

"Your lordship is correct," said Mr. Paddock hastily. "Mrs. Bruce misquoted purposely—in jest, you know. Jibe—japery."

"Oh—er—pardon me," returned his lordship.

"I saw Helen in London last spring," Mrs. Bruce went on. "She confided to me that she considers her husband a genius. And if genius really be nothing but an infinite capacity for taking champagnes, I am sure the poor child is right."

Little murmurs of joy, and the dinner proceeded. The guests bent over their food, shipped to Mrs. Bruce in a refrigerating car from New

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York, and very little wearied by its long trip. Here and there two talked together. It was like an intermission between the acts.

Mr. Minot turned to the Omaha girl. Even though she was two wives behind on Mr. Nat Goodwin's career, one must be polite.

It was at the close of the dinner that Mrs. Bruce scored her most telling point. She and Lord Harrowby were conversing about a famous English author, and when she was sure she had the attention of the table, she remarked:

"Yes, we met his wife at the Masonbys'. But I have always felt that the wife of a celebrity is like the coupon on one's railway ticket."

"How's that, Mrs. Bruce?" Minot inquired. After all, Paddock had been kind to him.

"Not good if detached," said Mrs. Bruce.

She stood. Her guests followed suit. It was by this bon mot that she chose to have her dinner live in the gossip of San Marco. Hence with it she closed the ceremony.

"Witty woman, your wife," said one of the colorless New Yorkers to Mr. Bruce, when the men were left alone.

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Mr. Bruce only grunted, but Mr. Paddock answered brightly:

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes. Don't you?"

"Why—er—really—" Mr. Paddock blushed. Modest author, he.

A servant appeared to say that Lord Harrowby was wanted at once outside, and excusing himself, Harrowby departed. He found his valet, a plump, round-faced, serious man, waiting in the shadows on the veranda. For a time they talked together in low tones. When Harrowby returned to the dining-room, his never cheerful face was even gloomier than usual.

Spencer Meyrick and Bruce, exiles both of them, talked joyously of business and the rush of the day's work for which both longed. The New York man and a sapling from Boston conversed of chamber music. Martin Wall sat silent, contemplative. Perhaps had he spoken his thoughts they would have been of a rich jewel shop at noon—deserted.

A half-hour later Mrs. Bruce's dinner-party was scattered among the palms and flowers of

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her gorgeous lawn. Mr. Minot had fallen again to the elder girl from Omaha, and blithely for her he was displaying his Broadway ignorance of horticulture. Suddenly out of the night came a scream. Instantly when he heard it, Mr. Minot knew who had uttered it.

Unceremoniously he parted from the Omaha beauty and sped over the lawn. But quick as he was, Lord Harrowby was quicker. For when Minot came up, he saw Harrowby bending over Miss Meyrick, who sat upon a wicker bench.

"Cynthia—what is it?" Harrowby was saying.

Cynthia Meyrick felt wildly of her shining hair.

"Your necklace," she gasped. "Chain Lightning's Collar. He took it! He took it!"

"Who?"

"I don't know. A man!"

"A man!" Reverent repetition by feminine voices out of the excited group.

"He leaped out at me there—by that tree—pinioned my arms—snatched the necklace. I couldn't see his face. It happened in the shadow."

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"No matter," Harrowby replied. "Don't give it another thought, my child."

"But how can I help—"

"I shall telephone the police at once," announced Spencer Meyrick.

"I beg you'll do nothing of the sort," expostulated Lord Harrowby. "It would be a great inconvenience—the thing wasn't worth the publicity that would result. I insist that the police be kept out of this."

Argument—loud on Mr. Meyrick's part—ensued. Suggestions galore were offered by the guests. But in the end Lord Harrowby had his way. It was agreed not to call in the police.

Mr. Minot, looking up, saw a sneering smile on the face of Martin Wall. In a flash he knew the truth.

With Aunt Mary calling loudly for smelling salts, and the whole party more or less in confusion, the return to the house started. Mr. Paddock walked at Minot's side.

"Rather looks as though Chain Lightning's Collar had choked off our gaiety," he mumbled. "Serves her right for wearing the thing in her

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"Your necklace! He took it!"

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hair. She spoiled two corking lines for me by not wearing it where you'd naturally expect a necklace to be worn."

Minot maneuvered so as to intercept Lord Harrowby under the portico.

"May I speak with you a moment?" he inquired. Harrowby bowed, and they stepped into the shadows of the drive.

"Lord Harrowby," said Minot, trying to keep the excitement from his voice, "I have certain information about one of the guests here this evening that I believe would interest you. Your lordship has been badly buffaloed. One of our fellow diners at Mrs. Bruce's table holds the title of the ablest jewel thief in America!"

He watched keenly to catch Lord Harrowby's start of surprise. Alas, he caught nothing of the sort.

"Nonsense," said his lordship nonchalantly. "You mustn't let your imagination carry you away, dear chap."

"Imagination nothing! I know what I'm talking about." And then Minot added sarcastically: "Sorry to bore you with this."

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His lordship laughed.

"Right-o, old fellow. I'm not interested."

"But haven't you just lost—"

"A diamond necklace? Yes." They had reached a particularly dark and secluded spot beneath the canopy of palm leaves. Harrowby turned suddenly and put his hands on Minot's shoulders. "Mr. Minot," he said, "you are here to see that nothing interferes with my marriage to Miss Meyrick. I trust you are determined to do your duty to your employers?"

"Absolutely. That is why—"

"Then," replied Harrowby quickly, "I am going to ask you to take charge of this for me."

Suddenly Minot felt something cold and glassy in his hand. Startled, he looked down. Even in the dark, Chain Lightning's Collar sparkled like the famous toy that it was.

"Your lordship!—"

"I can not explain now. I can only tell you it is quite necessary that you help me at this time. If you wish to do your full duty by Mr. Jephson."

"Who took this necklace from Miss Meyrick's hair?" asked Minot hotly.

"I did. I assure you it was the only way to

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prevent our plans from going awry. Please keep it until I ask you for it."

And turning, Lord Harrowby walked rapidly toward the house.

"The brute!" Angrily Mr. Minot stood turning the necklace over in his hand. "So he frightened the girl he is to marry—the girl he is supposed to love—"

What should he do? Go to her, and tell her of Harrowby's amiable eccentricities? He could hardly do that—Harrowby had taken him into his confidence—and besides there was Jephson of the great bald head, the Peter Pan eyes. Nothing to do but wait.

Returning to the hotel from Mrs. Bruce's villa, he found awaiting him a cable from Jephson. The cable assured him that beyond any question the man in San Marco was Allan Harrowby and, like Cæsar's wife, above suspicion.

Yet even as he read, Lord Harrowby walked through the lobby, and at his side was Mr. James O'Malley, house detective of the Hotel de la Pax. They came from the manager's office, where they had evidently been closeted.

With the cablegram in his hand, Minot en-

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tered the elevator and ascended to his room. The other hand was in the pocket of his top coat, closed tightly upon Chain Lightning's Collar—the bauble that the Earl of Raybrook had once wagered against a kiss.

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CHAPTER VIII

AFTER THE TRAINED SEALS

MR. MINOT opened his eyes on Thursday morning with the uncomfortable feeling that he was far from his beloved New York. For a moment he lay dazed, wandering in that dim borderland between sleep and waking. Then, suddenly, he remembered.

"Oh, yes, by jove," he muttered, "I've been knighted. Groom of the Back-Stairs Scandals and Keeper of the Royal Jewels—that's me."

He lifted his pillow. There on the white sheet sparkled the necklace of which the whole British nobility was proud—Chain Lightning's Collar. Some seventy-five blue-white diamonds, pear-shaped, perfectly graduated. His for the moment!

"What's Harrowby up to, I wonder?" he re-

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flected. "The dear old top! Nice, pleasant little party if a policeman should find this in my pocket."

Another perfect day shone in that narrow Spanish street. Up in Manhattan theatrical press agents were crowning huge piles of snow with posters announcing their attractions. Ferries were held up by ice in the river. A breeze from the Arctic swept round the Flatiron building. Here lazy summer lolled on the bosom of the town.

In the hotel dining-room Mr. Minot encountered Jack Paddock, superb in white flannels above his grapefruit. He accepted Paddock's invitation to join him.

"By the way," said Mrs. Bruce's jester, holding up a small, badly printed newspaper, "have you made the acquaintance of the *San Marco Mail* yet?"

"No—what's that?"

"A morning newspaper—by courtesy. Started here a few weeks back by a noiseless little Spaniard from Havana named Manuel Gonzale. Slipped in here on his rubber soles, Gonzale did

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—dressed all in white—lovely lemon face—shifty, can't-catch-me eyes. And his newspaper—hot stuff, my boy. It has *Town Topics* looking like a consular report from Greenland."

"Scandals?" asked Mr. Minot, also attacking a grapefruit.

"Scandals and rumors of scandals. Mostly hints, you know. Several references this morning to our proud and haughty friend, Lord Harrowby. For example, Madame On Dit, writing in her column on page one, has this to say: 'The impecunious but titled Englishman who has arrived in our midst recently with the idea of connecting with certain American dollars has an interesting time ahead of him, if rumor speaks true. The little incident in the lobby of a local hotel the other evening—which was duly reported in this column at the time—was but a mild beginning. The gentleman in charge of the claimant to the title held so jealously by our British friend promises immediate developments which will be rich, rare and racy.'"

"Rich, rare and racy," repeated Minot thoughtfully. "Ah, yes—we were to watch Mr.

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Trimmer. I had almost forgot him in the excitement of last evening. By the way, does the *Mail* know anything about the disappearance of Chain Lightning's Collar?"

"Not as yet," smiled Mr. Paddock, "although Madame On Dit claims to have been a guest at the dinner. By the way, what do you make of last night's melodramatic farce?"

"I don't know what to make of it," answered Minot truthfully. He was suddenly conscious of the necklace in his inside coat pocket.

"Then all I can say, my dear Watson," replied Mr. Paddock with burlesque seriousness, "is that you are unmistakably lacking in my powers of deduction. Give me a cigarette, and I'll tell you the name of the man who is gloating over those diamonds to-day."

"All right," smiled Minot. "Go ahead."

Mr. Paddock, reaching for a match tray, spoke in a low tone in Minot's ear.

"Martin Wall," he said. He leaned back. "You ask how I arrived at my conclusion. Simple enough. I went through the list of guests for

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possible crooks, and eliminated them one by one. The man I have mentioned alone was left. Ever notice his eyes—remind me of Manuel Gonzale's. He's too polished, too slick, too good to be true. He's traveled too much—nobody travels as much as he has except for the very good reason that a detective is on the trail. And he made friends with simple old Harrowby on an Atlantic liner—that, if you read popular fiction, is alone enough to condemn him. Believe me, Dick, Martin Wall should be watched."

"All right," laughed Minot, "you watch him."

"I've a notion to. Harrowby makes me weary. Won't call in a solitary detective. Any one might think he doesn't want the necklace back."

After breakfast Minot and Paddock played five sets of tennis on the hotel courts. And Mr. Minot won, despite the Harrowby diamonds in his trousers pocket, weighing him down. Luncheon over, Mr. Paddock suggested a drive to Tarragona Island.

"A little bit of nowhere a mile off-shore," he

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said. "No man can ever know the true inwardness of the word lonesome until he's seen Tarragona."

Minot hesitated. Ought he to leave the scene of action? Of action? He glanced about him. There was less action here than in a Henry James novel. The tangle of events in which he was involved rested for a siesta.

So he and Mr. Paddock drove along the narrow neck of land that led from the mainland to Tarragona Island. They entered the kingdom of the lonely. Sandy beach with the ocean on one side, swamps on the other. Scrubby palms, disreputable foliage, here and there a cluster of seemingly deserted cottages—the world and its works apparently a million miles away. Yet out on one corner of that bleak forgotten acre stood the slim outline of a wireless, and in a little white house lived a man who, amid the sea-gulls and the sand-dunes, talked daily with great ships and cities far away.

"I told you it was lonesome," said Mr. Paddock.

"Lonesome," shivered Minot. "Even God has

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forgot this place. Only Marconi has remembered."

And even as they wandered there amid the swamps, where alligators and rattlesnakes alone saw fit to dwell, back in San Marco the capable Mr. Trimmer was busy. By poster and by handbill he was spreading word of his newest coup, so that by evening no one in town—save the few who were most concerned—was unaware of a development rich, rare and racy.

Minot and Paddock returned late, and their dinner was correspondingly delayed. It was eight-thirty o'clock when they at last strolled into the lobby of the De la Pax. There they encountered Miss Meyrick, her father and Lord Harrowby.

"We're taking Harrowby to the movies," said Miss Meyrick. "He confesses he's never been. Won't you come along?"

She was one of her gay selves to-night, white, slim, laughing, irresistible. Minot, looking at her, thought that she could make even Tarragona Island bearable. He knew of no greater tribute to her charm.

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The girl and Harrowby led the way, and Minot and Paddock followed with Spencer Meyrick. The old man was an imposing figure in his white serge, which accentuated the floridness of his face. He talked of an administration that did not please him, of a railroad fallen on evil days. Now and again he paused and seemed to lose the thread of what he was saying, while his eyes dwelt on his daughter, walking ahead.

They arrived shortly at the San Marco Opera-House, devoted each evening to three acts of "refined vaudeville" and six of the newest film releases. It was here that the rich loitering in San Marco found their only theatrical amusement, and forgetting Broadway, laughed and were thrilled with simpler folk. A large crowd was fairly fighting to get in and Mr. Paddock, who volunteered to buy the tickets, was forced to take his place at the end of a long line.

Finally they reached the dim interior of the opera-house, and were shown to seats far down in front. By hanging back in the dusk Minot managed to secure the end seat, with Miss Meyrick at his side. Beyond her sat Lord Harrow-

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by, gazing with rapt British seriousness at the humorous film that was being flashed on the screen.

Between pictures Harrowby offered an opinion.

"You in America are a jolly lot," he said. "Just fancy our best people in England attending a cinematograph exhibition."

They tried to fancy it, but with his lordship there, they couldn't. Two more pictures ran their filmy lengths, while Mr. Minot sat entranced there in the half dark. It was not the pictures that entranced him. Rather, was it a lady's nearness, the flash of her smile, the hundred and one tones of her voice—all, all again as it had been in that ridiculous automobile—just before the awakening.

After the third picture the lights of the auditorium were turned up, and the hour of vaudeville arrived. On to the stage strolled a pert confident youth garbed in shabby grandeur, who attempted sidewalk repartee. He clipped his jests from barber-shop periodicals, bought his songs from an ex-barroom song writer, and

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would have gone to the mat with any one who denied that his act was "refined." Mr. Minot, listening to his gibes, thought of the Paddock jest factory and Mrs. Bruce.

When the young man had wrung the last encore from a kindly audience, the drop-curtain was raised and revealed on the stage in gleaming splendor Captain Ponsonby's troupe of trained seals. An intelligent aggregation they proved, balancing balls on their small heads, juggling flaming torches, and taking as their just due lumps of sugar from the captain's hand as they finished each feat. The audience recalled them again and again, and even the peerage was captivated.

"Clever beasts, aren't they?" Lord Harrowby remarked. And as Captain Ponsonby took his final curtain, his lordship added:

"Er—what follows the trained seals?"

The answer to Harrowby's query came almost immediately, and a startling answer it proved to be.

Into the glare of the footlights stepped Mr. Henry Trimmer. His manner was that of the

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conquering hero. For a moment he stood smiling and bowing before the approving multitude. Then he raised a hand commanding silence.

"My dear friends," he said, "I appreciate this reception. As I said in my handbill of this afternoon, I am working in the interests of justice. The gentleman who accompanies me to your delightful little city is beyond any question whatsoever George Harrowby, the eldest son of the Earl of Raybrook, and as such he is entitled to call himself Lord Harrowby. I know the American people well enough to feel sure that when they realize the facts they will demand that justice be done. That is why I have prevailed upon Lord Harrowby to meet you here in this, your temple of amusement, and put his case before you. His lordship will talk to you for a time with a view to getting acquainted. He has chosen for the subject of his discourse *The Old Days at Rakedale Hall.* Ladies and gentlemen, I have the honor to introduce—the real Lord Harrowby."

Out of the wings shuffled the lean and gloomy Englishman whom Mr. Trimmer had snatched from the unknown to cloud a certain wedding-

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day. The applause burst forth. It shook the building. From the gallery descended a shrill penetrating whistle of acclaim.

Mr. Minot glanced at the face of the girl beside him. She was looking straight ahead, her cheeks bright red, her eyes flashing with anger. Beyond, the face of Harrowby loomed, frozen, terrible.

"Shall we—go?" Minot whispered.

"By no means," the girl answered. "We should only call attention to our presence here. I know at least fifty people in this audience. We must see it through."

The applause was stilled at last and, supremely fussed, the "real Lord Harrowby" faced that friendly throng.

"Dear—er—people," he said. "As Mr. Trimmer has told you, we seek only justice. I am not here to argue my right to the title I claim—that I can do at the proper time and place. I am simply proposing to go back—back into the past many years—back to the days when I was a boy at Rakedale Hall. I shall picture those days as

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no impostor could picture them—and when I have done I shall allow you to judge."

And there in that crowded little southern opera-house on that hot February night, the actor who followed the trained seals proceeded to go back. With unfaltering touch he sketched for his audience the great stone country seat called Rakedale Hall, where for centuries the Harrowbys had dwelt. It was as though he took his audience there to visit—through the massive iron gates up the broad avenue bordered with limes, until the high chimneys, the pointed gables, the mullioned windows, and the walls half hidden by ivy, creeping roses and honeysuckles were revealed to them. He took them through the house to the servants' quarters—which he called "the offices"—out into the kitchen gardens, thence to the paved quadrangle of the stables with its arched gateway and the chiming clock above. Tennis-courts, grape-houses, conservatories, they visited breathlessly; they saw over the brow of the hill the low square tower of the old church and the chimneys of the vicar's modest house.

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And far away, they beheld the trees that furnished cover to the little beasts it was the Earl of Raybrook's pleasure to hunt in the season.

Becoming more specific, he spoke of the neighbors, and a bit of romance crept in in the person of the fair-haired Honorable Edith Townshend, who lived to the west of Rakedale Hall. He described at length the picturesque personality of the "racing parson," neighbor on the south, and in full accord with the ideas of the sporting Earl of Raybrook.

The events of his youth, he said, crowded back upon him as he recalled this happy scene, and emotion well-nigh choked him. However, he managed to tell of a few of the celebrities who came to dinner, of their bon mots, their preferences in cuisine. He mentioned the thrilling morning when he was nearly drowned in the brook that skirted the "purple meadow"; also the thrilling afternoon when he hid his mother's famous necklace in the biscuit box on the sideboard, and upset a whole household. And he narrated a dozen similar exploits, each garnished with small illuminating details.

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His audience sat fascinated. All who listened felt that his words rang true—even Lord Harrowby himself, sitting far forward, his hand gripping the seat in front of him until the white of his knuckles showed through.

Next the speaker shifted his scene to Eton, thrilled his hearers with the story of his revolt against Oxford, of his flight to the States, his wild days in Arizona. And he pulled out of his pocket a letter written by the old Earl of Raybrook himself, profanely expostulating with him for his madness, and begging that he return to ascend to the earldom when the old man was no more.

The "real Lord Harrowby" finished reading this somewhat pathetic appeal with a little break in his voice, and stood looking out at the audience.

"If my brother Allan himself were in the house," he said, "he would have to admit that it is our father speaking in that letter."

A rustle of interest ran through the auditorium. The few who had recognized Harrowby turned to stare at him now. For a moment he sat

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silent, his face a variety of colors in the dim light. Then with a cry of rage he leaped to his feet.

"You stole that letter, you cur," he cried. "You are a liar, a fraud, an impostor."

The man on the stage stood shading his eyes with his hand.

"Ah, Allan," he answered, "so you are here, after all? Is that quite the proper greeting—after all these years?"

A roar of sympathetic applause greeted this sally. There was no doubt as to whose side Mr. Trimmer's friend, the public, was on. Harrowby stood in his place, his lips twitching, his eyes for once blazing and angry.

Dick Minot was by this time escorting Miss Meyrick up the aisle, and they came quickly to the cool street. Harrowby, Paddock and Spencer Meyrick followed immediately. His lordship was most contrite.

"A thousand pardons," he pleaded. "Really I can't tell you how sorry I am, Cynthia. To have made you conspicuous—what was I thinking of? But he maddened me—I—"

"Don't worry, Allan," said Miss Meyrick

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gently. "I like you the better for being maddened."

Old Spencer Meyrick said nothing, but Minot noted that his face was rather red, and his eyes were somewhat dangerous. They all walked back to the hotel in silence.

From the hotel lobby, as if by prearrangement, Harrowby followed Miss Meyrick and her father into a parlor. Minot and Paddock were left alone.

"My word, old top," said Mr. Paddock facetiously, "a rough night for the nobility. What do you think? That lad's story sounded like a little bit of all right to me. Eh, what?"

"It did sound convincing," returned the troubled Minot. "But then—a servant at Rakedale Hall could have concocted it."

"Mayhap," said Mr. Paddock. "However, old Spencer Meyrick looked to me like a volcano I'd want to get out from under. Poor old Harrowby! I'm afraid there's a rift within the loot —nay, no loot at all."

"Jack," said Minot firmly, "that wedding has got to take place."

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"Why, what's it to you?"

"It happens to be everything. But keep it under your hat."

"Great Scott—does Harrowby owe you money?"

"I can't explain just at present, Jack."

"Oh, very well," replied Mr. Paddock. "But take it from me, old man—she's a million times too good for him."

"A million," laughed Mr. Minot bitterly. "You underestimate."

Paddock stood staring with wonder at his friend.

"You lisp in riddles, my boy," he said.

"Do I?" returned Minot. "Maybe some day I'll make it all clear."

He parted from Paddock and ascended to the third floor. As he wandered through the dark passageways in search of his room, he bumped suddenly into a heavy man, walking softly. Something about the contour of the man in the dark gave him a suggestion.

"Good evening, Mr. Wall," he said.

The scurry of hurrying footsteps, but no an-

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swer. Minot went on to 389, and placed his key in the lock. It would not turn. He twisted the knob of the door—it was unlocked. He stepped inside and flashed on the light.

His small abode was in a mad disorder. The chiffonier drawers had been emptied on the floor, the bed was torn to pieces, the rug thrown in a corner. Minot smiled to himself.

Some one had been searching—searching for Chain Lightning's Collar. Who? Who but the man he had bumped against in that dark passage-way?

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CHAPTER IX

"WANTED: BOARD AND ROOM"

AS Dick Minot bent over to pick up his scattered property, a knock sounded on the half-open door, and Lord Harrowby drooped in. The nobleman was gloom personified. He threw himself despondently down on the bed.

"Minot, old chap," he drawled, "it's all over." His eyes took in the wreckage. "Eh? What the deuce have you been doing, old boy?"

"I haven't been doing anything," Minot answered. "But others have been busy. While we were at the—er—theater, fond fingers have been searching for Chain Lightning's Collar."

"The devil! You haven't lost it?"

"No—not yet, I believe." Minot took the envelope from his pocket and drew out the gleaming necklace. "Ah, it's still safe—"

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Harrowby leaped from the bed and slammed shut the door.

"Dear old boy," he cried, "keep the accursed thing in your pocket. No one must see it. I say, who's been searching here? Do you think it could have been O'Malley?"

"What is O'Malley's interest in your necklace?"

"Some other time, please. Sorry to inconvenience you with the thing. Do hang on to it, won't you? Awful mix-up if you didn't. Bad mix-up as it is. As I said when I came in, it's all over."

"What's all over?"

"Everything. The marriage—my chance for happiness—Minot, I'm a most unlucky chap. Meyrick has just postponed the wedding in a frightfully loud tone of voice."

"Postponed it?" Sad news for Jephson this, yet as he spoke Mr. Minot felt a thrill of joy in his heart. He smiled the pleasantest smile he had so far shown San Marco.

"Exactly. He was fearfully rattled, was Meyrick. My word, how he did go on. Con-

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siders his daughter humiliated by the antics of that creature we saw on the stage to-night. Can't say I blame him, either. The wedding is indefinitely postponed, unless that impostor is removed from the scene immediately."

"Oh—unless," said Minot. His heart sank. His smile vanished.

"Unless was the word, I fancy," said Harrowby, blinking wisely.

"Lord Harrowby," Minot began, "you intimated the other day that this man might really be your brother—"

"No," Harrowby broke in. "Impossible. I got a good look at the chap to-night. He's no more a Harrowby than you are."

"You give me your word for that?"

"Absolutely. Even after twenty years of America no Harrowby would drag his father's name on to the vaudeville stage. No, he is an impostor, and as such he deserves no consideration whatever. And by the by, Minot—you will note that the postponement is through no fault of mine."

Minot made a wry face.

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"You haven't lost it?"

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"I have noted it," he said. "In other words, I go on to the stage now—following the man who followed the trained seals. I thought my role was that of Cupid, but it begins to look more like Captain Kidd. Ah, well—I'll do my best." He stood up. "I'm going out into the soft moonlight for a little while, Lord Harrowby. While I'm gone you might call Spencer Meyrick up and ask him to do nothing definite in the way of postponement until he hears from me—us—er—you."

"Splendid of you, really," said Harrowby enthusiastically, as Minot held open the door for him. "I had the feeling I could fall back on you."

"And I have the feeling that you've fallen," smiled Minot. "So long—better wait up for my report."

Fifteen minutes later, seated in a small rowboat on the starry waters of the harbor, Minot was loudly saluting the yacht *Lileth*. Finally Mr. Martin Wall appeared at the rail.

"Well—what d'you want?" he demanded.

"A word with you, Mr. Wall," Minot an-

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swered. "Will you be good enough to let down your accommodation ladder?"

For a moment Wall hesitated. And Minot, watching him, knew why he hesitated. He suspected that the young man in the tiny boat there on the calm bright waters had come to repay a call earlier in the evening—a call made while the host was out. At last he decided to let down the ladder.

"Glad to see you," he announced genially as Minot came on deck.

"Awfully nice of you to say that," Minot laughed. "Reassures me. Because I've heard there are sharks in these waters."

They sat down in wicker chairs on the forward deck. Minot stared at the cluster of lights that was San Marco by night.

"Corking view you have of that tourist-haunted town," he commented.

"Ah—yes," Mr. Wall's queer eyes narrowed. "Did you row out here to tell me that?" he inquired.

"A deserved rebuke," Minot returned. "Time flies, and my errand is a pressing one. Am I

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right in assuming, Mr. Wall, that you are Lord Harrowby's friend?"

"I am."

"Good. Then you will want to help him in the very serious difficulty in which he now finds himself. Mr. Wall, the man who calls himself the real Lord Harrowby made his début on a vaudeville stage to-night."

"So I've heard," said Wall, with a short laugh.

"Lord Harrowby's fiancée and her father are greatly disturbed. They insist that this impostor must be removed from the scene at once, or there will be no wedding. Mr. Wall—it is up to you and me to remove him."

"Just what is your interest in the matter?" Wall inquired.

"The same as yours. I am Harrowby's friend. Now, Mr. Wall, this is the situation as I see it—wanted, board and room in a quiet neighborhood for Mr. George Harrowby. Far from the street-cars, the vaudeville stage, the wedding march and other disturbing elements. And what is more, I think I've found the quiet neigh-

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borhood. I think it's right here aboard the *Lileth.*"

"Oh—indeed!"

"Yes. A simple affair to arrange, Mr. Wall. Trimmer and his live proposition are just about due for their final appearance of the night at the opera-house right now. I will call at the stage door and lead Mr. Trimmer away after his little introductory speech. I will keep him away until you and a couple of your sailors—I suggest the two I met so informally in the North River—have met the vaudeville lord at the stage door and gently, but firmly, persuaded him to come aboard this boat."

Mr. Wall regarded Minot with a cynical smile.

"A clever scheme," he said. "What would you say was the penalty for kidnaping in this state?"

"Oh, why look it up?" asked Minot carelessly. "Surely Martin Wall is not afraid of a back-woods constable."

"What do you mean by that, my boy?" said Wall, with an ugly stare.

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"What do you think I mean?" Minot smiled back. "I'd be very glad to take the role I've assigned you—I can't help feeling that it will be more entertaining than the one I have. The difficulty in the way is Trimmer. I believe I am better fitted to engage his attention. I know him better than you do, and he trusts me—begging your pardon—further."

"He did give me a nasty dig," said Wall, flaming at the recollection. "The noisy mountebank! Well, my boy, your young enthusiasm has won me. I'll do what I can."

"And you can do a lot. Watch me until you see me lead Trimmer away. Then get his pet. I'll steer Trimmer somewhere near the beach, and keep an eye on the *Lileth*. When you get George safely aboard, wave a red light in the bow. Then Trimmer and I shall part company for the night."

"I'm on," said Wall, rising. "Anything to help Harrowby. And—this won't be the first time I've waited at the stage door."

"Right-o," said Minot. "But don't stop to

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buy a champagne supper for a trained seal, will you? I don't want to have to listen to Mr. Trimmer all night."

They rowed ashore in company with two husky members of the yacht's crew, and ten minutes later Minot was walking with the pompous Mr. Trimmer through the quiet plaza. He had told that gentleman that he came from Allan Harrowby to talk terms, and Trimmer was puffed with pride accordingly.

"So Mr. Harrowby has come to his senses at last," he said. "Well, I thought this vaudeville business would bring him round. Although I must say I'm a bit disappointed—down in my heart. My publicity campaign has hardly started. I had so many lovely little plans for the future—say, it makes me sad to win so soon."

"Sorry," laughed Minot. "Lord Harrowby, however, deems it best to call a halt. He suggests—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Mr. Trimmer grandiloquently. "As the victor in the contest, I shall do any suggesting that is done. And what I suggest is this—to-morrow morning I shall call upon Allan Harrowby at his hotel. I shall bring

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George with me, also some newspaper friends of mine. In front of the crowd Allan Harrowby must acknowledge his brother as the future heir to the earldom of Raybrook."

"Why the newspaper men?" Minot inquired.

"Publicity," said Trimmer. "It's the breath of life to me—my business, my first love, my last. Frankly, I want all the advertisement out of this thing I can get. At what hour shall we call?"

"You would not consider a delay of a few days?" Minot asked.

"Save your breath," advised Trimmer promptly.

"Ah—I feared it," laughed Minot. "Well then—shall we say eleven o'clock? You are to call—with George Harrowby."

"Eleven it is," said Trimmer. They had reached a little park by the harbor's edge. Trimmer looked at his watch. "And that being all settled, I'll run back to the theater."

"I myself have advised Harrowby to surrender —" Minot began.

"Wise boy. Good night," said Trimmer, moving away.

"Not that I have been particularly impressed

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by your standing as a publicity man," continued Minot.

Mr. Trimmer stopped in his tracks.

"As a matter of fact," went on Minot. "I never heard of you or any of the things you claim to have advertised, until I came to San Marco."

Mr. Trimmer came slowly back up the gravel walk.

"In just what inland hamlet, untouched by telegraph, telephone, newspaper and railroad," he asked, "have you been living?"

Minot dropped to a handy bench, and smiled up into Mr. Trimmer's thin face.

"New York City," he replied.

Mr. Trimmer glanced back at the lights of San Marco, hesitatingly. Then—it was really a cruel temptation—he sat down beside Minot on the bench.

"Do you mean to tell me," he inquired, "that you lived in New York two years ago and didn't hear of Cotrell's Ink Eraser?"

"Such was my unhappy fate," smiled Minot.

"Then you were in Ludlow Street jail, that's

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all I've got to say," Trimmer replied. "Why, man—what I did for that eraser is famous. I rigged up a big electric sign in Times Square and all night long I had an electric Cotrell's erasing indiscreet sentences—the kind of things people write when they get foolish with their fountain pens—for instance—'I hereby deed to Tottie Footlights all my real and personal property'—and the like. It took the town by storm. Theatrical managers complained that people preferred to stand and look at my sign rather than visit the shows. Can you look me in the eye and say that you never saw that sign?"

"Well," Minot answered, "I begin to remember a little about it now."

"Of course you do." Mr. Trimmer gave him a congratulatory slap on the knee. "And if you think hard, probably you can recall my neat little stunt of the prima donna and the cough drops. I want to tell you about that—"

He spoke with fervor. The story of his brave deeds rose high to shatter the stars apart. A half-hour passed while his picturesque reminiscences flowed on. Mr. Minot sat enraptured—

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his eyes on the harbor where the *Lileth*, like a painted ship, graced a painted ocean.

"My boy," Trimmer was saying, "I have made the public stop, look and listen. When I get my last publicity in the shape of an 'In Memoriam' let them run that tag on my headstone. And the story of me that I guess will be told longest after I am gone, is the one about the grape juice that I—"

He paused. His audience was not listening; he felt it intuitively. Mr. Minot sat with his eyes on the *Lileth*. In the bow of that handsome boat a red light had been waved three times.

"Mr. Trimmer," Minot said, "your tales are more interesting than the classics." He stood. "Some other time I hope to hear a continuation of them. Just at present Lord Harrowby—or Mr. if you prefer—is waiting to hear what arrangement I have made with you. You must pardon me."

"I can talk as we walk along," said Trimmer, and proved it. In the middle of the deserted plaza they separated. At the dark stage door

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of the opera-house Trimmer sought his proposition.

"Who d'yer mean?" asked the lone stage-hand there.

"George, Lord Harrowby," insisted Mr. Trimmer.

"Oh—that bum actor. Seen him going away a while back with two men that called for him."

"Bum actor!" cried Trimmer indignantly. He stopped. "Two men—who were they?"

The stage-hand asked profanely how he could know that, and Mr. Trimmer hurriedly departed for the side-street boarding-house where he and his fallen nobleman shared a suite.

About the same time Dick Minot blithely entered Lord Harrowby's apartments in the Hotel de la Pax.

"Well," he anounced, "you can cheer up. Little George is painlessly removed. He sleeps to-night aboard the good ship *Lileth*, thanks to the efforts of Martin Wall, assisted by yours truly." He stopped, and stared in awe at his lordship. "What's the matter with you?" he inquired.

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Harrowby waved a hopeless hand.

"Minot," he said, "it was good of you. But while you have been assisting me so kindly in that quarter, another—and a greater—blow has fallen."

"Good lord—what?" cried Minot.

"It is no fault of mine—" Harrowby began.

"On which I would have gambled my immortal soul," Minot said.

"I thought it was all over and done with—five years ago. I was young—sentimental—calcium-light and grease paint and that sort of thing hit me hard. I saw her from the stalls—fell desperately in love—stayed so for six months—wrote letters—burning letters—and now—"

"Yes—and now?"

"Now she's here. Gabrielle Rose is here. She's here—with the letters."

"Oh, for a Cotrell's Ink Eraser," Minot groaned.

"My man saw her down-stairs," went on Harrowby, mopping his damp forehead. "Fifty thousand she wants for the letters or she gives

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