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THE LONE WOLF RETURNS

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE LONE WOLF
ALIAS THE LONE WOLF
BAROQUE, A MYSTERY
LINDA LEE, INC.
JOAN THURSDAY
RED MASQUERADE
THE DARK MIRROR
THE FALSE FACES
SHEEP'S CLOTHING
THE DAY OF DAYS
NOBODY
THE DESTROYING ANGEL
THE BANDBOX
CYNTHIA-OF-THE-MINUTE
THE FORTUNE HUNTER
NO MAN'S LAND
THE POOL OF FLAME
THE BRONZE BELL
THE BLACK BAG
THE BRASS BOWL
TERENCE O'ROURKE

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THE LONE WOLF RETURNS

BY

LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVENUE

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Miss Eliz. M. Dacus
9r
10-29-1921

To

FRANK EDWIN VERNEY

because he asked for more and
because there won't be any more

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The Lone Wolf Returns

I

"I LOVE you," said Michael Lanyard.

He spoke in French; and that simple phrase, covered by the surging song of strings and woodwinds, was inaudible to other ears. Only the woman with him heard and, hearing, roused from the reverie into which she too insensibly had lapsed, turning back from the prismatic pageantry of the dance eyes whose grave regard gave never a clue to the emotions his words inspired.

Making no more acknowledgment than this, she studied him intently but kindly, touched by the wistfulness that shadowed the demeanour of unpretending dignity which she had learned to like best of all the many phases of the man their friendship had revealed.

The severity of evening dress in line and lack of colour became him well, setting off the lean, sculptured contours of his face, giving value to its even warmth of tone. Traces of silver at his temples hinted at that history, not too happy, with which she was in part acquainted. The strength with which his mouth was modelled affected her, as always, with a faint, strangely pleasant thrill of alarm, the dark, clear eyes, at once

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deferential and demanding, held her in a spell she had no wish to break.

"I love you," he repeated.

Her brows took on a quaintly plaintive cast. "I know, my friend," she replied in the same tongue and tone. "For a long time I have known . . . as you have known my love was all for you. And yet . . ." The slender shoulders lifting their fairness out of the corsage of her jetted gown sketched a shrug.

"I had to wait to tell you," he said, "till I was sure—"

In indulgent raillery she interrupted: "Sure that you loved me?"

He smiled, but wagged his head in stubborn earnestness: "Sure of what else I must say."

"There is more?"

"Much more." The man leaned over the table, with an even deeper accent of sincerity in his guarded voice: "I love you so dearly, Eve, the thought of a life without you is beyond my understanding . . . Yet I may not ask you to be my wife."

"May not?" Hands of consummate grace fluttered above the cloth in tragicomic impatience. "Or will not?"

"Will not because I may not."

Eve de Montalais held a small pause of perplexity, made a small sign of frustration. "It is a riddle," she said. "But when one speaks in riddles, one speaks playfully . . . as you do not. Tell me, then, my Michael! why you think you may not ask me to marry you, when between us all else has been said?"

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"I love you too well—"

"Too well to make me happy?"

"Too well to let you stake your happiness on the hazards of such a life as mine."

"You forget, if you deny me the right to share those hazards, whatever they may be, I shall have no happiness to risk."

"You are young," the man thoughtfully stated, "the best of your life lies before you. And you are, I think, the loveliest woman that ever lived. Many men after me will long for and love you, one of them you will find worthy . . ."

"Still, you forget, my heart is given."

"Time heals all memories."

"You believe that?" She withdrew a little, settling back in her chair, and used her fan, gazing away over its nodding plumes. "I was mistaken, then; I believed you loved me too well to hold my love the whim of a day or a month or a year. I thought you knew me too well to think my love was lightly given, or once given might be recalled."

He winced under that reproach. "Without your help," he pleaded, "how shall I be strong? You know what it costs me to say what I am saying, that I could not say anything to displease you if I held your happiness second to my own. It is of you alone I am thinking; you whom I love and who are not for me."

"If you love me," Eve de Montalais said quietly, "you will never leave me."

"Better that; better you should learn to hold the memory of me in contempt, than I should risk your

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waking up too late, as some day you would surely waken, to realize you had joined your life to the life of one whom the world esteems a common thief."

"'The world esteems'!" Disdain touched her lips. "You are not that."

"I was once—"

"The past is dead."

"Or merely sleeping? Who shall say?"

"Ah no! my friend, you waste your time if you ask me to believe that."

The music fell, and the gay rumour of voices that replaced it, as the dancers began to move back to their tables, was not enough to warrant the former sense of security from eavesdropping by inadvertence or intention. In tacit silence Madame de Montalais extended her hand, Lanyard offered his cigarette-case, then a match. But after a single inhalation the woman forgot to smoke, and permitted the tobacco to fume to waste in its jewelled holder, her attention seemingly diverted by the pomp and vanity of that sumptuous cavern wherein the folk of her world were accustomed nightly to foregather and play yet once again the time-old game whose fascination never fails, whose stake is love . . .

But Lanyard had eyes for his love alone.

Her beauty in his sight was like a pain in his heart, a hand at his throat. Slender and gracious and fair, with a sense, hard to define, of something more than human in that warmly human loveliness, something that made one think of a sickle of moon afloat in an azure midnight sky, of dawnlight fleeting breathlessly athwart a summer sea . . .

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His for the asking!

He had loved before, but never as now, never with this tenderness, this all-possessing wish to serve and safeguard, this passionate self-abnegation . . .

"What is it?" he asked, seeing her start, with an almost imperceptible suggestion of aversion, as she sat looking away across the room.

"That man," she replied—"that creature, rather, whom one never sees without shuddering. And one sees him everywhere."

Even before he looked Lanyard had divined the occasion of this antipathy. It was true, what she had said: ever since this tide in their affairs had brought these two together in New York, no matter where they turned of an evening in quest of amusement, or rather for an excuse to be with each other, at some time in its course they seemed fated to cross the path of this personality, odd, compelling, and in some how forbidding.

One saw the man now, with a party of guests laying claim to a table on the far side of the floor, a table that had been conspicuously reserved and refused to others, though the Crystal Room was crowded and late-comers were importunate. A gross body, ponderous and slow of movement, with a heavy face of singularly immobile cast, resembling and for all its fleshiness as destitute of colour as a mask of papier-mâché, with a strange effect of transparency as if lighted by an inner glow akin to phosphorescence. Punctiliously mannered and at all times dressed with the nicest care as to the cut and propriety of his clothing, but unfail-

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ingly bedecked like a sultan with an incalculable wealth of jewellery in sets meticulously matched; yesterday with emeralds, today with diamonds, tomorrow with rubies, at another time it might be with fire-opals burning on fingers and watch chain, serving as cuff-links, waistcoat buttons, and studs for his shirt: a bizarre shape to meet in the haunts of fashion . . . And never alone, always surrounded by a little court of sycophants, seldom twice of the same composition, but as a rule including a few fragile beauties, apparently of the stage, and invariably one whom Lanyard took to be a paid clown, an undersized man with the face of a sage droll, the dress and deportment of a diplomat, and something in his fixed solemnity which suggested an ever-present expectation that his lightest word would win a gale of laughter—as, indeed, more often than not it seemed to.

The other sat, as by habit, taciturn and aloof in the heart of his noisy company. A dull man or a deep. Speaking seldom, eating little, drinking nothing, always smoking, holding one pose without stir for long minutes at a time: only the eyes beneath hood-like lids, eyes of a repellant pallor and surprising brightness, were restless, ranging from face to face, not only of his companions but of every person within his scope of vision, peering into each with a steadfast, imperturbable and penetrating curiosity . . .

Lanyard had more than once been resentfully conscious of that prying look. He was conscious of it now and rather hoped its author could read his lips, reckoning its impertinence ample provocation for the temper of what he was about to say.

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"The Sultan of Loot," he mused aloud, adding in answer to Eve's mirthful glance: "my private nickname for the animal. If it does him injustice, he ought to take in his sign, don't you think? I know him by sight, of course; but that is all. Some bucketeer or bootlegger, no doubt; Prohibition no less than Providence makes strange bedfellows, nowadays, in this mad country."

"Strange," the woman observed, "how people one doesn't know sometimes seem to haunt one."

"When it *is* strange."

Her eyes narrowed. "Why do you say that, Michael?"

"I hardly know," he confessed with a deprecatory laugh. "More, at least, than this: that it has seldom been my fortune to be so haunted without something in the nature of a sequel."

She made a mental shudder graphic. "In this instance, for your sake, I trust the rule will not hold good."

"I hope so, indeed. I entertain the least inclination imaginable to better my acquaintance with that monsieur. And yet, it would surprise me not at all if I were to see much more of him before I see less."

There was music again, a retrograde movement from tables to open floor.

"Why so mysterious, Michael?"

"Upon my word, I can't tell you. Why did you shiver when you spoke of the fellow? Blame it, if you like, to that sixth sense, that instinct of self-preservation which serves some men as intuition serves most

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women—call it what you will, I have quite definitely a feeling I am no more done with that one whom I do not know than I am as yet begun with him."

A sidelong glance discovered the personage in question indulging in one of his rare smiles, an introspective smile that might mean he had indeed been reading Lanyard's lips, or might mean nothing of the sort. True, that he was no longer looking at Lanyard; it remained equally true that he was apparently paying no attention to the conversation of his company.

"And that is why"—a derisive shift of the woman's eyes indicated the quarter of the room in which the subject of their speculations had established himself—"you are trying to jilt me—is it?—and excusing your ungallant conduct with vague references to the 'hazards' of your life!"

Lanyard shook his head, again possessed by the gravity of his purpose. "I am scarcely so childish," he said. "But for days—for months, indeed, but especially in these last few days—I have been thinking of the life I have to offer a wife, the life of a man hunted, without fortune or position, friendless in a strange land but for you."

"'Hunted'?"

The echo deprecated the strength of that term, but he would not modify it. "Hunted," he reiterated: "the life of an outlaw. Society does not forgive: it will sometimes applaud a successful transgressor, but it never has patience with the penitent."

"Tell me why you say that, Michael. I have the right to know."

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"It is this, then," Lanyard said with reluctance: "wherever I go, I am a marked man. The world wears mocking eyebrows when it hears that the Lone Wolf no longer prowls. 'Perhaps, today,' it says: 'but wait. Let him prove his sincerity and fortitude against the dead drag of my indifference, let him make his way if he can, I have my own affairs to busy me.' . . . The police are satisfied my change of character is merely a blind. Another class, even more skeptic, is made up of those whose lot today is as mine was yesterday, creatures of envy, greed, and uncharitableness, all those qualities that make criminals. These, should they see me in rags, would say: 'Another turn or two of the screw and he will be one of us again.' Seeing me apparently prosperous, they say: 'Observe that he wants for nothing: he is cunning, that one.' Or suppose some unknown makes a famous coup; the chorus is then: 'The Lone Wolf has done this thing!' . . . Society indifferent, its police distrustful, its enemies envious: one needs strength to make way against so strong a tide!"

"You have it."

"But will it last?"

"With mine to comfort and encourage you when your strength wearies . . ."

"But figure to yourself a possible event: We marry. What happens? Your friends are affronted, they turn from you—"

"Did you call them friends?"

"Even friendship fails when its self-esteem is flouted. . . . You are left alone," Lanyard obstinately

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pursued, "but for me. And for every friend you have lost, you have found an enemy—my enemies. These good haters of mine will resort to every expedient to poison your mind against me, while to me they will come saying, 'Do as we bid you or prepare yourself to see her suffer.' Conceive me mad enough to tell them to go to the devil: the next time we find ourselves conspicuously placed in public, a hand falls on my shoulder, I your husband am arrested on a trumped-up charge. Assume that I clear myself: still the disgrace remains, the shame. And I its cause. . . . No! never ask me to condemn you to a life like that."

He sat brooding, in a silence which she respected for a little, watching him with shrewd vision all the while.

"Something has happened," she said at length, "to make you think such things."

"You are right." He nodded sadly: "I have come to my senses. These months I have spent in almost daily association with you have been the happiest of my life. I have been too happy . . . They can't continue: I love you too well."

The plumed fan was arrested, the woman's eyes grew wide and dark, her breathing quickened. "What do you propose?"

"I think you must know . . ."

"Tell me!"

He entreated her with haggard eyes. "Since we may not marry, what else can I do but go my way?"

"No!" she impatiently countered. "There is something more in your mind than you have told me."

"Neither there nor in my heart."

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"You are keeping something back for fear of frightening me: some danger threatens you—!"

"Nothing."

"Nevertheless you have reason to fear—"

"I have always to be on my guard. Misfortune visits in strange guises, and most often unannounced. For myself, I am accustomed to that; I do not greatly care. But for you—that is another matter."

The fan resumed its weaving. After a pause Eve said: "If you must go, so be it. But 'whither thou goest, there go I'—"

"No!"

"It matters not how far," she nodded. "What is it to me where I live, so I am with you?"

"Can you require that of me?"

"I!" she cried, startled—"of *you?*"

"You are a woman of this world, Eve. Do I not know? Can I forget how you were when I found you, buried to life in that isolate château half a hundred years to the south of Paris? Can I not see what a change has come over you in these few months of your own New York?"

"Of you—"

But he would not listen. "You were born and bred to breathe this atmosphere. Can you ask me to doom you to exile in some hole or corner, some place so lost that the whisper of my ill fame will not find it? Some kraal in South Africa!——an iron hut in the Australian bush!—where else? . . . You would die of such a life, or live only to learn to hate me."

"Never that. Love outweighs all."

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"So we tell ourselves, so we believe, till we are required to lay down for love even our self-respect. Could I retain that—could I forgive myself—knowing I had robbed you of all that had made life fair for you, and left you only the happiness of giving up your life for love?"

"Selfishness speaks there . . ."

"Vanity, the father of selfishness, is present in every human affair. It is not a pretty thought; but men and women in this world are made that way. There is my vanity, too, to be thought of." Lanyard had a wry, apologetic smile. "Consider that you have never known a want you could not gratify out of your private means; while I am a penniless adventurer, a man living from hand to mouth, today on a modest pension, tomorrow on God knows what . . ."

"At last!" said Eve de Montalais: "it is that, then, your pride that stands between us."

"A man with less is not a man whom you could love."

She made no direct reply, but after a time sat up and began to gather round her the folds of her wrap.

"I am a little weary," she told Lanyard. "There is more to be said than you have said, my Michael! but not now, not here . . . Perhaps another night . . . Please take me home."

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II

THE breath of that November night was soft and warm, its dim sky distilled a pensive rain with frequent lulls. Burnished by the daily traffic of eighty thousand tires the wet pave of the Avenue resembled a broad channel of black marble veined with pulsing gold. Over churning tides of after-theatre travel the police towers watched like great gaunt goblins, stabbing the misty mirk with angry eyes, ruby, emerald, and amber.

The brougham drifted sedately with the northbound press; its pace all too swift notwithstanding, its journey too quickly accomplished. Yet neither of the lovers had spoken since leaving the Ritz. Only when the grey palisades of the Hotel Walpole loomed ahead, spangled with the gilt of a thousand windows, the woman stirred in her corner and sat forward, peering with fond concern into the face of the man, giving him her hands.

"Be patient with me, Michael," she said. "It isn't that I can't read your heart—I know, my dear, I know! . . . All you said just now was true enough; but all the truth has not yet been said. Neither are my wits as ready as yours. You must give me time to think. You will, I know."

"I am altogether yours," he answered. "Your happiness is all that matters."

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"Not all, not my happiness alone, but yours as well—ours!"

She swayed into his arms; for the first time Lanyard knew her lips . . .

He came to himself, after a fashion, standing bare of head beneath a lamp-fringed canopy of bronze and glass, formally touching her fingers and mouthing polite phrases as to a woman he barely knew . . . Absurd!

And on her part only enriched colour and a heightened radiance in her eyes betrayed the revolutionary work of those too few moments.

"Tomorrow," he heard Eve saying . . . "No: not tomorrow; I'm dining with the Druces. The day after. Call for me early, Michael: we'll have a long drive and a little dinner somewhere in the country."

Her look said so much more, he had no certain knowledge of what he stammered in response. But presumably the phrases served. She nodded gayly, ran up the steps. He watched her whisk through the revolving door and fade away from view in the hot illumination of the foyer before it occurred to him to cover his head. And his stare was vacant when her chauffeur delayed him with a respectful query; to which, after a moment, Lanyard replied, many thanks, but he felt more in the humour for a stroll than to be motored to his rooms; he wouldn't mind the drizzle.

The goblin eyes blinking from red to green, he profited by the interruption of up-and-down-town travel to cross to the west side of the Avenue before settling into stride for a walk of a mile to his modest

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lodgings; in a mood of exaltation too rare to countenance return of those misgivings to which he had that night for the first time given voice, those doubts and fears by which his lonelier hours of late had none the less been ridden, ever since he had learned that his love for Eve de Montalais had grown to be a passion passing his strength to withstand.

He had done his best but had essayed the impossible tonight, in attempting to make her see that marriage between them were for her a madness. He admitted that, now he knew of her own confession that she loved him. Now with the music of her incomparable voice still chiming that assurance in his memory, now with the fragrance of her lips lingering on his own, Lanyard knew that whether he had fought well or ill to save her from himself, the fight was lost; one course alone remained to him: to do away with every hindrance to the firm establishment of Eve's happiness, to reorganize his life so that every objection to their union might be compromised, every echo of the past silenced, every embarrassment of the present compensated.

A task to tax the wits and heart of a superman, contemplation of it in that hour affected Lanyard with no dismay: armoured in and inspired by her love he could not fail.

In this ecstatic temper only subconsciously aware of his surroundings, the man was measuring off a round four miles an hour, southbound on the sidewalk over across from the Cathedral, when that occurred which brought his head down from the clouds: the sema-

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phores signalled for another suspension of traffic on the Avenue, and an instant later a taxicab inexpertly driven at unlawful speed passed Lanyard crabwise, skidding wildly on the greasy asphaltum as its chauffeur threw out clutch and applied brakes to avoid crashing into a file of cars debouching from West Fiftieth street.

An old-fashioned, gloomy contraption, of that high-chested hobbledehoy type now fast becoming extinct, the cab performed two complete revolutions like a skittish monstrosity chasing its tail, and toppled perilously as if minded to try a somersault as well, before it brought up, rocking and growling, broadside to the curb.

From its black pocket of a body noises of embittered expostulation were issuing in a woman's voice and a foreign tongue; neither the voice of a gentlewoman nor language such as one would employ with whatever provocation. It was to Lanyard, indeed, like a souvenir of younger years to hear that broadside of vituperation couched in the argot of the thieves'-kitchens of Paris. And at a discreet distance he paused, diverted, humanly hoping for the worst.

At the same time a badly rattled driver, comprehending no word of the abuse cascading upon his head but sensitive enough to its tone, tumbled off his box and made for the door, vainly seeking to make an authentic brogue audible. But his hand was no sooner lifted to its latch than the door flew open in his face and a lovely lady in resplendent attire and a towering fury bounced out and—a figure of flaming colour in the blue-blacks of the nocturnal scheme—addressed

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herself to the man with gesticulation so vividly adequate to her temper that instinctively he lifted both arms to guard his features and, stumbling over his own heels in panic retreat, sat down with suddenness and shocking force.

No national spirit is so exquisitively responsive as that of the French to comedy of physical misadventure. When the chauffeur coming into contact with the sidewalk gave up his breath in one vast "*Ouf!*" his fare forgot to be angry, bit a blistering epithet in two, and incontinently passed into such spasms of mirth that she was fain to lean her finery against the dripping side of the cab lest her limbs refuse to sustain her. And while she shook and held her sides and uttered peal upon peal of laughter—heedlessly permitting her wrap to fall open and expose to the inclement air the most cynical of decolletages framing flesh quite literally crusted with jewels—the chauffeur was scrambling to his feet in a rage that threatened to rival her own late transports, and a crowd was beginning to gather, too, as crowds will in New York, upon any provocation, in any street, at any hour of any day or night. On which accounts Lanyard reckoned in time to interfere.

Hurriedly consulting the taximeter, he stepped between the two, fished a bill from his pocket, and thrust it into the palm of the chauffeur before this last comprehended what was happening.

"None of that!" he enjoined, raising a peremptory voice to drown the snarl with which the man was tuning up to repay abuse and derision with the drippings of his own vocabulary. "You've got your fare, so

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clear out before this officer whom I see approaching hands you a summons for careless driving. D'you hear?—not another word!"

And as the chauffeur, cowed by this appearance of authority, shut a gaping mouth and stumbled to his seat, Lanyard turned to the woman and caught her arm in a firm grasp. "Come, Liane! compose yourself. I'll find you another cab."

The woman responded with a moment of stupefied silence during which her eyes incredulously rounded, then with a squeal of rapture—"Lanyarrrrd!"—and an impulsive offer to enfold him to that generous bosom, which only clever footwork foiled.

"Michael!" she cried in French—"my Michael! Of all men living the one whom I most have longed to find!"

"Observe that the lost is now found," he advised in the same language, smiling. "But be so amiable as not to keep me waiting here in the rain. Pull yourself together, Liane—your wrap as well, if you don't want to catch cold in your chest—in most of it, at least." In a more urgent voice he added: "Can you not understand your danger? Cover yourself, Liane—you are mad to expose such treasure on a public street at night!"

"What flattery!" the woman demurely responded. Nevertheless she did as he bade, clipping her cloak at the throat with one hand while the other slipped beneath his arm. "I am so overjoyed to find you again, my dear friend, I do not believe any evil could affect me. But come . . ."

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She tugged him out of the grinning ring that had begun to form, and away from the kerb, where the grumbling chauffeur was settling into place behind his wheel, and where Lanyard had been preparing to beckon in the first vacant cab.

"But you want another taxi—"

"Not I, monsieur. It is but a step, where I am going. As for this rain, it is nothing"—she held out a hand—"already it has ceased. And surely I can count upon your gallantry . . ."

He consented with entire good-nature—"As ever, irresistible, Liane!"—and found himself with the woman on his arm rounding the corner and moving toward Sixth avenue. "New York, by what appears, has the honour of entertaining you once again . . ."

"Again? But still, if you please."

"Proving the weakness of deductive reasoning," he observed. "When one saw you in a hired cab, one inferred you were merely a bird of passage."

"But I have never been away, monsieur, never since that luckless voyage landed us here last Spring. I find it amusing, this great town; as Paris is no more, alas! thanks to the War and the poor health of the franc. . . . As for that infamous taxicab, I ask you: what is one to do when one's own car is, as these quaint Americans put it, laid out?"

"Laid up."

"Laid out or laid up—it is all the same."

"I believe you," Lanyard chuckled—"at my age, Liane."

He was aware, but seemed not to be, of sidelong scrutiny, keenly inquisitive.

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"Is it that you begin to find yourself bored with this America, Michael?"

"Ah!" he parried—"I must not complain."

"The old life calls, eh?" (So she construed that equivoque as confirming her surmise; which argued an anxiety to do so. But why?) "You miss something, my friend, in this land where more things are verboten than in Germany before the War?"

"I miss my youth," Lanyard admitted with a rueful laugh—"those misspent years!"

"You would have them back?" she inquisitively demanded. "What for? To misspend them all over again?" He smiled illegibly; she laughed in impish glee. "I felt sure of it, when I thought of you today, Michael, I said to myself: By this time he will be well weary of this country of atrocious cookery, ice-water, and virtue with the indigestion."

"You, then, knew I was still here?"

"One was so informed."

"One has, it seems, friends of whose kind interest one was unaware."

"It was a little bird that told me."

"An idle little bird, if it finds no better gossip to twitter than the tale of my dull days."

"It is truly as I said!" She squeezed his arm. "You *are* bored. So, then! a little patience and you will call it, as I do, a happy chance that threw me in your way tonight."

"Impossible that one should esteem it otherwise."

Lanyard smiled down at the woman, openly taking advantage of the illumination of a street lamp to study her.

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In her day reputed the most beautiful demi-mondaine in Paris and the most dangerous, the old allure of her charms, by this tricky light at least, seemed unimpaired; while that she was still dangerous one had memories of events by no means stale to prove. And now what diablerie was she fostering behind that mask of fair, seductive flesh? what mischief had she in mind that required his co-operation?

An innate flair for anything in the nature of an intrigue stirred in its sleep, lifted its head, sniffed the wind with eager nostrils . . .

They came to Sixth avenue, where the hand under his arm gently led him south again, in the shadow of the Elevated.

"A long 'step' to this rendezvous of yours, Liane."

"Patience: we are nearly there. Or is it that your soul has grown so deeply ennuied even I—?"

"To the contrary, as you see, I am coming along quite peaceably. I have but one regret."

"And that?"

"It desolates me to know we must part so soon."

"This way, impostor." Guiding him across the Avenue, the woman held on toward Broadway. "What hour is it, do you know?"

"A quarter to one," Lanyard reported on the advice of his watch.

"Then I am fifteen minutes beforehand—"

"That is to say, practically unsexed."

"Furthermore, my friends are never on time. Why not keep me company while I wait, and enjoy a little raking over of old scandals?"

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"It would be a pleasure, Liane; but are you sure—?"

"We are arrived."

The woman was diverging toward a dwelling which wore an aspect of too much decorum; a modest establishment with just two windows on the street level diffusing a benign, domestic glow through heavy draperies behind stout bars of iron, and a tight-lipped look about the solid door at the back of its mildly lighted vestibule.

Coupling the atmosphere of its environment, which was both tawdry and rowdy, with certain rumours that had come to his attention, the reticent expression of the house with the rank of private cars that lined the kerb before it, Lanyard hazarded with an accent of distaste: "The Clique Club, eh?"

"You are acquainted?"

"With its reputation only. One hears that the percentage of mortality resulting from indulgence in its bootliquor is unusually low."

"Do you suspect me of luring you here to poison you, Michael?"

"Not while you remain incontestibly the mistress of weapons so much more deadly than moonshine. Moreover, it is written in my horoscope, curiosity will be the death of me."

Liane giggled, planting a finger on a push-button which, Lanyard remarked, she located without looking. By way of response a horizontal slit opened in the upper half of the door, and through this a pair of anonymous eyes appraised them, Lanyard without favour, but otherwise in respect of the woman. Then with an impressive clanking and thumping of chains

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and bolts the door swung wide, disclosing an entry, the habitat of a good actor in the make-up of a movie gangster, functioning as Cerberus to this institution of post-Prohibition New York. And passing through a second and less formidable door, Lanyard and the woman entered a reception-hall of voluptuous embellishment and devilishly subtle illumination.

Here, in a chair before an ardent grate, a youthful odalisque was lounging with crossed knees, a waspy young blood of the town was holding a pose of elegance, with elbow on the mantel, and both were engaging in conversation an overmannered person distinguished by ornate evening dress and the beak and bald head of a bird of prey; a scene that might readily have passed for one in a private home but for wild squalls of jazz drifting down the broad staircase and the vibration of the floor above with the rhythmical shuffle and stamp of many feet.

At sight of the newcomers the hairless Wonder with a perfect bow excused himself to his gossips, and glided forward, smirking, shaping deferential shoulders, giving his bleached talons a good air-wash.

"Mademoiselle Delorme!" he uttered in accents of intense gratification.

"Good evening, Theodore," Liane gave him in French, with friendly nonchalance. "Monsieur Morphew is here so soon, no?"

"Not yet, mademoiselle. But before long, beyond doubt . . ."

"The usual room? We will go up and wait . . . But I believe you do not know Monsieur Lanyard, Theodore."

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"The Clique Club is so unfortunate," Theodore deplored, saluting Lanyard profoundly, "as not to number monsieur among its members."

"And very stupid of it, if you ask me," Liane retorted. "See that he gets a card, will you."

"You are much too gracious, Liane; I shall have so little use for a guest-card—"

"What are you talking about, Michael? Guest-card! I should say not. I am proposing you for membership. It costs nothing when one is properly introduced. Eh, Theodore?"

"As mademoiselle says . . . If Monsieur Lanyard will be so kind as to let me have his address . . ."

With a shrug, Lanyard gave in. After all, it didn't matter. . . . And when he had duly been entered in the club register, Theodore escorted the newly fledged member to the foot of the stairs, upon which Liane Delorme was picturesquely waiting, and there turned both over to the guidance of a highly polished subaltern.

Wide doorways on the first landing disclosed a chain of rooms dedicated to the rites of jazz, liquid, instrumental, terpsichorean. Calculated to remind a crusading clergyman of Belshazzar's Feast, they reminded Lanyard of almost any Broadway restaurant at midnight.

On the second landing, however, a break in the dance music below made audible the heartless laughter of an ivory ball coquetting with a roulette wheel behind one closed door, while a waiter emerging from another room permitted a glimpse of a private supper party

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at the peak of its lead, an interior tolerably Hogarthian.

Lanyard exchanged amused glances with Liane. "Busy little club," he commented, "but wants rechristening—Clique's far too conservative—should be known as the Liberal."

At the rear end of the hall another door admitted to a prettily furnished supper room, where a table was being laid and, in coolers on a side-table, several bottles of champagne were enjoying their last rest. Requesting the waiter in attendance to open one of these, Liane shrugged out of her wrap—which Lanyard took, though he kept his overcoat on by way of pointing an intention to stop for a few minutes only—and having made herself at ease upon the club fender of an open fire, clinked her glass to Lanyard's.

"To you, my too-long lost friend, and to me—to a friendship that has known too many interruptions and must henceforth know fewer."

He toasted with cool ambiguity: "To a rapport more complete."

With professional ease the waiter faded from their knowledge; and the woman dimpled bewitchingly, patting the broad seat of the fender.

"Come, sit by my side, Michael: let us talk."

"With all the pleasure in life," he assented, placing himself at a discreeter distance than she had designated —"on one condition, my dear Liane: none of your artfulness."

"Michael!" she reproached, delighted—"you don't trust me?"

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"Really, you read one's mind."

"Don't be alarmed, my old one." She made a face to match her tone of mocking reassurance. "I was mad about you once, I don't deny; but that was long ago. Besides, you little know me if you think it likely I would lay myself open to be scorned another time."

"I little know you," Lanyard conceded, "whatever I may think; and I've got the quaintest notion, Liane, that the less I learn about you the more likely I am to enjoy ordinary peace of mind. Be a good child, now; treat me as you would a father, not as you might a prospective papa. Tell me: what the deuce is your little game?"

"'Game'?" she repeated, petulant. "Michael, my dear! your manners aren't as good as they were when your morals were worse."

"Admit that you didn't ask me up here to amuse yourself with innocent flirtation."

"That is true."

"Admit, then, I am pardonably curious."

"Well! if you will have the truth . . . When I got over being foolish about you, Michael . . . How long ago it seems!"

"A good half-year."

"I found I was still fond of you. When all's said about that sad affair, you know, it was I who was rather a devil, and you who were rather a dear. I owe you for more than one good turn I never did anything to deserve."

"I wish I might think your associates in that adventure had come out of it as well disposed."

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"That absurd Monk, that clown Phinuit! Why bother your head about such canaille?"

"And what has become of the precious pair?"

Plump but pretty shoulders described a gesture of indifference. "I know nothing of them since that day when last you saw us all together. I was out of patience with them then—as I think you guessed. When you dismissed us, I sent them packing. And you?" Lanyard, smiling, shook his head, and the woman cheerfully consigned reminiscences to the grave of those dead yesterdays where they belonged. "Tell me now about yourself."

"What is there to tell?"

"Much, monsieur. You are a mystery."

"I am flattered . . ."

"That's all blague," the woman scoffed. "You know I'm interested in all you do. I've just told you so, and why." She endured his quizzical scrutiny with a frank and friendly countenance, more entertained than irritated by his mistrust. "Surely, my dear! you've not been misbehaving so badly you need hesitate to confide in me."

"But a little while ago you were telling me my life was dull."

"You don't find it so?"

"You might the tale of it. Tastes differ."

"One is to infer your conduct has been good?"

"Irreproachable—by certain standards."

"Mine?" Liane twinkled—"or yours?"

"Yours certainly, since I hesitate to bore you."

"But you are provoking! And not at all polite."

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Lanyard looked apologetic and said nothing. "Very well, then! if you won't answer when I ask you prettily, I presume I shall have to tell you all I know about yourself."

Lanyard pricked up his ears. "The little bird again?"

She solemnly nodded. "It is industrious; every day it brings me news of this and that."

"And it tells you what of this?"

"Enough to make you what I styled you a moment ago: a mystery."

"Is it permitted to ask, how a mystery?"

"Assuredly. To begin with: It is now six months since you settled down, apparently to vegetate in this dry climate."

"You distrust appearance?"

"Always when so far out of character. It is not like Michael Lanyard to become static all at once. But here you live quietly, in the cheapest decent lodgings, you have no callers, you write few letters, you see no friends—but one—and spend no money on yourself; only when you are seen in public with Madame de Montalais you seem indifferent to expense. You see—?"

"I see one thing plainly: that it were well to put salt on the tail of that little bird and wring its damned neck."

"But you do not see that this is, in one of your history, questionable conduct? It is too much like reversion to your old days, when you lived solitary and worked alone, making the name of the Lone Wolf

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famous in Europe by following out your theory that a thief to be successful should have no friends to betray him."

"But today!" Lanyard remonstrated—"the source of this astonishingly detailed and accurate information about my modest habits can hardly have failed to assure itself that they are all well within the law."

"On the surface. As were those of Michael Lanyard, the world-known Parisian connoisseur of art before the War. But the cunning that made it possible for the Lone Wolf to maintain that disguise, unsuspected by the keenest criminal investigators of the Continent, has not necessarily failed with years. To the contrary: what you did once you should be able to do again, with even greater success, since you are now older, less hot-headed, more astute. Let me tell you, my dear friend!" the woman concluded with an unmistakable note of earnestness: "they have great respect for your abilities, those who are interested in you today."

"It seems, then," said Lanyard after a reflective pause, "I have to thank you for a warning."

"I would be an ungrateful wretch did I fail to give it, who owe you my life twice over at least."

"I think we may call that debt cancelled if you'll answer one question."

"No questions!" A jewelled hand flashed a sign of refusal. "I have said more than was wise as it is."

He persisted: "You won't tell me—?"

"Ask me nothing, my friend," Liane Delorme begged. "But use your wits; they will tell you more

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than I dare, perhaps—fond as I am of you, Michael—they are more to be trusted. Remember, with women like me self-interest is ever at work. Perhaps it may be that the pleasure of seeing you tonight has made me for once self-forgetful, another time may find me less indiscreet."

"I will be careful," Lanyard said gravely, "not to expect too much . . ."

With equal gravity she responded: "Then you will be wise."

"And now," he concluded, rising, "your friends can't be much longer; I mustn't put them to the trouble of kicking me out."

Liane put out a hand and caught his. "But I wish you to stay. I promise you will be welcome. My friends will be delighted. One of them in especial I am anxious you should know. You will find him well worth your while, one of the most interesting men in New York, quite a social power in his way."

"In his way—?"

"A quiet way, my friend, but a very real one."

There was more meaning in her eyes than in her words. Lanyard hung in doubt. Impossible to misread the sincerity of her desire to have him stay on. But her motive?

He had delayed too long. Voices sounded in the hallway, the gay accents of a woman predominating. Then the door opened; five people entered.

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III

THE first was a pretty young thing, piquantly fair and petite, with glowing face and merry eyes, at sight of whom Lanyard felt warranted in breathing an invocation to his prophetic soul. For now, it seemed, chance or predestination was making good that presentiment to which he had confessed during supper at the Ritz.

This brilliant little shape of life in the dark rectangle of the doorway had been conspicuously one of that party whose forbidding host had excited the aversion of Eve de Montalais and, in himself, half-formed forebodings. The man at whom she was so gayly gurgling over her shoulder, who wore both topper and grin at the doggish slant which becomes the author of an amusingly improper wheeze, was the little chap of the weazened wise mask whom Lanyard privately reckoned court jester to the Sultan of Loot. The latter in very person bulked in the shadowy background provided by the corridor, a presence vast but vague, betrayed by the baleful burning of fire opals as a thunderhead on a summer's night may remain more sensed than seen till a glimer of lightning lends definition to its loom. Behind lurked a fourth, a figure still more indefinite. And in the rear a gleam picked out the hairless poll of Theodore, inclined at a servile angle.

Discovering Liane Delorme all at once, the lady on

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the threshold registered rapture, then ran to her with glad hands extended, her slight little body bearing an extravagant wrap of Russian sables with a grace as dainty as a fay's. Lips that didn't need paint to point their pretty contours bubbling joyously—"Darling Liane! You luscious thing! How we've missed you!"—she precipitated herself into Liane's arms and printed inconsiderate kisses upon that studiously composed complexion. When she permitted Liane to disengage and present Lanyard, he received an almost disconcertingly cordial smile and a tiny hand on which blazed in insolent beauty what he rated at first glance the most exquisite emeralds he had ever seen, who in his day had been somewhat an amateur of emeralds.

"Mr. Lanyard!"—Liane's introduction had been effected in English—"I *am* so glad to know you. It seems to me Liane knows all the interesting people—and nobody else."

"One trusts very truly you will not find need tonight to revise that recommendation," Lanyard returned, bowing low over the little hand. He added with an enquiring inflexion, because he wasn't sure of having caught the name aright: "Mrs. McFee . . ."

"Mrs. Folliott McFee," Liane supplied with an accent on the Folliott that supplemented something to this sense: 'Surely you must know that magic name!'

All the same, Lanyard didn't.

"Folly for short," laughed Mrs. McFee—"Folly to my friends." Then she gave a small make-believe shriek because the sable robe was being lifted from her shoulders by the gentleman of the carven coun-

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tenance. "Peter Pagan! how you startled me . . . You know Peter Pagan, of course, Mr. Lanyard: everybody does."

"Business of initiating you to the inner circle of certified somebodies, Mr. Lanyard," quoth Mr. Pagan solemnly, shaking hands, and leaving Lanyard with a feeling that no man had a right to look like that if he couldn't extemporize more tellingly.

But Liane had dropped a hand upon his sleeve and was drawing him aside to be made known to the Sultan of Loot.

"Mr. Morphew: Mr. Lanyard . . . You must become good friends, you two who are both such good friends of mine."

This impressive figure of the immobile and livid face and the hooded eyes, this Mr. Hugh Morphew, met Lanyard with a manner subtly allusive beneath a show of non-committal courtesy. His smile was grave, reticent and fugitive, a solitary cat's-paw flawing the surface of plumbless deeps; his few words were carefully chosen and cast in polished periods by an orotund voice: he was honoured to make the acquaintance of Mr. Lanyard and hoped that he, as a friend of Mademoiselle Delorme, would be so very good as to become one of their number for the remainder of the evening . . . But in the cast of his eye, the clasp of his hand, in an undertone his accents had as he pronounced these perfunctory phrases, there was meaning intended to be seized by Lanyard only, and which the latter interpreted much to this effect: 'We have been waiting a long time for this meeting, you and I. But patience:

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all in good time we will come to understand each other perfectly.' . . .

To this finesse Lanyard returned no acknowledgement of any sort. Indeed, he contrived to appear unconscious of it, to interpose an amiably modest manner between the scrutiny of those inquisitive but illegible eyes and a nature anything but easy to impress. He had lived so long in this world, in the course of a busy life had had so much to do with pretentiousness, that secretly, and the innuendoes of Liane Delorme to the contrary notwithstanding, he inclined to suspect Mr. Morphew of being a pompous fraud, a character of the utmost commonplaceness skulking behind the consequential false front of a jerry-built personality. He might be mistaken; but for the present the best he was disposed to grant Mr. Morphew was suspended judgement.

Moreover, at the moment, Folly McFee was demanding his attention on behalf of one Mr. Mallison, another whom Lanyard remembered having noticed at the Ritz.

This final introduction was transacted without casualties but without eliciting crows of ecstasy from either party. Mr. Mallison, indeed, was unaffectedly off-hand in his attitude, he didn't care a damn who knew that, to him, Mr. Lanyard was an interloper, an upstart, nobody in particular. A gesture for which Lanyard was grateful since it enabled him to reciprocate the sentiment that shaped it without feeling remiss in the matter of everyday urbanity.

Tall and gracefully made, Mr. Mallison aired eve-

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ning clothes and hair of a lustre seldom to be observed this side of the cinema screen. His speech had the tune of the educated English, or something nearly resembling it, his manners were silky and sulky, he practised a furtive smile down his nose as if he knew something but wouldn't tell, he had mastered a killing trick or two of the eyes for use in talking to women. And when it transpired, on the word of Folly McFee, that Mally tango'd quite too divinely, one felt that one needed to know no more. . . . A person of importance, if you asked Lanyard, solely as he might upon occasion shine with incandescence borrowed from the genius of Mr. Morphew, upon whom Mallison seemed assiduous to fawn in season and out.

Having offered the apology for his intrusion which custom prescribed and accepted the equally conventional assurance that all hands were ravished to have the privilege of welcoming one so well sponsored, Lanyard settled down to use his wits, as Liane had recommended, and find out for himself what this party was all about; if, indeed, it was 'about' anything more unusual than mankind's native predisposition to make light of whatever laws there be.

Certainly, if its members had foregathered at the Clique Club for any purpose other than the desire to drink forbidden wine upon premises of unholy repute, it wasn't at first blush apparent. Nobody was hungry, every soul present having sat through a supper elsewhere and earlier. On the other hand, everybody was famously thirsty with the exception of Mr. Morphew, who was alleged never to drink, and Lanyard who,

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having sampled it, didn't frightfully care for the Clique cellar. But all of a sudden Folly McFee, in whom artificial exhilaration was mounting apace, announced that she craved sure-enough excitement. Whereupon at a sign from Morphew the cloth was whisked away and the green baize of a card-table disclosed; whose top manipulation of a hidden catch reversed, bringing to light a small layout for roulette, complete but for chips and the metal wheel to fit in the bowl. These being supplied by Theodore, Mr. Morphew announced that he would stand the first trick as banker and croupier in one, and that white chips would cost one dollar apiece and the sky would be the limit; Mrs. McFee produced an impressive roll of bills from a jewelled mesh-bag and bought chips with a free hand; while Liane Delorme, Mallison, and Pagan purchased more conservatively but still eagerly.

But Lanyard, when Morphew's heavy-lidded eyes turned his way, shook his head: "Thanks; but if you don't mind I'll just look on."

"O Mr. Lanyard!" Folly McFee remonstrated—"and you look like such a good sport."

"You see how deceitful I am," Lanyard pointed out. "Let this be a lesson to Folly, not to trust appearances."

"But really, my friend!" Liane observed reproachfully—"you are no longer the man you were."

"I have always made it a rule not to gamble without money in pocket."

"But I will let you have any amount you want."

"You are too good, Liane. Another rule I have all

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my life observed is never to gamble with borrowed money."

"Your credit is good, Mr. Lanyard," Morphew tersely put in.

"Rule Number Three: Never play on credit . . . I am deeply sensible of your courtesy, Mr. Morphew, but really I will be most grateful if you will permit me to sit by and look on merely. The novelty of seeing myself in such a rôle at a roulette table will be compensation enough for the self-denial."

"As you prefer . . ." Morphew politely gave in. But before long he made occasion to exchange with Liane a look clouded with meaning, which Lanyard wasn't supposed to see and which, so far as anybody else knew, he didn't, who was busy just then refilling Folly McFee's glass and making amused response to the coquetry with which the flushed and laughing face turned up to his was instinct.

All the same, Lanyard wasn't missing much that went on, Life had too well trained his faculties to overlook nothing that fell within their range and to be wary of dismissing as necessarily negligible the most minor and incidental details of any affair. He was beginning now to experience glimmerings, to perceive that this curious post-midnight party was 'about' something after all. Even before intercepting that mute consultation of eyes he had felt tolerably satisfied that a community of interests existed between at least three of those present, that Liane, Morphew and Pagan were playing prearranged parts in complete mutual sympathy. It was just possible that Mallison, too, was

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privy to their confidence; but one rather doubted that, Mallison impressed one as more likely to prove a tool, a pawn, a wage-loyal henchman, than a peer of this interesting confederation.

The arguments he had adduced in his endeavour to make Eve understand that he was not a man of the sort she ought to marry began to seem inspired. Liane had never brought him here simply to gratify a vagrant whim. Neither had her half-veiled hints been idly uttered, concerning those nameless acquaintances of hers who were taking such a profound if gratuitous interest in Lanyard, and the one whom she most wanted him to meet, either Pagan or Morphew unquestionably, and who was "quite a social power . . . in a quiet way." Because the woman was well-disposed, for old sake's sake she had chosen to warn him, if in her own oblique fashion, to be on his guard with those two in whose minds, Lanyard hadn't any manner of doubt, the project for some time had been forming of inveigling him into some shady sort of association with them, for purposes of their own in the last degree questionable.

Undoubtedly they had taken a good deal of pains to inform themselves as to Lanyard's circumstances. How they expected to be repaid for their trouble remained for him to find out. Hardly out of his pocket; knowing as much as Liane had revealed, they probably knew more, even that the débâcle of his unregenerate days had left him without resources other than the half-pay attaching to an extended leave of absence from the British Secret Service, and that the not inconsiderable cost of squiring about New York a woman of

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fashion had brought him to a pass where he might no longer refuse to face the prospect of being unable to pursue that sweet association for sheer inability to finance it—he who had been accustomed to waste money away as freely as in more spacious times he had been wont to appropriate it! A plight the more painful in that it was one he couldn't possibly confess to the woman he loved. He had gone tonight as far in that direction as pride would let him. . . .

Since, then, it was manifestly not pence they wanted of him, this precious pair, this Morphew and this Pagan, it followed that they wanted something less tangible but probably in the upshot more profitable, something which they might have found themselves in a position to require of him if he could have been induced to play roulette on credit and had lost—as he made no doubt he would have lost. Setting aside all question of the honesty of the wheel which Morphew's huge hands were manipulating with notable deftness, the observation and experience of this inveterate gambler of other days had convinced Lanyard that luck seldom or never favours him to whom its smile is a matter of life or death.

Not that he conceived the game to have been planned with any idea of inducing him to play and lose, his attendance had come about too fortuitously. To believe that was to believe Liane had foreseen that he would be marching down Fifth avenue at half an hour after midnight and had deliberately arranged to have her cab skid and land her on the kerb a dozen paces ahead of him.

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No: by every sign acceptable to a fairly sophisticated intelligence, tonight's affair had been plotted for the sole if highly problematic benefit of Mrs. Folliott McFee. Not in all likelihood for the purpose of fleecing her at a friendly little game, though she was punting with feverish imprudence, broadcasting her bets and losing very considerable sums without perceptible care. Lanyard was prepared to credit Messrs. Morphew and Pagan with capacity for any degree of knavery; but their evident affluence and their association with Liane Delorme inclined him to believe that they were in this instance up to some mischief at least a cut above crooked gambling. Liane, thorough-paced rip that she was, had in the course of a highly chromatic career feathered her nest too warmly to be reduced to the rôle of tout to a brace of common sharpers.

What, then, could their purpose be with this engaging and indiscreet young person? If only one knew a little more about Mrs. Folliott McFee it might be easier to guess.

In the absence of such specific information, a study of her as she was tonight would do no harm, might quite possibly prove rewarding.

Indisputably a fascinating creature. Divested of her sables, disclosed partially in but largely out of a flimsy piece of impudence which the cynical Rue de la Paix had fashioned to serve as an evening gown, she cut a figure the most sprightly and sightly heart could wish: an animated miniature of extreme loveliness, abandoning herself to the spirit of play with the heedless vivacity of a charming child; drinking a bit more

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than she should, perhaps, while she watched her stakes unfailingly fall to the lot of the croupier's rake, but plaguing Mallison with a lightly malicious wit that struck him speechless and left him more than ever sulky, bartering pungent banter with Mr. Peter Pagan, cheeking the taciturn Morphew till he smiled perforce his rare begrudged smiles, and never for an instant forgetting that Lanyard was likewise an unattached and personable male; and all with a delicate air that robbed her most flagrant audacities of any suggestion of poor taste and made her seem strangely out of place in that ring of hard and selfish faces, in that overheated private room of an establishment whose every purpose was illicit, in that demoralizing atmosphere drenched with perfume of wine and scent of perfumed flesh . . . Strangely out of place, appealingly helpless for all her bravado: a child among thieves and worse . . .

But it were a thankless job to waste solicitude upon her: if Folly couldn't take care of herself, nothing was more certain than that the way to earn her abiding dislike was to try to take care of her. In New York, as every elsewhere in the haunts of men of means beyond their needs or native ability to spend with good grace, no novelty at all inheres in the spectacle of such flighty young women, amusement-mad and gifted with too much freedom from responsibility, going devious ways with dubious guides. And the worst of it is, as a general rule it's nobody's business but their own.

Now in course of time, when a waiter entered with yet another cooler wherein two more bottles were luxuriously cuddled in cracked ice, the open door admitted

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stimulating strains of the orchestra downstairs; and forthwith Folly McFee concluded she'd had enough of roulette, at least temporarily.

"Perfectly damn' rotten luck!" she declared, pushing back her chair and jumping up. "I'm for a dance, maybe that will change it. Who wants to take me down for this tango? Mally——?"

"You can't have Mally," Liane Delorme informed her with serene decision. "You've had him all evening at the Ritz. It's my turn now. Take Peter Pagan: he's a better match for you, dear."

"Pick on somebody your own size," Pagan paraphrased, leaving his place with an alacrity that forestalled Lanyard's intended response to the glint of invitation in the eyes which Folly promptly had turned his way. "If you refuse me, Folly, you doom me to dance with Liane; and that always makes me feel like an enterprising tug waltzing the Mauretania round the North River."

Liane retorted with one of those characterizations so dear to the Parisian heart, a deadly insult but absolutely meaningless when rendered into English; and Pagan proved a certain lack of finish in his cosmopolitan education by merely looking blank as he mentally translated her remarks. After which he bowed cheerfully to the traducer of his lineage and ambled off with Folly's hand under his arm; while Liane rose and playfully tweaked Mallison out of his chair by an ear, to his indignation, for he had been winning and naturally wanted to go on playing as long as his luck lasted.

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"It isn't that I really want to dance," she coolly explained to Morphew and Lanyard as she haled Mallison to the door, "but simply to give you two time to get acquainted . . ."

Morphew lumbered heavily after her and set the spring-lock by way of providing against interruption. "Intelligent woman, Liane," he approved, unsmiling, as he returned to his chair.

"As to that, monsieur, one is entirely of your mind."

Lanyard helped himself to a cigarette and looked civilly receptive under the weight of Morphew's direct and thoughtful stare.

"Odd," that one considered, "we never happened to meet before this, Mr. Lanyard."

"Think so?"

"Noticed you about town often enough."

"But does not the fact that our paths have sometimes crossed prove we travel widely different courses?"

"I'm not so sure . . ."

"Not——?" Lanyard murmured, lifting the brows of polite surprise.

"I've got a notion, if the whole truth were known, you and I would find we were travelling in much the same direction . . . in the dark."

"Monsieur does much travelling in the dark?"

"Guess you know what I mean," Morphew's gravity was lightened by a twinkle of genial cunning. "When I say 'in the dark,' I mean, of course, the side of our lives we like to keep covered up."

"This is most interesting," Lanyard protested with animation. "You are going to tell me about that side of your life which you like to keep covered up?"

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"No fear." The twinkle broadened into a grin. "Guess I'll let you guess at that, same as I have to guess at yours."

"I hope very truly monsieur does not so waste his time. I can assure him, if his guess-work were to flood with light every nook and byway of my life, what he would see would not entertain him."

The lines running from Morphew's nostrils to the corners of his mouth took on a sardonic set. "I doubt that, Mr. Lanyard."

"My ways of life are very quiet."

"I believe you. Still, I doubt I'd be bored."

"Possibly not," Lanyard conceded. "One is able to judge only by what one has seen of you in public, monsieur; which leads one to believe your interests centre by choice in light-hearted young people, not sober-sided, steady-paced elderlies like myself."

"Oh! as to that, I take folks as I find them," Morphew alleged. "And I find 'em all interesting, one way or another. Now yourself . . ."

"But I do assure you I am not at all interesting."

"Point of view," Morphew contended. "I'll say you've had an interesting life."

Lanyard gave a good-natured shrug. "After all, it is the only life I have . . . But monsieur, I am sure" —his manner grew moderately pointed—"would find it tiresome."

"I don't," Morphew bluntly countered.

"Then I am honoured—I presume—to learn you have concerned yourself in respect of my modest self."

"I know a lot about you," Morphew admitted—"past and present."

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"Yet you tell me you think my present mode of life intriguing!"

"Intensely."

Lanyard laughed. "Monsieur will pardon my suggesting that his sources of information, however busy, are unreliable if they have led him to believe my small affairs worthy of his attention."

"Point of view again." Morphew dismissed argument with a flirt of a massive hand. "Be that as it may: I've been anxious to meet you to ask you to help me answer a certain question."

"Indeed?"

"Perhaps it would be more nearly right to call it a problem in psychology."

"I am all attention."

"It's like this . . ." Morphew had resumed his customary guise of profound solemnity. "What I want your expert opinion on, Mr. Lanyard, is the question of whether it's possible for a man . . . say he's a friend I'm taking a personal interest in . . . a man who built up a pretty warm criminal reputation for himself, when he was younger, and then hit the sawdust trail apparently for keeps . . . Whether it's possible for such a man to keep going straight in the face of every possible incentive to set up shop again as a master crook."

"Such incentives as——?" Lanyard enquired with every symptom of intelligent interest in a hypothetical instance.

"Well! let's suppose this man I've got in mind, this friend of mine, has fallen for a woman who's got

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everything, social position, any amount of coin, all that sort of thing. Say she's in love with him, too, and they want to get married. But my friend is broke, or next thing to it; and he's got a touchy sense of honour —sometimes reformed crooks have, you know—so he can't marry the woman, because that would make him look like a fortune-hunter if she ever found out he hadn't a red cent; and he can't let on to her he's stoney, because then she'd insist on marrying him to support him, and he'd feel like a yellow pup; and he can't do a quiet fade-out, either, because then she'd think he hadn't been on the level with her, and that would break her heart. That leaves him where? He's got to have coin to go on with, and the only way to get it is for him to remember some of the things he's been trying to forget. He's living in a city where there's more money and loot lying round loose to be picked up for the taking than any place else in the world, and where police protection against burglary and highway robbery is a positive joke, where a good fat safe is cracked or a hold-up pulled off every other day, and ninety-nine times out of a hundred the crook's never caught. So you see our friend has just what I said he had, every temptation to come back strong in the house-breaking line, and practically nothing to fear—except maybe that the woman he's crazy about will tumble sometime to how he's getting his dough. And that's the problem that's been puzzling me, Mr. Lanyard: What's our friend going to do? . . . What would *you* do?"

Lanyard thoughtfully ground out the fire of his cigarette in an ash-tray and got up. "I imagine," he

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said quietly, "your anonymous friend would do precisely what I mean to do, Mr. Morphew. He would get well weary of tedious beating about the bush, but at the same time would remind himself that the obligations which devolve upon a guest constrain him to overlook, for the present, a piece of damnable impertinence. He would for that reason take his hat and coat and stick—as you see me taking mine—and finally his departure—as I shall take mine, monsieur, pausing only to advise you . . ."

Lanyard stood over Morphew, plunging a stare ugly with anger into the apathetic and unreadable eyes of his host. "At the first sign, Mr. Morphew," he said, "of any disposition on your part to meddle further in my affairs, either in person or through an agent, I will seek you out, wherever you may try to hide, and break this stick, or a stouter one, over your contemptible back. Be advised: hands off!"

He waited an instant to hear what Morphew might have to say to this defiance; but since the man said nothing, made no sign of any sort, his huge body betrayed his mind by not so much as the stir of a finger or the wince of an eye, Lanyard at length wheeled on a heel and went to the door. Only then, as his hand closed on the knob, Morphew spoke, employing the same conversational tone he had all along employed.

"One moment, Mr. Lanyard. It may interest you to know I own this joint. When I got up to shut that door a while ago, I gave Theodore the high-sign. Ever since then four of our waiters, the toughest

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rough-necks on the pay-roll, have been stationed in the hall. If you try to leave without my say so, you'll be badly beaten up; and if you try any rough stuff in here, my finger's on the push-button that will call them in . . . I am not done talking with you yet, my friend. So now, if you'll attend to me and keep your temper in hand, I'll show you just where you stand."

He rested, watching Lanyard with no perceptible emotion in his bleak, pale eyes; and when, after momentary consideration, Lanyard turned back from the door, the man resumed with the same minatory composure, leaning forward with an arm on the table and rapping out his points with a thick forefinger.

"Whether you've gone back to thieving or not, Lanyard, I don't know yet. I guess you have. If you haven't, you've thought of doing so. Whether or not, you've got to come to me. I've got you"—Morphew turned his hand palm up and closed the fingers slowly into a tremendous fist—"there! You can marry your Mrs. de Montalais as soon as you like, but only with my consent; and you won't get that for nothing. If you're back at your old game, you'll come across to me, fifty-fifty. If you marry the woman for her money, my share will be half of all you squeeze out of her."

"And"—Lanyard's fingers were itching to bury themselves in that fat throat and shake the beast till he cried for mercy—"and if I refuse?"

"I'll advertise you to all New York—or anywhere else you try to live with your wife—as the Lone Wolf back at his old dodges. I'll prove you committed

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every burglary of any size this Town has known in the last three months; and if that isn't enough, I'll plant others on you. You'll come across to me, my dear sir, or go up the River for life."

"Such being the case," said Lanyard, shortening his grip on his stick, "I think I would as willingly go up for manslaughter—if killing a blackmailer comes under that head."

As he spoke the door was thrown open, a vast din of angry and excited voices seethed up from below, and Theodore appeared on the threshold, chattering, wringing his talons in antic terror.

"Monsieur!" he stuttered between clashing teeth—"Monsieur Morphew! The police! A raid! A raid!"

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IV.

WITH an incoherent bellow of rage and astonishment Morphew reared up out of his chair, overturning it. But that was all: instantaneously something like a paralysis of consternation laid hold of him, so that he stood with huge hands fluttering feebly and knees quaking under his great weight, the light dimming behind the bleached flesh of his face, jaw sagging, stunned eyes seeking the doorway.

Through this last, a froth of noise upon the uproar from below, came sounds of scuffling and voices angry and expostulant. In the corridor a confused movement became visible, a knot of figures fell apart, Liane Delorme broke through and, ghastly with pallor beneath her war-paint, strode breathlessly into the room, one strong sweep of a perfectly modelled arm brushing aside the gibbering Theodore.

Mallison followed her closely, like a fearful child tagging at its mother's skirts, with the slinking tread and something of the witless look of a cowed animal peering through the sleek surface of his comeliness. And that this look little belied his state of mind was shown by the nervous shy he gave when Lanyard, satisfied there was nothing to be gained by more delay, made for the door.

The corridor was choked with people, flustered waiters mixed in with guests whom the alarm had routed

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out of the other private rooms, all aimlessly milling about and questioning one another with vacant eyes and babbling tongues. Nobody offered to stay Lanyard, on the other hand nobody offered to get out of his way. Pagan passed him, plying busy elbows, his habitual leer erased. Of Mrs. McFee one saw nothing.

Half-way to the head of the staircase Lanyard found the jam on the narrow landing too dense to be penetrated other than by main strength and ill will; and, crowded against the banisters, waited for some general movement that might permit him to proceed.

Looking down over the handrail, he commanded a view of the first landing, the stage of a more lively scene, as guests and employees stampeding for the stairs were checked, hustled, and bullyragged by a squad of police, readily to be picked out by their flat-topped blue caps, and by a number of plain-clothes men, quite as conspicuously badged by those weather-worn derbies lacking which self-respecting police detectives consider themselves no sportsmen in their attitude toward lawbreakers.

Hectoring cries of authority, plain profanity of an unimaginative citizenry, and yammering of hysterical women manufactured a clamour that drowned out all lesser noises till somebody near Lanyard used stentorian lungs to suggest the roof as a possible way of escape; upon which advice the whole body of people surged toward the third flight of stairs.

In that moment, while clinging to the banister-rail to keep from being swept along, Lanyard heard his name shrilled in a pathetic voice, and saw Mrs. McFee

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struggling in the rush, the violet eyes darkly dilate with dismay, the mouth of a child tremulous with appeal. Immediately he threw himself toward her. Tripped and jostled till her strength began to fail, his arms alone saved the young woman from going down under those panic feet. Then putting his shoulders to the press, he dragged her out of the worst of it and into the semi-shelter of a jog in the wall, in front of which he planted himself as a shield.

"Now we're all right," he cheerfully said. "Take it easy, and don't worry."

"But I can't help worrying!" the small person objected, clutching the lapels of his dress coat with importunate hands. "How can I, if I'm going to be arrested and put in jail and brought up in a police court with all these awful people? The shame of it! the disgrace!"

"If you'll trust to me," Lanyard suggested, "I think I can promise you none of those calamities will happen."

"But how can you——?"

"I'm sure I know a way . . ."

As he spoke, with no warning whatsoever the house from cellar to roof was drenched with darkness absolute.

This thing befell with fine dramatic force. Where there had been deafening hubbub and confusion to confound the readiest, a lull of a long moment succeeded, during which every voice was hushed and nobody stirred. In this breathing-spell Lanyard found time to surmise what had happened: that some creature of

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Morphew's, acting possibly on inspiration but more probably in conformance with a plan preconcerted against such emergency, had disconnected the master-switch of the electric lighting system. . . . But Folly McFee whimpered in new fright and caught him closer to her; and in another breath the turmoil revived in redoubled volume.

Lanyard lifted his hands to the woman's and gently disengaged them.

"There, Mrs. McFee! don't be alarmed. They've simply shut off the lights to give the people the police are after a chance to escape. If you will calm yourself and have a bit of faith in me, I'll get you out of this in a jiffy, and no harm done."

"But my wrap! I can't go without my wrap, I'd catch my death! And my handbag, too— I left it on the table——!"

"I'll find them for you; it won't delay us a minute."

Lanyard swept the darkness roundabout with an extended hand, which encountered nothing; then, satisfied that the landing was now practically deserted, drew the woman out of her corner and coolly wound an arm round her.

"I'll be better able to avoid losing you, this way," he explained. "Hope you don't mind."

"No-o," said the small voice—"I think—I believe I rather like it."

For all that unmitigated mirk Lanyard experienced no difficulty in finding the way back to the right door.

"Hello?" he called, pausing on its threshold. "I've

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got Mrs. McFee here, safe and sound. Somebody make a light: I noticed candles on the mantlepiece . . ."

Nothing answered him. But this he had discounted. Releasing the woman and bidding her stop where she was, he struck a match whose flare revealed a room deserted.

Folly McFee gave a gasp of astonishment: "Where are they?"

"In sound American slanguage," Lanyard replied, crossing to the fireplace and applying the flame to the wicks of moulded and tinted candles which decorated its mantel—"our friends have flown the coop. You see, Morphew just now told me he is the proprietor of these premises; so I'm inclined to suspect the lights were put out to permit him to make a clean getaway. . . . But here's your wrap." He draped the sable robe round the woman's shoulders. "And your bag," he added, finding the same where Folly had left it.

"But I don't understand," she protested, lifting a bewildered small face to the light.

"I never imagined you would, Mrs. McFee," Lanyard laughed, catching up one of the candlesticks and turning to the door. "If you had understood, I fancy, you would never have come here tonight—or any night—that is, unless it's a fad of yours to live up to your nickname. . . ."

The words failed on his lips as he pulled up, finding the door blocked by a long, lanky shape of humanity that lounged with one lazy shoulder against the frame; the derby of tradition on the back of his head, hands buried in the pockets of an unbuttoned overcoat—one

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of them, Lanyard hadn't any doubt whatever, holding an automatic pistol ready.

"The devil!" he involuntarily exclaimed.

"Devil yourself, Monseer Lanyard," a nasal drawl retorted. "Funny! I was thinking only a day or so ago, it was about time for you and me to be bumping into each other again. And now, lo and behold you!"

"It can't be!" Lanyard incredulously cried, stepping nearer and holding his candle high.

"Wrong again: it can," drawled the humorous voice —"it is!"

Candlelight ruddled the lineaments of a North American Indian in the skin of a paleface: narrowed eyes beneath a lofty brow, a thin nose with a prominent bridge, lantern jaws and high cheek-bones, a wide slit of a firm-lipped mouth.

"Crane!" Lanyard cried in unfeigned pleasure.

"Never forget anything, do you?" Mr. Crane complained in mock bitterness. "Here I was counting on being able to put something over on you, because you hadn't seen me for five or six years—Nineteen-Seventeen, wasn't it?—and you'd ought've forgotten my map entirely . . . Swell chance!"

He surrendered to Lanyard's friendly grasp a bony hand of tremendous strength. "Well!" he groused on: "I guess here's where I miss another opportunity to put you out of harm's way—in the hoosegow—because you wouldn't be so gosh-awful glad to see me if you'd been doing anything real naughty."

"My dear man!" Lanyard informed him: "if every American detective discovered even a tenth of your de-

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ductive intelligence, New York's crime wave wouldn't be a ripple. . . . That aside, I'm more glad to see you than I can tell."

"I bet you are," Crane assented with ironic intent. "And I'll risk another safe bet, too: The sooner you see the last of me for tonight, the gladder you'll be."

"Why waste time trying to deceive you? I don't deny it."

"Then I reckon it'll make you and your lady happy if I fix it up pronto for you to get away without being mugged and finger-printed and all? Well: I'm a sworn servant of the law, and by all accounts you're a desperate bad lot; but come along . . . Only you got to promise you wont tell on me."

Crane sighed and straightened up, only to have Lanyard drop a detaining hand on his arm.

"A moment, my friend, by your leave. My personal gratitude I hope to prove when you are less occupied. But Mrs. McFee, too, would like to thank you. . . . Permit me, Mrs. McFee: Mr. Crane . . ."

"Mrs. Folliptt McFee?" Crane quickly queried, with a glint of interest, and engulfed in his grasp her absurdly insignificant hand. "How do you do, ma'm? Pleased to meet you."

"It's awfully sweet of you," Folly replied with trusting eyes and that hint—no more—of an infantile lisp which she had found so serviceable in dealing with certain types of men. "I'm sure I'd be frightened silly if it wasn't for you and Mr. Lanyard."

"Nothing for you to be scared about," Crane reassured her. "It's the outfit runs this joint we're after

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tonight, not the general public, that great body"—his tone took on the authentic twang of a public orator—"of simple-minded, plain-living, law-deriding hooch hounds that forms the sturdy backbone of this glorious nation. . . . Listen to 'em yap!" He grinned broadly, cocking an appreciative ear to the racket.

"No, ma'm: even if you and Monseer Lanyard hadn't run into me, the worst that could happen to you would be to have your names and addresses taken, so's you could be called as witnesses in case we caught somebody. Which," Crane added with conviction, "I don't much think we will, not tonight, not since they put the lights out on us. That's a brand new dodge, and a hot one. After this gets out, I reckon we'll have to carry our own lighting-plant along with us for night work, like in the movies."

He was piloting Mrs. McFee down the corridor while thus discoursing, in the wake of Lanyard's candle. Now, at the head of the stairs, he nodded to a patrolman stationed there, and the three were permitted to descend.

The raiding party had by this time found other candles and brought a few electric torches into play, by whose meagre illumination the business of winnowing out the goats from the sheep was proceeding in the rooms which had been reserved for dancing. But of this Lanyard and Folly McFee caught only the barest of glimpses in passing; for Crane, obviously in haste to discharge his friendly duty and be rid of them, passed them with all possible expedition through the house. At the front door he nevertheless held them for a moment.

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"There's more or less a mob outside," he stated; "but I guess you won't have much trouble finding a taxi. That is, unless Mrs. McFee came in her own car . . ." But it transpired that Folly hadn't. "Then I guess it's good night folks! Only, I'd like one word with you first, Lanyard, if Mrs. McFee won't mind . . ."

Drawing Lanyard aside, Crane dropped his voice: "Still with the B. S. S.? Doing anything special over here?"

"No: in fact, nothing. On leave of absence."

"I see. Where you stopping?" Crane noted the street number on the back of an envelope. "I'll look you up as soon's I get time. Like to have a chin about this and that."

"Do, my friend; and don't delay too long."

Passed by Crane through the police lines but pursued by jeers and cat-calls of the crowd which had collected, Laynard and Folly hurried round the corner into Sixth avenue, and there by good fortune picked up a cab almost at once. This they would hardly have needed but for the drizzle, which had set in again: Folly McFee, it appeared, lived in the lower Fifties, just east of Park avenue. Learning which, Lanyard hushed a sigh of content: the shorter the drive, the better. This latter part of his evening had exhilarated him not at all; and though the woman at his side was charming enough in her way, nothing would please him more than to see the last of her and be free to trot home to his dreams of Eve. In fact, he found himself surprisingly sleepy, considering the hour, which,

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according to a street clock on Fifth Avenue, still lacked a few minutes of two: so swift had been the transaction of events since his meeting with Liane Delorme.

A plaintive sigh from the other corner of the seat recalled him.

"You are tired, madame?" he enquired of the small figure huddled in that magnificent panoply of fur.

Passing lights fitfully revealed a petulant face to match Folly's tone: "More disgusted than tired. I'm so awfully grateful, and you've been such a perfect brick to me, Mr. Lanyard, it makes me sick to have you think me a little fool."

"But I assure you, I do not think anything of the sort."

"You forget what you said, back there in the Clique Club, about it's being a fad of mine to live up to my name."

"That would be unforgiveable were it open to the construction you put on it, madame. What I said was———"

"I know perfectly well what you said, at least what you meant: that I ought to have known better than to be there at all. But I don't see why."

"I should like very much to tell you, if I might without seeming to presume . . ."

"But I want you to tell me, Mr. Lanyard; I don't want to do things that make people think it's a fad of mine—"

"Surely you will be generous enough to forget those stupid words. Otherwise I shall never forgive myself."

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"I will . . . on one condition." A suggestion of the impish spirit of an hour ago revived in Folly's smile. "And that is, that you explain what you meant —right away."

"But it is so late, madame; and already we are arrived."

The cab was in fact halting in front of one of those interesting bijou residences into which modern architectural ingenuity has, in the more fashionable quarters of New York, remodelled so many of the brownstone and brick abominations of decades dead and gone.

"Late?" Folly McFee expostulated, dilating eyes of naïve perplexity. "Why, it's only two—the shank of the evening! Plenty of time to come in and have a drink and a cigarette and tell me how to save myself from the pitfalls of life in a great city."

And Lanyard, helping the woman to alight, with a bow and a smile covered yet another sigh of sentimental desolation. There was no refusal possible without rudeness . . .

By the time he had paid off the taxi Folly had used a latch-key, and was unfastening the throat of her wrap in the little entrance-hall.

"Do leave your coat and hat here, Mr. Lanyard—and make believe you're not bored to tears with the prospect of spending half an hour alone with a pretty woman who thinks you're rather nice."

"You do me injustice," he gravely returned. "This pensive silence you misconstrue is solely due to wonder what your family will think . . ."

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"The Saints be praised!" cried Folly McFee, rolling up devout eyes—"I haven't a suspicion of family, more than a maiden aunt who insists on living with me for the looks of the thing. But if it's information you're fishing for, it's only fair to tell you I'm a lone, lorn widdy woman, and have been for years. So you needn't be hoping for a jealous husband to pop in unexpectedly and save you from my wiles."

She danced to the back of the hall, a bewitching smile bidding him follow.

The room was a study and lounge in which easy chairs faced the embers of an open fire and windows heavily draped contributed to a cosy and informal atmosphere.

Here, measurably less bored than he thought he ought to be, Laynard accepted a cigarette and a high-ball compounded with such Scotch as he had not tasted since leaving England, and made himself comfortable on one side of the fireplace while on the other Folly curled herself up in an interesting pose with feet beneath her.

"And now," she announced with a speciously demure look—"I'm waiting to be told why I'm aptly nicknamed."

Smiling, Laynard put his glass aside. "Perhaps one reason is because you recklessly invite into your house at ungodly hours a man about whom you know nothing whatever."

"I know enough from the way you've behaved tonight. Besides, anything I want to know about you I can find out from Liane any time I care to ask."

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Folly made a provoking face. "You'll have to do better than that!"

Lanyard shrugged. "I see there's no fobbing you off . . . Is it permitted to be plain-spoken?"

"Please. Even if it hurts, I'm sure I'll find it refreshing . . ." With malice Folly amended: "coming from a man." She pursued with all the solemnity of a sagacious infant: "You know, Mr. Lanyard, it's all tosh, this effort you men are forever making to persuade the world you're the straight-forward sex. Maybe you are among yourselves, but with women—!"

Her eyes called Heaven to witness to the subtlety of masculine methods with women.

"I agree entirely, madame. But do you claim more for your own sex?"

"Oh! there's never any doubt about a woman's mind. She may not always say what she means, sometimes she doesn't just know how, but one always knows what she means."

"One always knows she means business . . ."

"Precisely." Folly giggled joyously. "You know, Mr. Lanyard, you're too delightful. I'm afraid you're a dangerous man."

Lanyard bowed his appreciation of this flattery. "You begin to believe, perhaps, you may have been a trifle injudicious in asking me in . . ."

The young woman agitated a dissentient head till its bobbed brassy tresses fluffed out like an aureole.

"Not the least bit!" she declared. "You could be dangerous and not half try; but so long as you persist

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in being a gentleman, why should I fear? Here am I using all my girlish arts to make you flirt—and all you can think of is how quickly you can read me the lecture I need and escape. Ain't that the truth?" She relished in elfin mischief Lanyard's momentary loss of countenance, then abruptly made a prim mouth, and sat with modest eyes downcast to folded hands. "Well!" she sighed: "go on . . ."

"No," Lanyard demurred; "I don't think I shall, if you don't mind. I begin to see my mistake: you can very well be trusted to take care of yourself."

"But if I insist? It isn't good manners to start something without finishing it."

"A man might better rush down a steep place into the sea than take a dare to advise any woman . . . But evidently I may as well resign myself to being thrown out instead of taking my leave in orderly fashion."

"Anything, so long as you get away some time soon!" Folly lisped, without looking up: "I understand you."

"To begin with, then: You are an extremely attractive young woman."

"Yes, I know. But is this part of the lecture? or have I at last succeeded in rousing you?"

But Lanyard wouldn't be diverted. "And apparently," he persisted, "too well supplied with money to know a real care."

"Simple sloughs of the wretched stuff," Folly frankly admitted.

"That sable coat you wore tonight can't have cost less than twenty thousand dollars."

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"How little men know! It cost thirty."

"The jewels you're wearing would ransom a profiteer's wife—"

"Why not? I'm a profiteer's widow."

"Those emeralds alone must be worth a hundred thousand."

"You do know emeralds, don't you, Mr. Lanyard?"

"Altogether, taken as you stand, you'd probably assay a quarter of a million. Yet you complacently riot about town and without a moment's hesitation trust yourself in resorts like the Clique Club, rendezvous of the rarest set of rogues New York can boast —and your host its self-confessed proprietor!"

"Oh! everybody knows Morphy's the King of the Bootleggers; but nobody except Revenue officials considers a bootlegger a criminal nowadays."

"Possibly not. Still, I fancy, society is less kindly disposed toward professional blackmailers, notorious demi-mondaines, and jewel thieves of international ill-fame."

"Mr. Lanyard! you don't mean to say—" Folly McFee sat up and made shocked eyes.

"I am one whose lot it has been to see a vast deal of this world, madame. I give you my word I recognized representatives of all those classes at the Clique tonight."

The woman illustrated a little thrill of delicious dread. "Of course, as to blackmailers, I've nothing to fear—"

"Pardon: but can you be sure? In the absence of any fair excuse for bleeding their victims, blackmailers

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have been known to manufacture evidence. And it's always, with them, the open season for high-spirited young women of fortune with a taste for entertaining indiscretions."

The violet eyes widened and darkened. "Mr. Lanyard! you don't mean—you don't think—!

"Tell me this, Mrs. McFee: How did you make the acquaintance of Mr. Morphew?"

"Why! through Madame Delorme—"

"And Liane?"

"Mally introduced us."

"And Mr. Mallison?"

"Oh! I don't know . . . I really don't remember where I met Mally. Somewhere at a dance. He's the perfectest dancer in Town."

"They are, as a rule."

"'They' ?"

"Permit one more impertinent question: Does Mr. Mallison make love to you?"

"Why, of course! it's the only conversation he knows."

"And you encourage him?"

"Now it's no use your trying to make me believe Mally's a blackmailer. He hasn't got enough brains —or anything else."

"Perhaps not. But others have, with whom he herds. For example, Mr. Morphew."

"Morphy!" Folly laughed the notion to scorn— "the King of the Bootleggers makes too much money, he doesn't need to levy blackmail."

"It may be merely a hobby of his," Lanyard sub-

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mitted reasonably; "or perhaps he's keeping his hand in order to have a good trade to fall back on if ever anything happens to upset the Eighteenth Amendment."

"You aren't serious, Mr. Lanyard?"

"Madame: I *know*."

"How can you?"

"Your American courts permit a witness to refuse to answer leading questions on the ground that his testimony might tend to incriminate or degrade."

"You mean Morphy's trying to blackmail you? What a wicked life you must have led!"

"I don't deny that; but rest assured, I admit it only to convince you I am not guessing. You will do well, believe me, madame, to avoid hereafter Mr. Morphew and all his crew."

"Mally and Peter Pagan and Liane Delorme? And they've been such fun! What's the matter with Liane?"

"Madame Delorme," Lanyard said slowly and with meaning, "I have known many years. Her friendship I value highly. I should be very sad to do anything to deserve her enmity."

"You *are* provoking!" Folly declared—"forever tantalizing one with hints. I presume you mean me to understand she's the notorious demi-mondaine you mentioned."

"Has Liane told you nothing about herself?"

"Oh heaps! but—"

"Then I beg you to excuse me from saying anything that might, possibly through my ignorance of the true facts, conflict with her confidences."

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"Beast!" said Folly McFee with feeling, and made him a face of pique. "I suppose it's no use trying to pump you about that international jewel thief . . ."

"None whatever, madame."

"Of course, you mean the Lone Wolf."

"But why that one?"

"Peter Pagan was talking about him at the Ritz tonight, told us there was a rumour the Lone Wolf had convalesced from his reformation and was on the loose again, right here in New York."

"I have no doubt," Lanyard agreed with entire tranquillity, "there is such a rumour . . . And now that I have duly functioned in my paternal rôle, my dear young woman"—he rose—"now I have told you all I know—"

"Anybody that believes that—!"

"I fancy you will be relieved if I bid you good night."

"I think you're perfectly damn' horrid," said Folly McFee, rising and extending her hand. "First you spoil my evening, then you run away."

"You will forgive me one spoiled evening, I know, if anything I may have said preserves to you the beauty of your tomorrows."

"I won't forgive you for running away from me," the young woman promised darkly, holding fast to his hand and unleashing 80 c.-p. eyes to do their devastating work. "You can be rather a dear when you choose; but I don't think it's a bit fair of you to rob me of four friends and not replace them with one."

"But I trust very truly—" Lanyard began.

A peremptory buzz of the doorbell interrupted.

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V

FOLLY McFEE whipped her hand away with a jerk, her round eyes consulted Lanyard's, in that furtive tone which people seem instinctively to adopt in times of apprehension, irrespective of the possibility of being overheard, "What can that mean?" she demanded—"at this hour of morning! Who can it be?"

"One or more of our fancy friends, undoubtedly," Lanyard replied with comforting absence of agitation —"calling to enquire if you got safely home—with, I'll wager, some transparent excuse for having left you to shift for yourself during the raid."

"But," the woman boggled, with a frown, "I don't want to see them . . . And all the servants are in bed . . ."

"Then I'm afraid there's no way out of it." Lanyard moved toward the hall door as the bell sounded another and more imperative stridulation. "Let me—"

"No," Folly decided, darting ahead—"I'll let them in. But I do wish I didn't have to."

"Then remember," Lanyard enjoined: "better not give them any reason to suspect I have warned you . . ."

"I understand." She paused an instant, nodding

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back to him. "I'll do my best. But promise me one thing: you wont leave me alone with them."

He promised, a gay flirt of that fair head thanked him, Folly vanished. And in another moment Lanyard heard her give little cries of elation whose ring was as true as one could wish: "Liane! Peter! how sweet of you both!" And the listener gave a nod of thoughtful approbation.

The dry accents of Mr. Pagan replied: "I told Liane you were all right, but she wouldn't hear of going home without stopping to make sure . . ."

"Oh I'm all right, of course! Mr. Lanyard brought me home. Thanks to him we didn't have the least trouble. But do come in, both of you, and tell him how *you* got out of it."

Liane was heard to consent, stipulating, however, that they would stop only a moment; and the three entered the study to find Lanyard at a wide window in the rear wall, thoughtfully peering out through its tear-blinded panes.

"Ah! ah! my friend," Liane saluted him in lively imitation of the tone she might have used to a child caught in mild mischief; and wagged a forefinger of reproof. "What are you up to there?"

"Trying to make out whether or not it's raining," Lanyard serenely explained, dropping the draperies his hands had parted.

"You might have waited to enquire of us."

"Judging by the state of mind you and Monsieur Pagan were betraying when I saw you last," Lanyard retorted, "it seemed fair to doubt whether you'd pay

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much attention to a drop or two of water." He comprehended Pagan in a lightly mocking bow. "You might tell us—we've been no end mystified—"

"I know," Mr. Pagan interrupted brightly. "You want the answer to that historical riddle: Where was Morphew when the lights went out?"

"Not where he was, monsieur, but where he went—and not alone—and with such amazing expedition."

"We didn't know what to think," Folly declared. "You vanished from that room like tumblers in a pantomime."

"It was very simple," Pagan glibly elucidated: "Everybody seemed to be making for the roof, so we followed the crowd."

"Presuming, of course," Liane amended, "you would, as well."

"You see," commented Lanyard, nodding to Folly, "how simply some things may be explained!" And thereby earned, and enjoyed, a resentful look from Pagan. "And did you actually get away across the roofs?"

"Unhappily, no. Those wretched police were up there, too," said Liane, with disgust. "So we had to go back and line up with the rest and give our pedigrees."

"Monsieur Morphew, too?" Lanyard's tone was skeptical. "And that so charming Monsieur Mallison?"

"All of us," Pagan snapped in a strangely sour temper. "That's what delayed us."

"Frankly, monsieur, you surprise me."

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"How so?"

"Why! if I were in Monsieur Morphew's shoes—"

"You'd rattle," Pagan asserted.

"What a literal mind you have, my friend! Well; but if I were, like that good soul, head of an institution so exposed to police attentions, I would be at pains to provide myself with more than one secret avenue of escape—when the lights were out."

"You've got to make allowances for Morph," Pagan blandly declared; "he hasn't had your early advantages."

"What do I see?" Apparently possessed by the belief that some sharp distraction was indicated if open hostilities were to be averted, Liane pounced upon Lanyard's barely tasted highball. "And this hour I have been dying of thirst!" She gulped with gusto, making eyes at Lanyard over the glass. "Yours, my friend? Never mind: Folly will fetch you another."

"Do with a drink myself," Pagan volunteered. "No, don't you trouble, Mrs. McFee, I know the way."

He ducked briskly out into the hall and was presently heard in the dining-room making melody with glasses and siphons and ice.

Liane set aside an empty glass, crossed to Lanyard, and petted his cheek with the authentic professional touch. "You mustn't mind Peter, mon coco," she cooed affectionately in French. "He presumes, perhaps, but then he's a privileged type."

"Mind him?" Lanyard questioned in a tone that implied he found the thought weird. "Vermin, my dear Liane, were ever my pet aversion. If you set

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any value on this insect, be good enough to keep him out from under my feet."

"Every time you do that," Folly grumbled in English, "you make me sick, to think of all the youth I wasted studying what I fondly thought was French."

Liane turned with a murmur of self-reproach, and gracefully posing on the broad arm of the easy chair passed a fair arm round Folly's even fairer shoulders.

"Forgive me, my pretty. Michael and I knew each other so long ago in that dear Paris of before the War, it goes against Nature to converse with him in any tongue but French. . . . Ah! my old one," she lamented to Lanyard. "Those old days! will we ever know their like again?"

Mistrustful of her drift, Lanyard briefly replied: "God forbid!"

Timely to catch the sense of these latter lines, Pagan returned, his countenance of a clown radiant with good nature restored by the fragrance of four eight-inch glasses on the tray beneath his nose.

"The dilute laughter of the peasants of Scotland," he announced, presenting the tray to Folly and Liane —"guaranteed to cure every heartache born of pining for a past that, if the truth were known, probably wasn't half so pleasant as the present—Prohibition and everything!" He presented the tray to Lanyard in turn, then, determined at all costs to win the centre of the stage, struck an absurd declamatory attitude. "To tonight and tomorrow," he toasted—"to hell with yesterday! Why waste good time mourning that which is immortal, anyway? All of yesterday that

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mattered we carry with us, imperishably enshrined in our hearts. After all, what is the present more than the past plus? What man was yesterday, he is today, with something added. Eh, Mr. Lanyard?"

"Or subtracted."

"I disagree"—Pagan made him a formal salute—"with all due respect. Man adds daily to the sum of his experiences, which sum he is; but he can never subtract from that sum one iota of what he has been. The peasant who becomes a financier remains at heart a peasant still."

"A pretty thought," Liane interpolated with earnest interest. "But, to a woman, somewhat unsettling, is it not?"

Pagan stared: "How unsettling?"

"Why! by what you tell me, I find myself still a virgin."

"Don't be depressing. Here am I, being deuced entertaining and eloquent and profound, philosophizing on matters of the spirit, while you . . . Bah!" quoth Pagan. "But to continue: Give the financier who was a peasant respite from his cares, and whither turns his heart? Back to the stage of his young days; if he takes a vacation, he spends it in overalls down on the farm."

"And yours, one presumes, are devoted to making records for the gramophone?"

"Don't interrupt, Liane. . . . Or take, say a criminal who has abandoned his misguided ways and become a respected member of the community. How will he relax? Eh, Mr. Lanyard?"

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"I will not presume to instruct monsieur on a point concerning which he is undoubtedly better informed than I."

Liane exploded a "Ho!" of pure joy, and Pagan shot Lanyard an envenomed glance which he was swift to mask with his well-worn smirk. "To be frank," he generously admitted, dropping into a conversational tone, "I had the Lone Wolf in mind. They say the fellow is here, in New York, now, and up to his old games again. I confess the thought rides my imagination, the puzzle of it. By all accounts, he went straight for years. How, then, came he to backslide? Were the claims of the past too strong? or the demands of the present? Does he steal today deliberately for gain? or involuntarily at the dictates of some subtle and deathless instinct?"

"But monsieur has so many entertaining theories, surely he will produce one to cover this hypothetical instance."

"I don't know. Nature is too strong for us, she laughs at all our efforts to revise her. We may repress and inhibit our native instincts as much as we will, but in the end, as a rule, they have their way. The Psychical Research Society reported, not long ago, the case of a man in whom the influence of instincts developed in early professional life were so strong that, buried though his criminal past was under a dozen years of law-abiding life, he reverted to old practices from time to time without knowing what he did; that it to say, in spells of amnesia, during which his first personality, the natural man, broke through the

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veneer of the secondary or artificial personality with which he had so painstakingly overlaid it. A safe-breaker and jewel thief like this Lone Wolf. Interesting if this were another such case."

"Interesting, indeed, monsieur, if conceivable."

"But think a minute, and I believe you'll admit it's easily conceivable. Imagine such a man, with wits and senses all habituated by years of rigorous training to serve his predatory nature. Because he's trying to live an honest life today doesn't mean that those old, ingrained habits have necessarily ceased to function. To the contrary, I imagine, they are always at work. As he goes to and fro and meets men and women who invite him into their homes—in their ignorance of his former identity, of course—inevitably, I maintain, such a man will always be observing and valuing and formulating plans of attack—subconsciously, perhaps, but still and for all that making use of the faculties he trained in other days. I can believe he never visits a home of any consequence without taking away with him a comprehensive scheme for burglarizing it. As you or I might, Mr. Lanyard, if either of us had the education of the Lone Wolf, say in respect of this very house. . . . And then some night, when he's least dreaming of anything of the sort, the old Adam reasserts itself, without or with his will and cognizance—"

Perhaps a little frightened by the gleam in Lanyard's eyes and the tension of his lips, Liane bounced up vivaciously, ran to Pagan, and clapped a palm over his mouth.

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"Peter!" she cried—"you make me tired, you talk so much. Once you get started, you never know when to stop. But now you will stop, I insist that you stop and take me home. It is nearly three, and I am weary to the marrow of my bones, too fatigued to listen another instant to your twaddle."

Lanyard contrived with fair enough grace to decline Pagan's magnanimous offer of a lift in his car; but by the time he found himself on Fifth avenue again was half sorry he had. There were no taxicabs cruising for fares at that hour, at least all he spied were tearing along with metal flags reversed; and his head was at one and the same time buzzing with fumes of whiskey and thick with that drowsiness of which he had first become sensible in the cab with Folly McFee. Singularly enough, that cloud had lifted during his stop in her home, whereas since leaving it, ever since he had drawn his first breath of the dank, chill air of the streets, his wits had been like slugs fumbling blindly in a bed of cotton-wool. Now his feet as well were beginning to feel leaden, walking, ordinarily a source of such keen enjoyment to this man of vigorous physical life, had become a task.

Hard to understand how one could have been so affected by the scanty ration of alcohol one had consumed that evening, a solitary glass of champagne at the Clique, a single Scotch and soda two hours later. It might be, of course, that Pagan had mixed too stiff a highball. One hadn't been so impressed while drinking, but now the flavour of the whisky clung to the palate, harshly reminiscent. Evidently not such good stuff as it had seemed at the first sip.

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Odd to find oneself resuming one's homeward walk at almost the very point where that rencontre with Liane had interrupted it. Still more odd, how that affair had resulted; in three brief hours everything had come true that one had foretold in seeking to dissuade Eve from the idea of marriage . . .

In a surge of grim rage Lanyard pledged Morphew and Pagan ample grounds for repentance should they show any dispostion to persist in tampering with his concerns.

Then he found occasion to execrate the weather, too, perceiving that it had been only holding off till now, when it had him at its mercy. Now all at once it ceased to tease and settled down to rain in dogged earnest and get the business over with.

And still no taxis . . .

Lanyard turned up the collar of his overcoat and dug both hands into its pockets, clipping stick under arm and plodding heavily through the shining puddles, with every labored step growing more conscious of bodily oppression and the lethargy that ruled his mind, feeling more abused in some vague how and aggrieved.

In the many-hued lights of the street the back-spatter of raindrops drilling on the sidewalk churned in rainbow iridescence, a froth of phantom jewels, enchanting, evanescent . . .

Strange that one should never have remarked this effect ere now . . . Stranger still how blindly man was wont to move through the world, benighted to its wonders, only in rare moments cheating the bandages with which individualism sealed his eyes and catching

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glimpses fugitive and ravishing of beauty adorning the most hackneyed ways . . . As now when, lifting dazzled eyes, Lanyard beheld himself a lonely wayfarer in a lane of jewels set in jet and gold . . .

Jewels that outrivalled even those the Sultan of Loot had paraded, and Liane, and that other woman . . . pretty little thing so well named . . . What the deuce was her name? Folly? Folly McFee!

Idiotic to mislay so soon a distinctive name like that . . .

Wading in jewels. Up to one's knees. As Liane waded in them, and Folly, and the Sultan of Loot . . . Between them these three must have had on display that night stones that would fetch four or five hundred thousand . . . flaunting them in the face of a pauper!

A pauper? Well: little better! Penniless, or next door to it. A few more days of running round with Eve . . . who must never guess . . . and he would be stoney. Not pinched for money—broke. The reward of virtue . . .

Lanyard laughed aloud, a cracked, ugly laugh.

Pagan hadn't been far wrong. Impertinent clown! Not far wrong, at that . . . Anything but easy to forget the cunning one once had gloried in, to remain forever deaf and dumb to the insiduous prompting of instincts which, as long as the sun shone, seemed to have been utterly stamped out and exterminated, but which, when clouds massed and the wind bared its teeth, had an accursed habit of proving they had been but rebelliously quiescent . . .

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Curious, how close to the line that mountebank had hewn in his guesswork at the psychology of the outlaw reclaimed!

There lingered still a picture instantaneously printed upon the sensitive film of consciousness, in that moment when Lanyard had stood peering out of the rear window at Folly McFee's: a view of the roof of a one-storey extension running back from the window, a flat roof decked over to serve as a terrace in warm weather, with, beyond it, thanks to an excavation being dug for a new building on the north side of the block, nothing between the house and the next street but a board fence enclosing the kitchen-yard. An open invitation to any man who might fancy the jewels of Folly McFee; jewels that, shrewdly marketed, would put a careful man beyond want for the rest of his days . . .

Lanyard growled an oath, gave himself an angry shake. What the devil had got into him tonight, that he should consent for a single instant to indulge such a train of thought?

Not that there was danger of *his* being tempted . . . He gave a thick chuckle of scorn. Nevertheless it was annoying to find oneself unable to forget that the temptation was there.

All the fault of that reptile with his viperous tongue and machine-made leer, What's-his-name . . . What *was* his name? Fagin? No: Pagan. Loathsome creature . . .

What an ass one had been to swallow his insolence simply because there were women present, to let such an illogical consideration restrain one from yielding

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to natural, primitive impulse and, with every provocation, throttling the fellow, wringing his scrawny neck . . .

In amaze Lanyard emerged from a seizure of sodden insanity to find himself at halt in front of the Waldorf, standing quite still in the driving rain and glaring at his hands, which were extended with tensed fingers compressing the windpipe of an imaginary victim.

What was he doing? He made an effort to pull himself together, and cast glances right and left, shame-faced to think that he might have been seen. But there was not another soul in sight on the whole, undulant length of the Avenue. Only a taxi shot past, and its driver hooted . . .

He seemed to have mislaid his stick. After a moment of myopic searching he gave it up, pocketed his hands and lunged on. . . . Not far to go now; but one made indifferent progress because of the fog. Of course it was fog! What else could make the lights so dim? Like a London fog, a London particular. And getting thicker every minute, blotting out the lights as a blotting paper sops up ink, leaving only blurs, faint and formless blotches fading into night absolute, black and steaming . . .

In a sudden saffron blaze Lanyard identified the common aspect of the small suite of rooms which he rented furnished. He was in the sitting-room, wrestling with his overcoat. Soaked through and dripping, the wretched thing seemed possessed of a devil of perversity which resisted all his efforts to shed it. He

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gave an infuriated wriggle, heard something rip, and discovered, in some surprise, that he was rid of it. Then with indignation he saw that the door stood open to the public hall, a staring oblong of black in the lighted walls. Lurching to this, Lanyard flung it shut with a thundering crash.

The problem of escaping from the intimate embrace of his dress-coat next engaged his intelligence. Something he couldn't afford to tear off his back. Yet he darkly foresaw difficulties. After a while of pondering, a spirit of low cunning prompted him to try to deceive the thing by making believe he didn't care whether it came off or not. . . . And astonishingly it appeared that this strategem had been successful: he was holding the garment in his hands. With the harsh, unfeeling laugh of a conqueror he cast it from him and shaped a course for his bedchamber. And barely in time: that London fog had stolen in after him somehow, probably through the door he had carelessly left open, Heaven knew how long. . . . At its old tricks, dimming down the lights till one could hardly see. Rapidly, too. He succeeded in beating the darkness to his bed, but with nothing to spare: as he sat on its edge, fumbling with his shoes, night whelmed the world with a stunning crash . . .

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VI

A SPLITTING headache roused Lanyard out of the void, with the help of an unfeeling hand that shook his shoulder, and a voice that heartlessly dinned his name into his ears.

When he tried to remonstrate his other shoulder was captured by another vice-like hand, and he was raised to a sitting position on the side of the bed. There, bending forward and clasping his head with both hands lest it rend itself in twain, he regained a measure of lucidity.

Broad daylight was flooding the room, not sunlight but the warm reflection of a sunny sky, beyond telling painful to optic nerves. On throbbing eardrums a voice jarred, hideously cheerful.

"Well: how're you feeling now?"

Without understanding Lanyard blinked into the homely, grininng countenance of Crane.

"Pretty rocky, I'll tell the World, the Tribune and the Herald! Next time you'll know better than to take liberties with lawless liquor—or I miss my guess. Got anything in the place good for a wrecked dome?"

Unwisely Lanyard sought to reply with a shake of the head under consideration. His moans were heart-rendering. When he got them under control he heard Crane say: "Well, son! it's a good thing to have a

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true friend on the job when you're feeling like this. You set there and take it easy while I run down to the drug store and fetch you a pick-me-up."

What were intended to be words of gratitude in response came out as the most disconsolate noises imaginable. Crane's footsteps receded through the sitting-room and died out beyond a door which was closed with thoughtful care. Pricked by pride, Lanyard put forth a tremendous effort of will and stood up.

Not till then did he appreciate that he was fully clothed but for his shoes and the dress-coat which he had a muggy memory of having discarded in the adjoining room.

When Crane re-entered without knocking, Lanyard was splashing in the bath-room. Some minutes later he came out wrapped in a dressing-gown and bearing some resemblance to his normal, self-respecting self. A steaming hot soak followed by five minutes under an icy needle-shower had moderated the headache to a bearable grumble. Crane was waiting with a tall and foaming glass. A draught long and acrid but grateful. The flavour of aromatic spirits of ammonia replacing that of aloes in his mouth, Lanyard was able to express his thanks with a smile less wan than might have been expected.

"I think you called yourself a true friend," he said: "that was true talk. Never in my life have I needed one more." Subsiding into a chair, he waved a feeble hand toward another. "Sit down and tell me to what I owe this act of mercy . . . "

"Well: if you want to know, I guess you owe it

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mainly to forgetting to lock your door when you crashed in last night." Crane sat down and favoured Lanyard with a quizzical stare, caressing lean jaws with bony fingers. "I knocked till I was tired, then tried the door, feeling pretty sure you were at home, because I could see by the transom you had all the lights going full blast. So I just naturally walked in and found you practically a total loss. You were cold sober when I saw you at two o'clock, but you sure did manage to collect a skinful between then and the time you turned in, whenever that was."

"To the best of my knowledge, not much after three."

"Blessed if I see how you managed it. Mind telling? I don't like to seem nosey, but this record you're claiming for the standing broad jag in one hour flat has got me guessing. Didn't know you went in much for that sort of thing."

"No more do I," Lanyard protested. "That is to say, I never did before and never will again, Heaven helping me to avoid further entanglements with temperance drinks."

"That what you call 'em?"

"I mean, the sort of drinks one's friends serve in these Prohibition times. I hesitate to ask you to believe that the ruin you see before you was wrought by one small glass of champagne at the Clique last night, followed by a single Scotch and soda at Mrs. McFee's."

"From the funny things I've seen bootliquor do in the last few months," Crane replied—"some of 'em

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not so darned funny, at that—I'm ready to believe anything you want to blame on it. What bothers me now, is you getting such stuff at Mrs. Folliott McFee's. That little lady is well enough fixed to keep her cellar stocked with the best. However," he reconsidered, "I guess she must've got it from her friend Morphew. She's been training considerably with him and his gang of late; and I wouldn't put it past that bird to poison his best friend for a profit of a few dollars a case."

"We see Mr. Morphew with the same eyes, you and I."

Lanyard wanted very much to question Crane for information concerning Mr. Hugh Morphew, but felt much too listless just then. Another time would do as well, when his mental processes had somewhat recuperated.

"So you were at Mrs. McFee's last night, were you?"

"Naturally, I had to see her home," Lanyard replied. "She asked me in to have that drink; and a little later the Delorme woman dropped in with a hyena who calls himself Pagan—daresay you know who I mean" —Crane nodded—"to make sure Mrs. McFee had come to no harm. You see, we were all guests of Morphew's at the Clique when you raided the place. But I presume that's no news . . . "

"You're wrong, then. Morphew and his lot got away clean. We couldn't find hair nor hide of him or any of the parties you've named. They must have beaten it by some secret passage while the lights were on the blink."

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Liane and Pagan, then, had lied about being turned back from the roof. Not that it mattered . . .

"How'd you get on with the pretty McFee?" Crane was pursuing with an interest too elaborately casual.

"Well enough, thanks. She seems a nice little thing if a thought flighty."

"Flighty's the word. I guess you haven't known her long."

"Only met her last night, a few minutes before the raid."

"Nice place she's got . . ."

"Nice enough," Lanyard assented languidly.

"Get much of a show to look around while you were there?"

Lanyard opened his eyes. "You're not asking these questions for conversation's sake."

"You're dead right I'm not," Crane drawled, stroking his jaws. "Guess I may as well break it to you. Mrs. McFee reported this morning, her house had been broken into last night, some time between three o'clock and daylight, her safe opened—little tin box she keeps in her boodwah—and the pick of her jewels looted."

"So!" said Lanyard—"it's to that I owe this honour."

"You've had such a lot of experience in that line, I thought maybe you wouldn't mind giving me a few tips . . ."

Lanyard lounged back in his chair again, tolerantly smiling.

"Why trifle with the truth to spare my feelings?"

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"Well!" Crane uncomfortably conceded—"I don't mind telling you, the job had all the ear-marks of one of the Lone Wolf's."

"Indeed?"

"The bird that opened that box did it painlessly, like you always used to, going on all I've heard—just talked to the works till the safe lay down and rolled over with all four paws in the air. Of course, he didn't leave any finger-marks. He got in by way of an extension at the back of the house: there's a French window opens onto it from the study. He didn't even need to jimmy that, though Mrs. McFee and the servants can't explain how it come to be open. In fact, the butler swears he latched it himself before he went to bed. Looks like somebody must have fixed it . . ."

"Somebody who, like your obedient servant, had plenty of opportunity."

"You got the idea."

"In short," said Lanyard, "what you are delicately trying to convey is that you'd be obliged if I'd come along quietly."

"No," Crane surprisingly answered: "nothing like that."

"Not—?" Lanyard persisted, in an unbelieving stare.

"No. . . . I'll admit, I looked you up today with a divided mind. I couldn't somehow believe it of you. On the other hand, I've been fooled by a lot of human nature in my time. But you put in an alibi, even before you came to, sound enough to satisfy me. Maybe I'm wrong about you, Lanyard, maybe you're as crooked

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as a Revenue inspector; but nothing will ever make me believe you pulled that job and then pickled yourself to celebrate, or that the Lone Wolf ever went home after cracking a box and crawled into the hay leaving his front door unlocked. Not only that, but just to make sure, in a perfectly friendly way, I frisked your pockets and searched these rooms high and low before I woke you up. You've got a good right to be sore, if it hits you that way; but I figured it was my duty as a friend as well as an officer of the law."

"On the contrary," Lanyard sincerely assured him, "I am appreciative and grateful, glad to be cleared in your sight, even more glad to be cleared in my own."

"In your own?" Crane repeated in perplexity. "What d'you think you mean by that?"

"I'm glad I do not have to wonder if possibly I did this thing in my sleep, so to speak."

"Quit your kidding!" Crane got up with a laugh. "I've got to be getting along now, oughtn't to have lost as much time as I have."

"I shall miss your soothing presence. But I am sure you understand that there are times, and this is one of them, when one would rather be alone."

"You said it."

"You will pardon my not rising to see you to the door?"

"Stay right where you are. I'll drop in again, some time this evening, maybe, to see how you are."

"Do. There are many things I want to consult you about when I feel better able."

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"Well: if anything gets in my way and I don't show up like I said . . . " Crane fished out a card from a worn wallet and placed it on the mantelpiece of the old-fashioned marble fireplace: "There's my name and number. Give me a ring any time you feel like it, and I'll blow you to a dinner with, maybe, something on the side whose kick isn't quite as deadly as a Georgia mule's."

For upwards of an hour after the detective had taken himself off, Lanyard lingered on in the easy chair, listlessly reviewing his memories of the previous night, memories comfortably clear-cut up to a certain stage . . .

After all, he were an ingrate to complain, surely he had no excuse for considering himself in disgrace with fortune, who had come thus far through this conjuncture retaining the confidence of Crane, but best of all his own!

He counted himself happy indeed—for all the malaise from which he still suffered and which only time and heroic measures in the way of exercise would do away with altogether—that Crane's investigation, while he lay senseless, had resolved every question that might otherwise have perturbed his secret mind. It was grateful to be spared the torment that, but for this exoneration, must have been his, the fear that he might himself, without his knowledge, have proved there was support in fact for the theory of criminal psychology which Pagan had advanced, the theory that it was well within the compass of possibility for a man in his plight, in sore financial straits and subconsciously

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tempted beyond his strength, to commit a theft while in a phase of auto-hypnosis coupled with amnesia, a condition comparable with somnambulism . . .

Otherwise his affairs, as Lanyard saw them, had come suddenly to a precarious pass.

In spite of the fact that he knew his intelligence would need some time to recover its accustomed competence, he entertained no slightest doubt but that he would be tomorrow, as he was today, convinced that the abstraction of the McFee jewels had been merely the first move in a campaign shrewdly planned to bring him to Morphew's terms.

His defiance of that one had not been tardy of result: the enemy had not only accepted his declaration of war, he had committed the first overt act.

Lanyard's temper hardened. If Morphew wanted war, he should have his fill . . .

But if war it must be, this was no time to waste in inaction: the enemy was already in the field and taking the offensive, while he lay resting.

Rising, Lanyard bestirred himself to set his house in order.

When he had shaved and dressed and dosed himself with stabilizing draughts of black coffee, he began to collect the clothes he had worn overnight, all of which would require the attentions of a valet before they would be again presentable. Rain had defaced the gloss of his topper beyond repair but by the hatter's iron. His trousers were damp and wrinkled bags of black stuff splashed to the knees with mud.

Over these stains Lanyard frowned. Impossible to

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understand how he had managed to come by the worst of them, even taking into account the condition in which he had traversed Fifth Avenue during the storm. The marks of that thin black ooze which accumulates on asphaltum explained themselves. But there were others inexplicable, and on his patent leather boots as well, smears and crusts of ochre mud which he could hardly have accumulated without wandering into broken ground, such as was not to be found on Fifth avenue at any point within the bounds of his besotted promenade.

But he distinctly recollected noticing an excavation behind the residence of Folly McFee. . . .

With a worried shake of his head that cost him several stabs of anguish, Lanyard folded and laid aside the trousers, and returned to the sitting-room to get his dress-coat.

As he took this up something in one of the coat-tail pockets struck against a leg of the table with a muffled but clashing thump.

By his own account, Crane had already rummaged the pockets of the garment, but conceivably the coat-tail pockets he had overlooked, who was better acquainted with dress clothes of American tailoring, from which such conveniences are commonly omitted. Lanyard's clothes, however, had been built in London; and to the British tailor coat-tail pockets are as an article of faith.

An exploring hand brought forth a little packet knotted in a handkerchief, one of his own.

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Lanyard surmised its contents before he had succeeded in loosing the knots.

With a sense of sickness, he stood staring down at the stolen jewels of Folly McFee.

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VII

IN sequel the life of Michael Lanyard knew some of its busiest moments, his modest lodgings were the stage of a scene of rare animation whose solitary actor figured as the restless axis of a whirlwind of garments. Then the air, clearing, disclosed the man decently clad for the street and stowing away in a safe pocket his unchancy treasure-trove.

Thus far he had gone about doing what he had to do automatically in a measure, as one will in times of extremity, putting off against an hour more opportune, when he might bring a clearer head to bear upon the business, too, the deliberate study which his troubles needed. Enough now to know the longer he delayed where he was, the more immediate his peril of suffering a second domiciliary visit by the police; who on this new occasion, beyond much doubt, would be represented by agents less kindly biassed than Crane, more skeptical and thoroughgoing in the matter of searching for Folly McFee's emeralds. It remained for Lanyard to prove appreciation of this fleeting smile of fortune by turning to good account the slender chance it granted to work out his salvation in his own time and way.

One detail, however, he dared not slight, though it cost minutes each more precious than the last: Lan-

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yard left behind him shoes and trousers from which every lingering suspicion of mud had been erased.

Some two hours later, after a tedious tale of twists and turns in the labyrinth of New York's several transportation systems, he left a train at the Mount Vernon terminal of the subway extension, and addressed himself to the tramp back to New York.

The sky was bright, the Indian Summer sunlight kind, the air inspiriting. By the time Lanyard had stretched his legs over a mile or two of by-roads—chosen for the long and lonely perspectives which enabled him to make sure he travelled with no other shadow than his own—he began to feel once more competent to ponder his fix and plot a way out.

No easy task: the problem posed by the fact that he had somehow, at some time in the course of the preceding night, unwittingly come into possession of stolen property, seemed open to solution only on one of two hypotheses, antagonistic, and neither at a glance more likely than the other. Failing his ability to turn up proof that another hand had rifled the McFee safe and secreted its loot in his coat while he slept, Lanyard would have to become reconciled to the belief that he himself had stolen the jewels while in a phase of submerged consciousness. Distasteful as was the bare suggestion, and human though the temptation was to adopt the more grateful theory and guide himself thereby, he still could not but doubt: the other was all too possibly the true explanation.

One thing at least he might take for granted, that the drink Pagan had brought him was drugged. But

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here again the lane of likelihood developed a confounding fork: Who could say whether the drug had been added to the drink by Pagan, or whether the whiskey itself had been one of those deadly synthetic concoctions with which that bastard offspring of Prohibition, the bootlegging industry, had flooded the land?

If it were the whiskey that Lanyard had to blame, Pagan, too, and Folly McFee and Liane Delorme must have suffered as severely, Liane even more, since she had made away with two drinks to Lanyard's one. . . . A simple matter to find out the truth, if one only knew the woman's address; but she had neglected to say where she was stopping, and other than those whom under the circumstances he would hardly care to consult, Lanyard could think of nobody who would be likely to know.

And even though investigation might prove that nobody else had been so punished, and thus satisfy Lanyard that his drink alone had maliciously been doctored, such knowledge would not necessarily lead him nearer to the facts of the robbery. Comfortable though it was to impute to Pagan the mischief with the whiskey, and assume that its object had been to throw Lanyard into coma and thus render it feasible to enter his rooms without his knowledge, smear yellow mud on his clothing and plant the plunder in his pocket, still it remained possible that the arch-intelligence which had decreed the administration of the drug, whether Morphew's or another's, had reckoned with even more diabolical cunning upon its breaking down those inhi-

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bitions which honour and faith and a good intent had imposed upon a nature perhaps—and for all Laynard could assert to the contrary—irreclaimably a thief's.

Hashish was reputed to work like that, to act upon its victims precisely as an acid eats away lacquer, stripping off layer by layer the most stubborn crust of honour and habit ever indurated by conscience and civilized convention, baring at last the primitive beast that lurks in every man.

No matter: though the identity of the thief must be a riddle still, to learn the truth about the whiskey would resolve the primary doubts that were harassing Lanyard and leave him better advised concerning what further steps would be required to clear up the mystery altogether. To this end the one thing now distinctly indicated was the need for action prompt, direct, and drastic.

Lanyard had not forgotten that appointment for the following afternoon which he must be able to keep with a clear mind and a clean heart, unapprehensive of any sort of interference.

He began to foresee a programme for the intervening night tolerably long and arduous. He had to hit upon some way to disembarrass himself of the emeralds that would clear him of all suspicion of ever having had anything to do with them. He had further to acquit or convict Pagan of tampering with his drink —and in the event of the conviction which he anticipated with entire confidence, to invent and enforce some means of persuading Pagan and his lot that Michael Lanyard was a good man to let alone.

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Now dusk was closing down upon the world in shade on shade of lilac, violet and blue, through which, moment by moment, the lights of the outlying city were blowing their blossoms of silver and gold. Directly ahead of Lanyard the electric sign of a roadhouse exploded its soundless salvo against the sky; and thus reminded that he needed food, who had so much to do ere dawn, he entered the place and dined with a frugality considerate of digestive powers sadly out of kilter. Then in the dark of the young night he resumed his walk, and between nine and half-past might have been (only that he took good care not to be) seen at pause on the Lexington avenue corner of the block in which Folly McFee dwelt, quietly reconnoitering the approach to her residence.

The house stood on the north side of the street, nearer Lexington avenue than Park, and with windows diffusing a dim glow through discreet draperies presented to the beholder the demure face that suited an establishment whose youthful chatelaine sported a sobriquet so apt and alluring.

Observers less interested than Lanyard was then have been known feelingly to comment upon the impish trick houses frequently practice of keeping their own counsel: the shrewdest reader of façades would have gathered nothing informing from the aspect worn that night by the dwelling of Folly McFee, no clue as to whether its pretty resident were at home, or, if at home, alone . . .

Lanyard hazarded a saunter past on the sidewalk opposite. Under more direct scrutiny the house re-

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mained as little communicative, the only profit he had of the maneuvre was the assurance that nobody was skulking in any of the areaways over across from it, on the watch for the likes of himself. But then there was no conceivable reason why anybody should be; not even his most impassioned ill-wisher, much less an unimaginative police force, could have been expected to divine that any attraction could possibly draw this putative criminal back to haunt the scene of his alleged crime.

Lanyard nevertheless, on gaining the Park avenue corner, merely crossed the street and continued his stroll through the next to the north, passing on the way the gaping foundation pit observed the night before from the windows of Folly's study, a survey of which from this new angle confirmed his belief that the thief need not have found it difficult to make his way into the backyard and swarm up to the roof of the extension. On the other hand, this aspect of the premises afforded Lanyard no least twinge of guilty reminiscence. Another circumstance that proved nothing; if his personal acquaintance with downright drunkenness was limited, he knew too well that it was quite possible for one to drink oneself into a state of alcoholic insanity and retain, on coming out of it, no memory of one's performances while in that condition.

Circumnavigation of the block having brought him again into the street upon which the McFee residence faced, but this time on its northern sidewalk, Lanyard's pace slackened; and idlest insouciance masked the surge of acute interest in him when, at twenty paces'

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distance, he saw the iron gate to its service entrance swing open and a maid emerge and make briskly off toward Park avenue—a tidy figure in black dress, white apron and cap, taking letters to post at the corner letter-box in time for the last collection.

Another freak of friendly fortune? or one of ill-favoured fate? The thing was too confoundedly well-timed, the invitation of that unguarded entrance too tempting. Indeed, when it occured to Lanyard that his action might have been considered a thought precipitate, it was too late to turn back, he had already slipped into the service hallway and restored the door to the position, half on the latch, in which the woman had left it. To change his mind now and retreat would be to court her attention, who would already be on her way back from the corner.

The hallway was long, narrow, dimly lighted. At its far end a stairway led down to kitchen offices. Midway, a swing-door communicated with the main body of the house. Through this Lanyard had no choice but to dart, reckless of what might await him on its far side: to linger where he was meant immediate discovery . . . and the emeralds on his person!

The swing-door gave into a butler's pantry, at the moment empty, where another opened into the dining-room and a third to the main hallway. Stacks of dishes in the pantry sink, no less than a clash of cheerful voices in the room adjoining, with Folly's rippling laughter clearly recognizable, told of a dinner party still in progress. The other living-rooms, then, ought to be untenanted. The butler due to pop back from

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the dining-room at any instant, Lanyard passed on to the entrance-hall, and experienced a relief, on finding it deserted, that betrayed an old hand sorely out of practice: the day had been when he could have taken far more desperate chances without a tremor.

Even so, he wasted no gestures. To go the way he meant to go, he had the dining-room door to pass, the risk to run of being seen. He edged to a point whence Folly's back was visible, and the butler, a decent, plodding, British body, taking himself off with an emptied decanter. He disappeared; and the pantry-door was heard to buffet the air. Lanyard waited a minute, then coolly ran—or, rather, stumped—the risk of the open door, trusting, if noticed by any of the diners, to pass as the butler with some business in the front part of the house. To the best of his observation his audacity served: the dinner-party seemed to be finding itself much too amusing to have attention to spare for matters of domestic routine. But one swift glance askance noted that Folly was entertaining only Pagan, Liane Delorme, and Mallison.

So much for Lanyard's solemn sermon on the dangers of questionable associations!

But could one fairly have expected anything better, when Folly had been given, subsequently, every reason to believe she had entertained in that overnight moralist a felon unawares? This, presumably, was her way of consoling herself for having been so shamefully taken in: as gay a partie carrée as heart could wish, figuratively making merry on the very coffin-lid of Folly's most recent bereavement . . .

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Fragments were all Lanyard could garner of the talk, who had no time at all to spare; but what little he did overhear was instructive. Folly, he learned, was firmly declining to be down-hearted: the police had given her every assurance that she would be wearing her emeralds again within a few days at most. Meantime, she knew no lack of objects of bedizenment: the thief in his haste had overlooked a secret cache of treasure in the safe he had used so cavalierly, she had still the McFee pearls and diamonds to don for protection against inclement elements; in witness whereto she was wearing them now. Challenged by Pagan to state what steps, if any, she had taken to safeguard these against the chance that the marauder might return to cancel his oversight, Folly laughed the notion to scorn, but under pressure admitted that she meant to have the combination of the safe changed as soon as she could remember to telephone its maker.

Communications all pitched in a key of the lightest banter. Folly, for example, was pleased to recount the antics of her maiden aunt when it dawned upon her that she had actually slept all through the visit of a burglar: the good woman had forthwith gone into hysterics and had come out of them only to pack herself off (at Folly's expense) to Atlantic City, professing the slender hope that a vacation from this theatre of crime would mend a shattered nervous system. In view of which Folly was disposed to hold the loss of her emeralds a not unmixed affliction. And when Pagan suggested that it might be good business for Folly to put a professional house-breaker on her

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weekly payroll, Liane applauded his wit with a deep-chested laugh.

No more need to wonder how this last had fared after her two drinks of the liquor a single dose of which had been enough to put Lanyard hors de combat. True: Liane might have been innocent of what was intended. But it wasn't easy to give her the benefit of the doubt.

As for Pagan, the pencilled question-mark against his name had been replaced by a cross in indelible ink.

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VIII

FROM a point close by the street door rose a flight of stairs which introduced Lanyard to a floor by every indication devoted wholly to the most intimate uses of Folly. There were two major rooms, a bedchamber at the back of the house and a boudoir overlooking the street, linked by a short hall on which opened a bath-room and capacious clothes-presses, all furnished with an extravagance that bespoke means ample to gratify the wildest whim of even a modern young woman. Folly's wardrobe alone would have given a dozen exacting women of fashion a choice of changes for every hour of the day and have left the first owner still ridiculously over-stocked. And Lanyard, taking cursory yet comprehensive note of the endless detail of luxury that went to make up a sybaritic ensemble, told himself it would be unreasonable to expect the tenant of this suite not to fancy herself much more than merely a little.

His survey, however, had gained him little more than a bare grasp of the general arrangement, when a light patter on the stairs drove him to cover in a retreat whose selection had been his first care: a closet stored with clothing for day-wear exclusively, therefore the least liable to be used by night, and furthermore so situate that its door, left—as Lanyard had found it—half an inch ajar, afforded a direct and wide-angled vista of the boudoir, and also, indirectly,

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by grace of a long mirror in the latter, a more fragmentary view of the bedchamber.

To his taste almost too cosily snuggled into a smother of garments whose subtle fragrance was most demoralizing, he lurked for many minutes, spying—as the mirrow permitted—on the maid whom he had first seen in the street and whose present duty, it transpired, was to turn down the bed-clothes and otherwise make the bedchamber ready to receive its mistress.

The quick, competent creature went about her work with a step so light that even ears trained to abnormal acuteness found it not entirely easy to keep track of her movements; so that, when she made an end and left the bedchamber, the man in hiding wasted several minutes waiting to make sure that he had the floor all to himself again.

Emerging at length, he wasted no more, but turned directly to the focal point of his most immediate interest, that is to say to the safe which had provided the wits of last night's thief with a test so trifling. And, Lanyard reflected, having inspected the thing, no wonder! When, he asked impatiently, would man learn anything from experience and cease to put his trust and his treasures in repositories of such pregnable construction? A pretty, dainty thing, neatly fitted into the base of a period secretary, its door masked by a hinged frame wrought to resemble a tier of drawers, its "combination-lock"—God save the mark!—capable of offering about as much resistance to trained talents as that of a child's bank . . .

Lanyard was proving all this to his own satisfaction,

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and indeed had already solved the combination by bending an ear to the fall of its tumblers, when the telephone rang.

The sharp thrill of the bell sounded in the study downstairs; the extension instrument on the little desk in the boudoir gave only a muffled click.

Lanyard used a silk handkerchief on the face of the safe to smudge out fingerprints, shut the false front, and moved lightly out into the hall, arriving at the rail round the stairway at the moment when the vocational singsong of the butler broke upon the conversation of Folly and her friends:

"Beg pardon, but Mr. Mallison is being wanted on the telephone."

With neither delay nor compunction Lanyard turned back to the boudoir extension, and had its receiver at his ear when Mallison arrived in the study and breathed a melodious "Hello?" to the waiting wire. But when a strange voice answered him, feminine at that, the eavesdropper was taken with a twinge of mixed chagrin and distaste, who had hoped for something worse than this and more illuminating, who had hastily set his heart on gaining instruction from Morphew's pompously measured rumble, and who, finally, knew no delight whatever in the prospect of prying upon some trivial affair of sentiment such as was promised by the cloying affection of this strange woman's salutation: "Is that you, Mally darling?"

Only the striking ambiguity of the reply she got helped Lanyard to overcome an impulse to hang up forthwith.

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"Yes," Mallison pronounced too clearly, too loudly, and in a manner of cold enquiry that carried no conviction whatever—"this is Mr. Mallison speaking. Who wants him?"

"Clever old sweetie!" the unknown applauded with a confidential laugh. "I do hope she can hear you; but I suppose she isn't in the same room if you have to shout like that. Better soft-pedal it a bit, dear, or the little lady may get leary."

To this Mallison replied, again remarkably as to sense, and in accents of unmistakably mortified amazement: "Oh, for Heaven's sake! you don't mean to say it's tonight? I don't see how I could possibly have let anything so important slip my mind . . ."

No less remarkably the woman pursued: "It's all right, then, dearie? I mean, everything is all set for the big bust?"

"Why, of course!" Mallison intoned distinctly, with a dying echo of the emotion which had coloured his last preceding response—"of course I'll be there. But I shall have to go down on my knees and beg Mrs. McFee to forgive me—and I really can't quite forgive myself for being so forgetful."

"Gosh!" the other breathed in awed admiration—"got to hand it to you, kid, you stall so pretty. Well: our friend—*you* know—is getting impatient, so it's up to you to shake a leg. How soon shall I say you'll be ready?"

"Oh, but really! I'm afraid I can hardly make it under half an hour."

"Sure that'll be long enough?" Surprising solici-

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tude seemed to shade the strange voice. "You know, dearie, we wouldn't for worlds crash in too soon, I mean before you get a good chance to do your very best dirty work. 'Cause the blacker the looks of it, the better the pay—and the surer."

"Oh quite!" Mallison cheerily agreed. "But half an hour will do me famously."

"Good enough." A sly chuckle accompanied this commendation. "You're one little fast worker, all right, darling: I only wanted you to take all the time you need to turn out an artistic job. All rightie: I'll set the alarm for thirty minutes from now—the zero hour! And mind you take good care of yourself, dearie. Ta-ta."

With elegance indisputable Mallison returned a musical "Au revoir."

Lanyard waited for the other receiver to refind its hook, then hung up in turn, and took his seething mystification back to the head of the stairs, whence he could overhear the apologies Mallison was offering below.

"Do be charitable, Folly, and make allowances for my weak mind. I simply can not understand how I could have been so great an idiot as to forget I'd promised Mary Ashe—Mrs. Stuyvesant Ashe, you know—I'd join a party she's made up for the Rendezvous tonight—"

"O Mally!" Mrs. McFee lamented—"how perfectly stupid!"

"I know: isn't it? But I promised over a week ago. And anyway, it's partly your fault, getting up this little

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dinner to celebrate your robbery, and making me forget everything else I had on for tonight. . . . Now please don't budge—and I don't need Soames to put me out, either. I know where I left my hat and coat and how to open and shut a front door all by myself."

"You can take my car, Mally, if you'll send it right back," Pagan generously put in. "Liane and I have got to hop along, too, in a brace of shakes. That is, you're welcome to it if you find it waiting. I told Ben to be back around ten."

"Thanks, old soul; but I'll have no trouble picking up a taxi over on Park avenue. Besides, it isn't nearly ten yet."

Pronouncing gracious but hurried good-nights all round, Mallison was heard to pass through the entrance hall, in a more guarded and intimate tone, and a decidedly tender one, remonstrating with his hostess because she had insisted on accompanying him to the door.

"Consider the looks of it, Folly: Liane and Peter will think you've fallen for me at last."

"No fear," Folly returned with uncomplimentary composure: "they know better."

"Besides, anyone would think you didn't trust me . . ."

This rang a note so false as to cause the eyebrows of the secret audience to lift and knit. But Folly's frame of mind was too completely and openly petulant to permit of her being wary and discriminative as well.

"Trust you!" she mocked lightly. "I'd like to know why I should, the way you carry on with women . . .

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Oh! I'm not in the least taken in by this tale about Mrs. Stuyvesant Ashe, you know, I believe that's just bunk to cover up a heavy date with some other misguided female."

"How perfectly flattering!"

"You wouldn't think so if you knew my opinion of the kind of women that fall for you, Mally."

The two moved into Lanyard's field of vision and paused by the door, Mallison buttoning himself into his top-coat and leering down at Folly with a doggish air, the woman maintaining for his benefit a pout that was less than half put on.

"As if you'd care a snap of those lovely fingers if I really were deceiving you!"

"You couldn't." Folly tossed her head. "I'm not quite simpleton enough to believe you mean anything you say to a woman, to any pretty woman, it doesn't matter who—"

"Now you *are* flattering me and no mistake." Mallison clapped on his topper, gave its crown an artful pat that adjusted it at the most killing angle, and managed a still more maddening smirk of complacence. "Believe you do care," he drawled . . .

"I care about having my party spoiled. Now Peter and Liane are going to run, too, and leave me all lonely and lorn."

Mallison laid hold of the knob and opened the door, but put his back to the edge of it and rested so, unaffectedly loath to forego the flirtation at its piquant stage of the present. His smile grew momentarily more personal and meaning; but some of its assurance

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might have been make-believe, considering the nervousness he betrayed in Lanyard's sight (though not in Folly's, since she couldn't see them) by keeping his hands behind him and fiddling with the door-knob. An impudent nod designated the two who had been left in the dining-room.

"I'll come back, if you like . . . after they've blown . . ."

"Mally!" Folly drew back, flushing. "Don't be a silly fool, don't say things like that to make me angry. I oughtn't to overlook—"

Of a sudden Mallison stood away from the door, permitting it to shut itself gently, and caught the woman in his arms. "I mean it," he breathed ardently to Folly's hair, holding her fast in spite of a notable absence of effort to escape. "I'm mad about you, Folly, simply mad about you—and you know it, you wild, sweet witch!"

"I know you're mad now," the witch replied neither wildly nor sweetly. "I may have suspected it before, but this proves it. Please let me go."

"Not a chance," Mallison confidently laughed—"I've got you now where I've been wanting you, God knows how long! Folly dear: I'm simply desperate with love of you. Only say the word—I'll tell Mrs. Ashe where she can go, and be back here inside half an hour, or as soon as I'm sure Peter and Liane have left. Folly! be kind to me—"

"Mally!" The cry was keyed low yet tense with indignation. A sudden squirm broke his embrace. Folly stood back, fending the man off with a firm hand.

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"Don't do that again, I wont have it. . . . How dare you say, or even suggest, such things to me? You know I don't care the least in the world for you. And even if I did . . . But I don't want to be unfair. You've had too much to drink tonight. Do go now, please, go right away, and don't come back till you're ready to beg my pardon."

"Oh!" The iced sincerity of the rebuff wiped away the self-confident smirk and set in its place a scowl of affronted self-esteem. "That's your style, is it, my lady? Virtue on a pedestal! And after the way you've led me on."

Folly held him briefly in a stare of incredulous disdain; her rush of colour slowly ebbing. A slight gesture sketched inability to understand the man, in a voice of reproach and regret she said quietly: "O Mally! how can you be so contemptible?"

The countenance of the dancing man grew darker still, his too-full lips took on an ugly contour beneath their closely-trimmed moustache of the mode. He seemed to contemplate, even with difficulty to refrain from uttering, some embittered and withering retort. Instead, he turned in dumb fury and flung out of the house. Thanks less to his temper and intention than to its automatic air-check the door closed without noise other than the click of its latch. And Folly gave herself a little shake of impatience and reasserted the wonted spirit of her countenance as she ran back to rejoin Pagan and Liane Delorme.

Their three voices were once more busy when Lanyard made his way back to the boudoir telephone and

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took a long chance with it, communicating to the Central operator the number Crane had left with him. But the turn of his luck was such that, though the connection was established all but instantaneously, the masculine voice that answered was not the one he wanted to hear.

No: Mr. Crane wasn't in, and there was no telling when he would be in; maybe in ten minutes, maybe in ten days. But the voice was perfunctorily prepared to take any message that Lanyard might care to leave and see that it got into Crane's hands as soon as he did return, if ever.

"Tell him, please, Mr. Duchemin called him up." It was necessary to spell out that old alias which Crane could hardly have forgotten. "Say my business is urgent—Mr. Crane will understand."

"Want him to call y'up? What's yuh number?"

Without the least hesitation, in a single phrase Lanyard abolished the telephone installation at Folly McFee's: "Say there is no telephone. But give him, if you will be so good, this address." Lanyard detailed the number of the house and street and hung up. He had no fear that Crane would fail to draw an intelligent inference and guide himself by the light thereof. Nevertheless he would have been grateful for some assurance that Crane would get the message in good time. . . .

Back at the head of the stairs, he felt warranted in assuming that his daring with the telephone had not betrayed him. The hum of talk that rose from the diminished dinner party was constant, or punctuated

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only by the laughter with which the two women encouraged Peter Pagan in his efforts to be funny. For all that, Lanyard escaped discovery by the narrowest of squeaks; for he stepped out into the hallway only to find that Mallison had let himself into the house again, and was furtively slinking up the stairs—was even then, indeed, half way up.

Driven back to the refuge of the clothes-press, Lanyard pulled its door into position in the same instant that saw Mallison skulk into the boudoir.

It appeared from this, then, that one had not erred in mistrusting the nervous hands of the dancing man as they had played with the knob—and one might no longer doubt, with the safety-catch as well—what time Mallison had delayed, posing with his back to the door and philandering with Folly.

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IX

NEITHER might he who unsuspected spied, through the crack of a closet-door all but closed, on Mr. Mallison with many a gesture of quiet authority making himself at home in Folly's rooms, seriously question the presence of a practician adept in the grammar of second-storey work. Mallison's footfalls would not have ruffled the repose of an insomniac, the play of his hands was certain yet light as the flutter of butterfly wings; and what he had to do by way of making ready for what he purposed doing, he did with right professional economy of effort.

To begin with, he did nothing at all more than stand still in the middle of the boudoir and study with glances keen, direct and comprehensive what one guessed were surroundings not wholly strange to him. And seeing him thus with his guard down, naked of all his petty social airs and graces and that shining garment of conceit which clothed the man like a woven armour when he was self-conscious, the hidden watcher began to suspect that he might have erred in his first rating, that the Mallison now revealed was worthier to be reckoned with than he had guessed. The Mallison of this minute was nobody's fool, knew what he was about, and—or Lanyard read every surface sign awry—was dangerously capable of proving at need a disconcerting knowledge of how to take care of himself.

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With a muted grunt of gratification in the sum of his survey, the man passed through to the bedchamber, wherein his maneuvres were less readily followed, since the mirror in the boudoir revealed to Lanyard only a narrow segment of the adjoining room. This comprehended, however, the head of Folly's bed, and the small table beside it from whose drawer Mallison removed a pretty trinket of a silver-plated, pearl-handled pistol, extracting its shells, thoughtfully putting them away in one of his waistcoat pockets, and finally replacing the weapon with nice precision where he had found it.

Content, it seemed, thus to have done his bit for preparedness, Mallison sauntered back to the boudoir, stripped off his top-coat, folded it with meticulous care and hid it, together with his hat, on the floor behind a capacious lounge chair.

Then consulting his watch and with a yawn politely shielded registering time to kill, he strolled over to the secretary and stooped to inspect, with a flickering, sly smile, the safe built into its base. The tip of a finger-nail discreetly pried open the blind front, leaving no treacherous trace, but after a show of hesitation the man seemingly decided not to disturb the safe itself, and restored the front to its former position. Private papers, with which the pigeonholes of the secretary were well stocked, next drew his interest, and he was betraying a mean disposition to tamper with them when the chance discovery of a hand-mirror resting face up on Folly's blotting-book diverted Mallison with a temptation which he didn't even try to resist. And he had

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finished disciplining an imperceptibly unruly eyebrow and had begun to practice a killing smile, an artful variation of the infallible gleam-of-teeth suite, when a bell grumbled vigorously in the bowels of the house and was interpreted as a signal for strict attention to business thenceforward.

Mallison went at once to the door to listen, an occupation in which he had the man in the clothes-press at a good disadvantage. The latter none the less contrived to infer from noises in the entrance-hall that Pagan's car had duly reported and that its owner and Liane were saying good-night. Then, as the rumor of their voices failed, Mallison re-crossed the boudoir with swift but silent tread and once more passed from Lanyard's range of vision. The latter, however, recalled having noticed a handsome, painted screen in that corner, and entertained no doubt but that Mallison was making himself small behind it.

To prove this guess well-grounded, Folly herself entered in another moment, and gave every evidence of being unaware of any alien presence as she faltered through the boudoir, casting discontented glances round as if in aimless search of something in the nature of a distraction. Unmistakably disappointed, and thereby the more frankly fretted, she drifted on to her bedchamber, from whose unseen recesses her voice and her maid's were presently to be heard.

What they said was of no moment: their bedtime dialogue of every day, varied only by Folly's decision to stay up a while longer: she wasn't sleepy and had letters to write. So saying, she dismissed the maid

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and sulkily trailed back into the boudoir, bringing a sizable case of tooled leather which held, one surmised, the jewellery she had worn at dinner, and which she proceeded to put away in the safe that deserved its style so little, but only as a matter of habit, demonstrating that all faith in the contraption was dead by not troubling to shut its door and set the lock.

In the pause that ensued, with a sigh of boredom Folly settled down in the chair before her secretary, and Lanyard ventured to widen the crack of the door a fraction.

The woman sat toying with a pen and more than half-turned away from this observer, charmingly posed with all the unconscious grace that was native to the sweetly fashioned body which her négligé, a sheer web of lace threaded with ribbon, made so bare a pretence of covering. A lamp on the secretary turned the tangle of her hair into a living nimbus and edged tenderly a neck and shoulders kissable in the sight of any man. Indeed, Mallison was hardly to be blamed . . .

Without making a sound he stole up behind the woman lost in thought, the fire of his lips on her flesh was the first that she knew of his presence. Crying out in alarm and anger, she started up to find herself in his arms.

"Hush, dear—please!" Mallison entreated, trying to insure her silence by resting fingers lightly upon her lips. "The servants might hear—"

"'Might'!" Folly stormed, jerking her head away ——"they shall!"

If Mallison had counted on such toleration as she

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had shown him by the street door half an hour earlier, his lamentable error was made manifest to him without an instant's grace. Folly fought him like a miniature fury, and to such effect that she was free while her defiance was still an echo in the room—free and swelling her throat with a scream when he plunged upon his knees before her and threw wide arms of suppliance.

"Please, please!" he begged—"don't call for help. I'll do anything you say, promise to be good and go quietly when you choose to send me away—only, don't call your servants. Think what they'd think!"

"What's that to me?" Folly demanded. "What do I care what they think of you?"

"It's you I'm considering," the man protested—"it's what they'd think of you I'm worrying about. You can't imagine they'd give you the benefit of the doubt . . ."

"Benefit of what doubt?"

"Do you suppose they'd believe I ever found my way up here without your invitation?"

"Is a woman always suspected of enticing the man who breaks into her house like a thief? I'll risk that."

"No—for God's sake! wait, listen to me, Folly! I don't deserve to be thrown out, you owe me fairer treatment—"

"I owe you *what?*"

"You're a woman, not a school-girl—you know what you've been doing to me these last few weeks, you know you've driven me half out of my head flirting with me."

"Oh?" Sense of humour reasserted itself in a little laugh. "Why half?"

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"Entirely, then," Mallison sullenly conceded. He got on his feet again, but his attitude remained conciliatory, even though he would persist in seeking to defend himself at her expense. "If it's insanity to love you, then I'm mad enough—but, God's my witness! I'm not altogether to blame. And you know that's true."

"And I'm to understand you stole back here tonight to tell me that?"

"No—but to beg your forgiveness for having acted as I did a while ago. I couldn't leave things as they were between us overnight, I couldn't think of anything but how unfair you were when I lost control of myself for just one little minute and made you see how madly I love you. I had to come back and have it out, explain—arrive at some sort of understanding."

"And you want me to believe you considered these your best overtures?" Folly uttered a cluck of contempt. "Before you go," she pursued, instinctively dragging across her bosom the inadequate protection of the négligé—"you might be good enough to explain how you did manage to sneak up here."

But Mallison merely uttered a sibilant *"Hush!"* and lifted a hand of warning.

Below, the grumble of the door-bell sounded with an accent imperative.

"What do you suppose that means?" the dancing man demanded in a whisper of apprehension.

"Somebody at the front door . . . How should I know?" The noise was repeated. A glint of distrust kindled in the woman's eyes. "What's the matter, Mally? Expecting somebody?"

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"Nonsense. What a question! Who should I be expecting?"

"How do I know?"

"I was only startled . . ."

"Yes," Folly affirmed with tightened lips: "I noticed that."

A sudden confusion arose in the lower hallway, several people giving tongue all at once: evidently whoever it was that had answered the door had been instantly made the target of a storm of questions.

Folly's face showed a stamp of deepened misgivings and suspicion. "What on earth—!" she murmured.

Upon these words Mallison closed in on her again and made her captive in a tight embrace.

"What does it matter?" he insisted. "Stupid people bothering Soames: what do they matter to you and me? Folly, I love you, I'm mad—"

She was fighting wildly but impotently now, kicking, pommeling with fists that did no hurt, biting at the hand that closed her mouth. Downstairs the clamour rose to a higher pitch of angry disputation. Boldly Lanyard stepped out of concealment.

Neither Folly nor Mallison saw him till he caught the dancing man from behind, with calculated brutality broke the clasp of his arms round the woman's body, and sent him spinning and stumbling across the room to bring up against the further wall with a crash that started his eyes in their orbits.

The disturbance below by this time had attained the proportions of a small riot. There were scuffling feet on the stairs. Nearer at hand Folly was screaming.

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To this Mallison added the snarl with which, recovering, he took the offensive in turn, launching himself at his assailant's throat in murderous fury. Unhappily enough for him, Lanyard had wanted nothing better. They closed, grappled, for a breath swayed as one. Then Mallison felt one of his arms being irresistibly wrenched out of its socket, and to such exquisite torture yielded, perforce turning his back to Lanyard, who held him so another instant, then without warning released him.

With the racket of argument, physical and vocal, now loud upon the very landing outside, Lanyard dared not be merciful or give Mallison any fighting chance. As the man whirled round to launch a new onslaught, Lanyard's fist carried every ounce of his weight and all his ill-will to the other's jaw. Lifted bodily by that terrific blow, Mallison crashed back across an occasional table, sweeping off and extinguishing a lamp, and collapsed, insensible, on the floor.

Simultaneously the door flung open and four people broke into the boudoir, a struggling knot that instantly resolved itself into its elements; the McFee butler, with coat half torn from his back, two strange men, one of rough-and-ready appearance, the other a type slightly more genteel, and a woman, a garish blonde of the synthetic school, with her hat over one ear.

The shaded light on the secretary alone remained to lend these several actors visibility. Lanyard stood squarely in front of it, his figure, to eyes new from the stronger illumination of the hall, hardly better than a silhouette. Folly, well out of harm's way on his one

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hand, was less kindly shadowed, in view of the extreme candour of her déshabillé; Mallison, on the other, was screened from the invaders by the drop-leaf of the table behind which he had gone down.

Thus chance set the stage and lighted it for a twist in the action of the piece unforseen even by its first player and collaborating dramatist. For the bottle-made blonde with hat askew needed only a glimpse of that tall, slender, and well-poised shape, bulking black against the glow, to hurl herself across the room, fall weeping upon Lanyard's bosom, and strain him passionately to the agitated abundance of her own.

"My husband!" she cried—"my husband! O Harry! how could you?"

And Lanyard suffered her.

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X

HE was in no hurry, the truth would all too soon be her bitter medicine; if meantime to rest on him the burthen of her wrongs were any comfort to the lady, she was welcome. Still, he inclined to think it lamentable that he didn't know her well enough to reason with her in a friendly way about her taste in scent for the hair. Chivalry he reckoned a fine gesture but a bit dear at the cost of asphyxiation.

For all that, the longer this unhappy creature continued blind to her blunder, the better for Folly—for Michael Lanyard, too. He was far from enjoying any sort of confidence that the next blind turn of events would prosper his meddlesome hand; he was constrained by circumstance to count more heavily than he relished on the resilience of Folly's wits and their readiness to read his heart in respect of herself and play up to the cues which he must somehow manage to give her.

An anxious sidelong glance caught Folly thunderstruck and gaping, with eyes astart doubting their own dependability. The last man she had ever thought to see again, with his consent, and particularly beneath that roof, the alleged larcener of her emeralds last night, tonight figuring spontaneously in the dual rôle of knight errant and spouse recreant!

He saw her so, and knew very well it could hardly

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tend but to make her bewilderment the thicker, yet an irrepressible devil of ribaldry in Lanyard prompted him to wag his head at Folly and make a comic mouth over the fair false limpet that had fastened to his bosom. Not a little to his surprise, more to his encouragement, a gleam of lively appreciation broke through the clouds of Folly's bemusement. But the limpet chose the selfsame moment to prove her protean versatility by shifting all at once into the guise of a shrew, thus rendering infeasible any further attempt to impart his mind to Folly through the medium of the eloquent eye.

Abruptly and with a clever effect of casting Lanyard off by main strength, the strange woman struck a florid pose with arm levelled and eyes ablaze.

"There!" she rasped—and Lanyard wondered could this possibly be the voice that had so lately cooed endearments by telephone—"there he is, gentlemen! there stands my husband, the dirty hound that leaves me to cry my heart out at home while he steps out with fast society dames, like that shameless, half-naked hussy there!"

The quivering index of denunciation picked out the shrinking shape of Folly in her informal attire, and the self-appointed censor paused to let this characterization bite deep. But when she offered to resume she half-choked instead because an unpresaged glare of ceiling lights, thoughtfully switched on by Soames, revealed to her not the hang-dog mask of Mallison but an utterly strange countenance whose graciousness was shaded by a problematical smile.

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A brief seizure of speechlessness was shared by the woman's companions, and utilized by Lanyard to note the more salient features of the others, individually, against the chance of future need. There was no foretelling when some flash of temper might not precipitate a free-for-all of outcome highly dubious; it might be useful to be able to identify these precious impostors should ill-luck throw one in with them another time. Commonplace scamps he accounted them every one. Contempt for Morphew mounted; a scoundrel of really respectable calibre would have known better than to employ such cheap tools for even a simple job of villainy.

The woman was, or had been, a comely wench; but the strong light wasn't kind to her complexion, to such of it, that is, as she hadn't scrubbed off on Lanyard's waistcoat. Her skin roughed up through its thick wash of whiting and smears of carmine, skillfully painted contours failed to amend the viciousness of thin lips that dragged in their corners, more than belladonna and mascaro would be needed to restore the pristine charm of eyes grown hard with looking too long upon life stripped of all loveliness.

And the men seemed her well-suited associates: one, a thickset body whose eyes of a brute went forbiddingly with an undershot jaw, the other a figure of saturnine cast and seedy gentility set off by a cutaway coat and a standing collar slightly soiled.

Recognizing in neither of these a personality to call for the waste of two consecutive thoughts, Lanyard returned his attention to the woman, who recoiled a step

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instinctively, as if afraid he meant to lay hold of her. "What!" she squawked in throaty disgust—"you ain't my husband!"

"Madame"—Lanyard did her a grave bow—"the misfortune is mutual."

"But where is he? Where's my husband?"

"Madame has mislaid one?"

The mock told, with a slack jaw and befogged eyes the woman fell back another pace. "I guess," she stammered, "there's some mistake . . ."

"The conjecture does madame's intelligence vast credit."

"It's Mr. Mallison she's after, sir." The butler Soames, schooled to view without any amazement the vagaries of a mad world of masters, and sensibly putting aside the immomentuous issue of his inability to account for Lanyard, addressed himself to this last as to his one intellectual peer of the time being. "They would 'ave it 'e was upstairs 'ere with Mrs. McFee, sir, and forced their way up in spite of all I could do."

"I quite understand, Soames—Mrs. McFee, too, I'm sure. You do understand, don't you, Mrs. McFee, this is no fault of Soames'?"

Folly shook herself together and vigorously nodded; but Lanyard coolly forestalled whatever words they were that troubled her lips.

"Mr. Mallison is no doubt madame's husband?" he challenged the blonde female. "She had some reason to think she would find him here?"

"Just a minute, Grace." The rusty genteel half of her supporting company, now that he pushed himself

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forward, proved to possess a rather formidable manner, at once truculent and crafty. "Let me speak for you—"

"You have that right?" Lanyard with pointed civility enquired.

"I've been retained by Mrs. Mallison . . ." The fellow fished a passée professional card from a pocket and thrust it under Lanyard's nose. "I represent her in this case."

"Interesting—but perhaps irrelevant—*if* true. I mean to say"—Lanyard brushed the card aside, but not before his eye had caught the name *Hobart G. Howlin* in engraved script followed by the designation *Attorney-at-law;* and all at once he became as ugly as he had theretofore been bland—"what of it?"

"We were led to believe Mr. Mallison was here—"

"You call yourself a lawyer and pretend that gave you any right to violate the privacy of this household?"

"It sometimes becomes necessary for a wronged wife to take the law into her own hands."

"Mrs. Mallison has been wronged, then? How sad."

"Mrs. Mallison," her counsel persisted, but with shaken bravado—"happens to know her husband has been spending too much of his time of late in the society of Mrs. McFee."

"In brief: you have had the effrontery to force your way into a private residence in the hope of securing evidence for divorce proceedings?"

"You've got the idea."

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"O insolent!" Folly flamed.

It was now again necessary for Lanyard firmly to put down interference, lest his diplomacy fail. "By your leave, Folly: permit me to deal with these gentry. Their account of themselves is much too ingenious to lose. If we let them rattle on—who knows?—we may learn something to their disadvantage."

At this the rogue of ruder mien concluded that he, for one, had had enough. "Come on," he mumbled, plucking at Howlin's sleeve: "le's get out o' this."

"Not so fast. You entered by force; you will leave in the good pleasure of Mrs. McFee. And then Mr. Mallison will go with you."

"What's that?" the lawyer demanded. "Mallison's *here?*"

"We have no wish to deceive you."

"But where?" the slighted wife shrilly objected. "I don't see him . . ."

"How little married folk ever know each other! The dear lad's so high-strung, when he heard you on the stairs he swooned away. Half a minute . . ."

Lanyard stepped behind the table to find Mallison in the first throes of coming to. An unceremonious hand twisted in his collar helped him find his feet. He swayed on them, glaring groggily round that ring of faces whose lips framed confounded murmurs, while Lanyard nodded politely to the confessed wife: "Permit me, Mrs. Mallison: your husband." More brusquely he added: "Now Soames: if you think you could find a policeman . . ."

The butler saluted this suggestion with unbegrudged

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