

Dr. Paul McKim

BY

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DR. PAUL, MCKIM

FRONTISPIECE

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CHAPTER I

THE TRAMP

WHACK! Whack! and two sharp raps of the park policeman's locust stick, upon his upturned soles, brought to his feet with a bound the uncouth wretch who had been comfortably sleeping upon the forbidden bench in Central Park.

His beard fairly bristled as he first looked savagely at the officer and then about, as though to see if anyone else was near. Accustomed as the officer was to a resentment of his usual dose to tramps who pitched their tents upon the park benches, he recoiled at the threatening attitude of the strong, fierce individual confronting him.

Suddenly the man's face changed from the savage to the servile. He removed his greasy cap, and, bowing to the officer, said:

"I beg your pardon; I guess you are carrying out orders, Captain, but at first I thought I had surely stepped on a live wire. Is there any place in New York where a poor, homeless devil like myself can take a nap without paying Waldorf prices?"

"You can't sleep on these park benches, that's certain," declared the minion of the law, "and I want to see how lively you can sprint across the green. Git!" and he began shoving the rough man towards the driveway.

Again the man's beard bristled, and he looked furtively about. Evidently the officer suspected what was in the fellow's mind, for he menacingly raised his club as though to strike him.

Instead, however, of appearing frightened, the tramp came so close to the officer that he could not make free use of his stick, did he so intend. There was no misunderstanding the present attitude of the tramp; he would resent the use of the stick, and the police officer hesitated.

The tramp had stopped. Remaining close at the officer's side he looked boldly into his face and said:

"Don't put your hands on me again unless I am under arrest. I know your duties as well as you yourself know them; you may arrest me, but you cannot assault me. You chaps are too damned free with your clubs. It is not your right nor have you the authority to try and execute your victims on the spot."

The tone and manner in which this was put caused the officer to stop and stare. No such impudent self-assertion, on the part of anyone, had ever before insulted his ear, therefore, he wanted to look at the thing before he killed it. That he was justified in killing the reptile seemed perfectly plain. This vagabond had dared to insult the cloth, and was he not the keeper of the cloth? More than once he had sent men to the emergency hospital for a less offense; should he falter now in that duty which upheld the dignity of the law? Yet, somehow, a streak of yellow welled up, as he looked into the determined face before him. The law was only po-

tent when backed by overwhelming force. This mendicant looked strong and resourceful, and, notwithstanding he was armed with the civilizing club and pistol, for once the doughty minion of the law felt that outraged humanity might turn and rend the overzealous cloth did he attempt to club respect for the law into this worthless carcass. He considered all tramps as dead and useless things.

A tragedy might have occurred had not an unexpected interruption interfered.

They were standing on the border of a secluded drive along which there was little travel, and it so happened that, at the very point where a clash seemed most imminent, a handsome and imposing victoria stopped. Within, and comfortably ensconced among the cushions and rich upholstering, were a large, stately dame, of uncertain age, and a beautiful, fluffy creature apparently about twenty years old.

The elderly lady beckoned pompously to the officer, who seemed perfectly willing to have his attention drawn from his puzzling charge, and, with a slight hesitation about leaving the tramp, he stepped to the side of the vehicle. The tramy individual betrayed no disposition to run away, but stood with face so averted that the occupants of the carriage could not get a perfect view of his features.

The lady drew from her reticule a small silver case from which she took a square card bearing a legend printed in bold type, at the same time showing to the officer a silver badge.

The master of the greensward of Central Park knew what to expect, and he knew, too, from past

experience, that it was incumbent upon him to show unusual deference to this important personage.

"Is the man under arrest?" asked the lady.

"No, ma'am," answered the officer, "I ordered him to move on, and he was giving me impudence as you came up, and I think I ought to run him in."

"Well, I'm inclined to think, in a secluded spot like this, you might relax your vigilance a bit. There is such a thing as pressing a discretionary duty too far. The parks are the only places where the poor can come and rest in seclusion. There are certain secluded parts where even a tramp should not seem offensive, so long as he indulges in no positive violation of the law."

"I only carry out orders, ma'am," broke in the officer. "We have been much troubled with tramps recently; they literally swarm in the park, to frighten the maids and the children."

"Yes, I dare say you have many complaints from the maids," sarcastically responded the lady, "but the parks are not for the exclusive use of maids and children. It is not reasonable to believe that persons would deliberately come to the parks to molest others, with the certainty of arrest before them, and, unless they actually commit an unprovoked offense, they should not be driven out. I would not be surprised to learn that, if the truth were known, poor, shabbily dressed frequenters of the parks have their own trials with thoughtless children and their careless maids. This man does not look vicious; let me speak with him."

The tramp was evidently puzzled over the situation, for he stood, sullenly kicking at a tuft of sod,

as though inclined to take some action. At a gruff command from the officer he threw up his head in a manner to intimate he did not relish his presumption, but he stepped forward, and, with cap in hand, stood, shamefaced, before the occupants of the victoria.

Before anything could be said by the distinguished-looking woman the man seemed to recover his self-composure. Straightening himself to his full six feet, he turned upon the police officer and said, in the dignified voice of one himself accustomed to giving commands:

"Officer, if I am under arrest, do your duty; if I am not, then I desire to go on my way," and he started to turn away.

The policeman, who was brave in the presence of others, replied:

"I have not placed you under arrest, but I will if you show any impudence here," and he gave an emphatic twirl to his club.

The woman could not help noticing the fierce superiority of the suspect over the dull animal of the law, nevertheless, she had a purpose and would not be daunted. She now spoke to the bristling vagabond, and noted the quick relaxation of his spirit in deference to her sex, and, doubtless, to the manifest high estate which her appearance proclaimed.

There was a secret exultation in her heart that this poor unfortunate betrayed by his manner that, at some former period in his life, he had known the ways of the genteel, therefore he was capable of understanding the signs of her own eminent respectability and importance.

"I am an officer of the Saving Society," she said, "and, as such, I have the authority to order your arrest. It is my first duty to assist you, and save you the humiliation and hardship of arrest and prosecution, if you will gracefully yield to my advice. My man Edgerton here is an arresting officer. Now, will you accompany him to the office of the Saving Society without protest and make no effort to escape if I promise you that no injustice shall be done you?"

"There is no other alternative, madam," said the suspect. "I am at your service, and will accompany your man."

"Your man" was said with such apparent sarcasm that the man on the box actually shook with silent laughter at the discomfiture of his fellow servant, Edgerton, who was now standing by the carriage door awaiting orders.

Turning to the officer the lady said: "I will now assume responsibility for this man. Edgerton will take him direct to my office. As he is not under arrest you will need no receipt." With this she drove away.

The trampy individual had received lasting impressions while standing by the carriage. One was the utter disregard for plain and simple justice on the part of the instruments of the law; but the other was of an entirely different nature. While he stood there, a helpless victim, although charged with no crime, he was all the while conscious of the fact that a beautiful face, with great sympathetic eyes, was contemplating him with deeper concern than any of the others present. Within his mind he had

quickly established an estimate of each which could not soon be altered. The police officer, with his profound belief that he, himself, was the law, he despised. The elderly lady, so thoroughly imbued with belief in her own importance as a philanthropist and a more than average personage, inspired him with a respectful tolerance, slightly tinged with pity. But the young lady—that was a different matter. There was nothing fictitious or artificial about her. She was genuine, betraying upon her frank, innocent face the hearty sympathy which she felt.

In her eagerness she patted the elderly lady's arm encouragingly, as though she were afraid that, after all, the policeman would carry out his threat and arrest the poor fellow. Evident satisfaction with the outcome was portrayed upon her beautiful face as the victoria was driven away. Tramp though he was in appearance, there was engendered in his heart a feeling for this young woman beyond description, which later flamed into a passion which would have conquered worlds for her.

A smile lurked about his mouth as he turned to the bewildered officer, and, bowing profoundly, thanked him for his courtesy. In his confusion the policeman actually raised his hat to them as they walked away.

Edgerton was fidgety and uncomfortable. He did not like the job of playing policeman anyway. In a few minutes he found himself wholly under control of the gentleman tramp, answering questions which were put to him as from a rapid-fire gun. To save his life he could not help it, he afterwards said.

The man had a flow and command of language,

and an air of good breeding, which the well-trained servant could not fail to recognize and respect. The quick, keen eyes; the dignified bearing and perfect self-control all bespoke a person of exceptional accomplishments, and the rough face, tattered garments, and other intimations of dire poverty were wholly submerged and lost sight of when Edgerton listened to his vivacious conversation. By the time they had reached Fifty-eighth Street and Fifth Avenue Mr. Tramp could have commanded Edgerton to tie his shoe-laces without fear of refusal, notwithstanding he was a sworn officer of the law and practically had the man under arrest.

Not far from the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-eighth Street stood a pretentious mansion of red sandstone, with massive balustrades on either side of the artistically carved steps. It was the home of some wealthy person.

At one side of the capacious building was a high wrought-iron fence with a wicket gate. Through this gate Edgerton led his now apparently willing prisoner, noting, however, with some alarm, that the man was making a careful mental survey of his surroundings. "A burglar by profession, no doubt," thought he. He had never approved of the habit his mistress had of bringing these vagabonds here, and was always prophesying that, sooner or later, it would cause serious trouble. In fact, he could not endorse the Saving Society from any point of view, notwithstanding the eminent respectability of its founders, for more than once had it fallen to his lot to do most disagreeable things as an emergency officer of the society. He was not, physically, a

strong man, neither was he brave; therefore, when he was called upon to perform the duties of a police officer he could never tell just which would cut and run first, his prisoner or himself. The man he was now bringing in seemed perfectly at ease, and for this very reason he suspected treachery.

They passed through the small iron wicket and the long passage by the building, emerging into quite a large inner court, in the rear of which was a square, two-story brick building. It was separated from the main building by a high iron fence, well spiked at the top. The first floor was a plain reception room. In the side next the house was a revolving door, such as are used in entrances to public buildings. At the rear of the room was a door, standing open, but protected by a strong iron grating, through which could be seen an approach from the rear.

In one corner an iron stairway, encased in a strong wire netting, gave access to the second floor. Toward this stair Edgerton now directed his charge. For a moment the prisoner hesitated; Edgerton felt trembly, foreseeing trouble. It did look suspicious, but apparently the man decided to take the risk without protest, for he stepped forward and preceded his keeper up the stairway. As he stepped into the upper room there was a sharp click, the door behind him closed, and he was truly a prisoner.

The room was divided into two parts, the side which he entered being a strong wire cage. On the other side a flat-top desk was placed against the wire screen so that a person sitting at it might interrogate another, facing him on the opposite side

of the screen. By a simple pressure of the foot a revolving screen, evidently of some protecting material, could be instantly passed between the two, and a shielded exit formed, allowing escape into a passage leading to the larger house. The most suspicious looking thing in this room was a mysterious cabinet having curious slits and openings in its side, intimating some secret purpose, the operations of which were directed from the inside. It afterwards proved to be the business end of a photographic outfit. The prisoner had not much time to contemplate his surroundings before a door leading into the passage opened, and a clerky looking woman of fifty, but with all the vitality and strength of thirty, having the appearance of a matron of some public institution of correction, made her appearance. There was no intimation of surprise or curiosity, nor a single line of sympathy in her cold, hard face. Every move she made indicated purpose, and full understanding of what she was expected to do. Merely glancing at the prisoner, she proceeded in a mechanical way to arrange the desk for business. It looked like clearing the deck of a warship for action.

The now thoroughly interested prisoner watched her movements, trying to anticipate just the meaning of each and every act. He was conscious of the fact that, though she pretended to be wholly indifferent to his presence, her shifting eyes were carefully watching him.

Recognizing that she was the secretary of whoever was to interview him, he at once decided to assume the air of indifference with which he intended

treating the whole matter, even though it should weaken his case. A chair stood facing the desk on his side, evidently intended for his occupancy during the examination. He leaned his arms across its top and coolly watched the secretary's movements. This attitude seemed to arouse the ire of the woman, for she paused, and looking maliciously at him, said:

"You look at home in a cage."

"You look equally charming behind bars," retorted the man.

Her eyes fairly snapped as she surveyed the impudent fellow who had the temerity to thus insult a person of her exalted position. Finding she could not bore holes through him with her penetrating gaze, she viciously slapped things about on the table to vent her spleen while awaiting the chief of the Saving Society. That personage proved to be the lady who had interested herself in the case of this outcast, Mrs. Von Comp, the president of the Society.

She entered the room from the passage leading from her grand residence, and as she swished her immense silken skirts through the door, the prisoner felt that he was about to confront a queen, who was all powerful in this, her own little court.

As Mrs. Von Comp paused at the entrance to take a first survey of her prisoner at long range, the prejudiced secretary said, quite audibly—"stubborn and insolent."

Mr. Tramp decided that the quickest way to put this heartless creature in bad repute was to prove, by his own actions, that she had grossly slandered

him. Removing his cap he bowed gravely to the president. "Take the chair," she said, and she motioned toward the chair on his side of the screen.

"After you, Madam," said the prisoner, with dignity.

Mrs. Von Comp did not conceal her surprise at the Chesterfieldian politeness of the uncouth man. Seating herself at her desk she said, quite gently: "You have seen better days." The man only bowed his head in response.

"You are an intellectual man, therefore I will waste no words in your case," she said, as she motioned for her secretary to prepare for her duties.

The secretary having seated herself, with pencil and notebook in hand, Mrs. Von Comp continued:

"I will explain, briefly, the nature of this institution and the authority for my having practically put you under arrest, for you are at this time a prisoner in the hands of the law. Should I deem it necessary, I could, by the touch of this button, call a van from the nearest police station and hand you over to the authorities, together with my report, and unless some unusual thing occurred to prevent it, to-morrow morning you would take your place among a score of other unfortunates with the certainty of a term on Blackwell's Island."

"Madam, if you will pardon me for interrupting you, and will take what I say in the right spirit, I should like to remark that, up to the present time what you have done in my case is wholly illegal, and were I so inclined I could hold you legally responsible for personal damages. There are circumstances, too, in my case which could make the mat-

ter of my detention a very embarrassing thing to you. But I hasten to assure you that it is not my intention to do anything which may cause you trouble or inconvenience, unless some gross injustice is done me." With this the prisoner intimated that he had had his say.

"You are quite correct," said the president of the Saving Society. "This part of our proceedings in your case is illegal. We assume the responsibility for errors we may make, but we have yet to experience the embarrassment of a complaint against us, and when I explain to you the purpose and work of this society you will understand there is little likelihood of our ever having serious trouble.

"The purpose of the Society is to step in between the law and those who seem to be victims of misfortune and ill circumstances, with whom the law alone can deal in the absence of aid from others. A person who is without means of support must become a beggar, vagabond or criminal, either of which is a menace to society and a burden upon the community which must be removed as quietly as possible, in order not to offend the public sight. Such persons have lost their rights as citizens, and are the charges either of charity or the law. If charity does not assume the burden there is no other alternative, the law must do its duty.

"Yours is a typical case. This Society is a sort of way station between an unlawful freedom and an unlawful imprisonment, therefore it, too, is necessarily unlawful, having, nevertheless, the endorsement of candid public opinion and the protection of the machinery of the law.

"What we do seldom reaches the public, because our institution is a close corporation, being composed of less than a dozen persons, and is self-sustaining, in the sense that the members alone assume all financial obligations, neither asking nor accepting contributions or aid from others.

"The embarrassment and hardship of arrest and court proceedings are often extremely cruel and unjust to those who, through stress of adverse circumstances, must in this unpleasant manner prove to the often overzealous police authorities that they are not a menace to society. This way-station has saved many and put them again in the right way.

"We usually question those who are given the benefit of this aid, in order to determine to what extent we can be of help to them, and to know if they are worthy of our ready assistance. I will now ask you these questions, and you may refuse to answer any which may incriminate, disgrace, or in any manner be injurious to you."

"What is your name?"

"Peter Kelly."

"Where do you live?"

"Put it homeless."

"What is your occupation?"

"I have no occupation at present."

"Have you a profession or trade?"

"I am a chemist by profession."

"Would you practice your profession if you could find employment?"

"Yes."

"What is your nationality?"

"I am an Englishman."

"Where did you last reside and practice your profession?"

"I cannot answer the question without embarrassment."

"How long have you resided in this country?"

"I prefer not to answer."

"Is there no one to whom you could apply for assistance?"

"None to whom I should care to apply."

"Would you accept financial aid from this Society and act in good faith with it, should we decide to assist you in finding employment?"

"If I accept aid from you I should feel compelled to do my utmost to repay it. Every vagabond is not a thief."

"That is very well said," commented the head of the Saving Society.

The overzealous private secretary presented the sheet containing the questions and answers. Mrs. Von Comp scrutinized them for a few minutes, at the same time seeming to be pondering the question as to what course to pursue in this case. Finally she laid the sheet upon the table and said:

"Mr. Kelly, you seem to be a strong, intelligent man well able to earn a living, therefore it seems strange that you are out of employment; on the other hand, while you are rough, and in appearance a homeless vagabond, you do not look vicious or dissipated. In view of this I am going to assume the risk of helping you to regain your respectability and a position which may make you useful to society instead of a burden upon it. I am going to give you one hundred dollars to enable you to provide your-

self with proper clothing and make yourself presentable to apply for a position with several houses to which I will give you letters. You need not fear that this will intimate to these people that you are a protégé of this Society; I shall protect you against that humiliation. As far as you know, I am putting you wholly on your honor, but I would not advise you to attempt to impose upon this Society or abuse its generosity.

"You must report to me here within three days." With this she pushed through the slit in the wire partition a receipt to which the man affixed the signature, "Peter Kelly." In the meantime the secretary had placed in an envelope the money; this, too, was given to him. He looked at the money, counting it, to the disgust and surprise of the disappointed secretary, and said:

"Madam, I feel more grateful for this unexpected generosity than I can express, but if it binds me to return here I cannot accept it. If you will allow me to accept it with the proviso that I shall either return it or appear here in person within three days, then I will feel most grateful. In either event you may feel certain your interest in my case is not wasted."

"Very well," replied Mrs. Von Comp, "I will trust to your honor."

At this moment there appeared in the door of the passageway the same vision of loveliness that had transfixed the vagabond in the park. Her great, innocent eyes looked at him now with the same solicitous interest as then, but the conditions seemed different. The wire grating seemed like prison

bars, and he felt like a real criminal. Loth to go at once and lose sight, perhaps forever, of the beautiful face so full of real sympathy, he hesitated as though awaiting some further word from Mrs. Von Comp, all the while half concealing his face. This did not prevent the young lady from scrutinizing his features closely.

"The way is open, you may go now," said Mrs. Von Comp, and she arose and turned toward the young lady.

As the tramp reached the door through which he had entered the place he turned to get one more respectful look at the sweet face which now gave him much more concern than the money which he held in his hand. He received two frightful stabs for his temerity, one from the gentle eyes of the fair maid, and a scornful look from those of the grumpy old secretary. Both left lasting impressions. He felt he could hate the one as ardently as he could love the other.

Passing out through the wicket in the tall iron fence he stood for a moment, looking at the money which he had crumpled in his hand, apparently undecided what to do. Soon recovering his wits, however, he looked cautiously about, feeling certain that someone was watching his every movement. With a few quick and comprehensive glances he fixed the surroundings so he could fully locate the place in future, then started rapidly towards Sixth Avenue, on which thoroughfare he soon disappeared.

At the corner of Sixth Avenue stood a man with a hot tamale outfit, his ever musical "hot! va-r-r-y hot!" causing the passers-by to smile amusedly, as

they always do at the hot tamale vendor. Into this Arab of the Tenderloin the hurrying tramp bumped, almost upsetting his whole outfit. He did not wait to resent the uncomplimentary epithets the seller of small meats hurled at him, but hurried on as though anxious to quickly lose himself in the crowd.

Had anyone been sufficiently interested to have watched the tamale man, they would have seen him quickly dive into a basement, soon reappear minus his outfit, and go tearing down the avenue close on the heels of the fleeing tramp.

Two hours later Mrs. Von Comp was again called into the office of the Saving Society to hear the report of Edgerton, who in the guise of a hot tamale man had shadowed the tramp upon his leaving the house on Fifty-eighth Street.

"The man went to Sixth Avenue, almost knocking me over in his haste. He stopped for a moment as though looking for someone to follow him, then he walked rapidly down the avenue to Thirty-eighth Street, where he again stopped and pretended to look into the show-window of a pawnshop. He then crossed to the corner of Sixth Avenue and Thirty-seventh Street, went into the bakery, and bought some rolls, and small cakes, and was eating them as he came out of the door."

"Poor fellow," exclaimed Mrs. Von Comp, "he was doubtless very hungry. I really forgot to ask him if he needed food."

Edgerton continuing his report, said: "After coming out of the bakery he walked very fast to Thirty-sixth Street, west of Broadway, and suddenly disappeared in a doorway, and to save my

life I could not tell whether he entered the little news stand or the shoe store.

"I waited for twenty minutes, and not a soul came out of or went into either place. I then went cautiously to the front of the shoe store and while pretending to examine the samples in the window, I obtained a full view of the interior. Only an old man and a young girl were visible, and there seemed to be no other exit.

"While I stood there, undecided what to do, a man came out of the small room occupied by a second-hand bookstore and news stand. He wore a long, black frock coat, a soft, black hat and carried his left arm in a sling made of a black silk handkerchief.

"This man had a blond beard, and there was something so familiar about his walk I could not help believing it was the tramp in disguise, and I followed him. As he came out of the place he saw me standing near the door and actually laughed at me. Quickly walking to the corner of Thirty-sixth and Broadway he jumped into a cab and was driven away at top speed. I thought I had lost him, but fortunately a second cab stopped at the curb at that very moment. Shouting to the cabman that it was double fare if he kept the other in sight without it being discovered that we were following, we dashed after it.

"The cab drove to a brownstone house on Fifth Avenue between Thirty-eighth and Thirty-ninth Streets, where the man alighted, paid his fare and discharged his cab. As we passed I saw him insert a key and open the door himself.

"At the next corner I discharged my cab and walked back past the house, and found it to be No. —, but there was no name plate on the door."

"Then you do not know positively it was the tramp you followed?" said Mrs. Von Comp.

"No, but I think it was, ma'am," replied Edgerton.

"Well, we have lost him anyway. We shall wait to see what happens during the next few days before we attempt to apprehend him," and Mrs. Von Comp examined critically some photographs lying upon the table in front of her. Handing one to Edgerton she said: "Keep that in your pocket; it will help to identify him should you see him again." On the margin was the note, "Apprehended in Central Park ——. Released——. No.——."

Three days later Mrs. Von Comp entered the office of the Saving Society and opened the letters awaiting her perusal—she permitted no one but herself to open and read these letters, in order that she could properly censor the secrets of the society. There was no letter or word of any kind from Mr. Peter Kelly, tramp, and Mrs. Von Comp was having a spirited discussion with her secretary regarding the propriety of thus trusting unknown persons who looked like criminals. "I shall use my own judgment in these matters, Miss McBirney," said Mrs. Von Comp.

"What is all the excitement about, mother?" spoke a sweet voice at the president's elbow.

Eudora Von Comp had quietly entered the room

at the moment of her mother's remark to the secretary. She was deeply interested in this charitable work, and often proved of great assistance in aiding her mother to ravel many of the curious snarls in which she found herself entangled in the performance of her arduous duties as head of the Saving Society.

Eudora was especially interested in the case of Peter Kelly. From the time he was first seen, a ragged vagabond in the park, she seemed eager to know all about his case.

"Your prediction has not come true, Eudora," said Mrs. Von Comp. "You said we would not lose the money, but we have. What on earth did you see in this man to cause you to believe he could be trusted? He was like a hundred others you have seen here."

"Yes, mother, he did look like the others, but he was not like them," responded Eudora. "I looked him over very carefully. His hair was perfectly clean and well kept; his teeth were perfect; his nails were manicured, and, if you had noticed carefully, you would have observed his truly noble brow. He had splendid eyes, fearless and highly intelligent, and his hands showed no indications of hard work. In fact, he was an unusual tramp, only made to appear uncouth by his rough clothing."

"Why, Eudora, your deductions are marvelous," exclaimed Mrs. Von Comp.

"I have not finished," said Eudora, and she continued: "If the man were a criminal he would not thus court being arrested as a tramp, therefore, he must be adopting the disguise of a vagabond for

some purpose. The fact of his having failed to return the money is not final in my mind."

"Well, it is truly puzzling, and I shall not attempt to solve the riddle," said Mrs. Von Comp. Turning to the secretary she said: "Bring me the photographic negatives and all of the pictures made from them."

"Here are the pictures, ma'am, but the negatives dropped in some acid and were spoiled," replied the secretary.

"Bring the spoiled plates," demanded Mrs. Von Comp.

"Thinking they were useless I sent them out in the waste," said the secretary, in much confusion.

Mrs. Von Comp's face betrayed her vexation as she wheeled her chair about to face the secretary.

"This is the second time you have told me that you spoiled the negatives of photographs taken here," she exclaimed, angrily. "Here is the first set which you claimed to have spoiled," and she unlocked a drawer and drew therefrom a small package. "There is not a mark on them. I want you to explain this matter."

The secretary at first seemed much surprised, but soon recovered her self-composure and haughtily replied: "I do not see why I should be called upon to explain every little accident that occurs here, I prefer to hand you my resignation."

A buzzer was heard in the room below. In a moment Edgerton appeared.

"Place this woman in the cage," the president ordered, pointing at the secretary.

A look of consternation came to Edgerton's face

and he looked, first at Mrs. Von Comp, then at the secretary, who stood with her arms folded, while an insolent sneer warped her already ugly face. Edgerton made no move to comply with the demand of his mistress.

"Do you refuse to obey me?" exclaimed Mrs. Von Comp, indignantly rising from her seat.

For a moment Mrs. Von Comp looked at the defiant secretary, then turning to Edgerton, she calmly asked:

"Edgerton, I am aware that this woman has stolen certain valuable papers from my private files and I am going to give her one chance to restore everything she has stolen. Upon her doing this I will be lenient, but if she refuses to do so I shall prosecute her. Now, if I assure you that I will protect you against anything she may do, will you obey me, or shall I also prosecute you?"

It was now the time for the defiant secretary to look surprised, and at the moment Edgerton stiffened up she apparently wilted. Mrs. Von Comp had given McBirney a great light,—a secret nod ended the matter.

Edgerton opened a wicket in the wire partition through which the woman passed without further protest.

Mrs. Von Comp took the receiver from the desk 'phone and was soon connected with police headquarters. "Hello, this is the office of the Saving Society," she said. "Is Brompton there? Send him up here at once, will you?" Then she rang off.

CHAPTER II

DR. PAUL M'KIM

It was an ugly night early in December. Rain, snow, and sleet were contending with each other for the mastery of the inclement conditions which made the streets unendurable. A rapidly falling thermometer was artistically welding all of this into ice, lumpy, slippery, and treacherous to man or beast who might be so unfortunate as to be abroad.

Only those who have attempted to navigate the toboggan slide called Fifth Avenue, during sleety periods, can fully appreciate the condition this night. Pedestrians had all they could do to keep their shoes and their hats apart. Cabmen were loth to accept fares because of the danger to their horses.

The cutting wind, with its caustic sting, whistled and moaned like a thing in distress. New York is a thing in distress, in a blizzard. It added to the discomfort and misery of those without, but this was compensated by the enhanced comfort and joy of those who could snuggle up within their pleasant homes and listen to the wail of the wind. Thus the sum total of misery and happiness was balanced.

While Dr. Paul McKim was a man who could appreciate the snug fireside and the consoling pipe, at the same time he could feel pity for those less fortunate than himself. On this especially inclement

night we find him in a splendid mood for an introduction, therefore we shall glide into his pleasant library, where he is meditating in front of a cheerful wood fire.

Fortunately, we are to experience an adventure later in the evening which will enable us to study this interesting man in action, but while he sits dreaming we shall delve into some personalities which will reveal Dr. McKim, the man, his tastes, his habits and profession.

The old-time red sandstone house, on Fifth Avenue, in which were both his office and his bachelor home, was just a place in which to seek a man of his nature and characteristics. It had been the home of one of New York's early rich men at a time when a millionaire was a thing to inspire awe, and there were to be found within its walls comforts which its external appearance did not indicate.

The first floor was devoted to offices and library; the second to the doctor's bachelor rooms, and the third was a well-equipped laboratory.

This evening the old house did not show a spray of light from its chinks, but stood as gloomy as the night itself. Within, however, the prospect was most cheerful.

Dr. McKim had rare notions regarding life, and what it should yield to him who lived to make the best of it. It seemed a downright shame that he, with his kindly nature and artistic tastes, should live a selfish, bachelor life. While he was not a wealthy man still, he had an ample income with which to indulge any taste he might develop, even if it included a wife. But he was a bachelor of the

most confirmed type, living a life of seclusion; cultivating only a limited acquaintance with fellow club members, and forming no close friendships, with but a single exception. He did have one friend who was his almost constant companion—Chester Von Comp.

The doctor's age was thirty-six years, and that of young Von Comp twenty-six, consequently the former was the controlling spirit.

Dr. McKim was a genius, skilled in the secrets of chemistry and although he was not in active practice at this time, he was a learned physician and surgeon.

Chester Von Comp was acquainted with these facts as was no one else. The doctor had confided in him, telling him much of himself, although there was more which he did not confide to the friend who was sufficiently discreet not to presume upon the close friendship and pry into personal affairs.

Young Von Comp had been graduated from Princeton with a predilection for chemistry, and an early acquaintance with Dr. McKim soon welded together kindred spirits. They were truly devoted to each other. They were now deeply and enthusiastically engaged in experimental chemistry, devoting practically their entire time to their laboratory work, with high hopes of accomplishing some great discoveries which would bring them both fame and fortune.

While Dr. McKim's income was comparatively limited, that of Chester Von Comp was more than ample, he having inherited liberal fortunes from

both his father and his grandmother, besides his prospects of inheriting a portion of his Aunt Katherine Von Comp's large fortune, known as one of the largest estates in New York.

The two men were well mated, the fascination of their chosen profession seeming to hold them from social indulgences and the dissipations which enthrall most rich young men in the great metropolis.

Young Von Comp was more of a club man, because of his having chambers at his favorite club. Each evening, between nine and ten o'clock, he could be found snugly ensconced in his favorite armchair, smoking and dreaming. Very frequently, after having indulged in his smoke, he would run in and visit Dr. McKim late in the evening, and they would sit and talk till midnight.

On this ugly winter's night an incident occurred which presents these men under wholly different circumstances. We will relate what happened that night while we are attempting to portray these two interesting characters, because the adventure throws upon them a strong side light which reveals something of their souls. Moreover, it has much to do with our story.

It was a curious coincidence that Chester Von Comp should have left his comfortable quarters on this exceptionally disagreeable evening, contrary to his usual habit. But, as he afterward told Dr. McKim, he was seized with an uncontrollable desire to come to the doctor's house, and he lost no time in doing so, feeling that some impending event called him.

Dr. McKim was seated alone in front of a glow-

ing fire, smoking his long-stemmed pipe, after having partaken of his evening repast. He was the embodiment of selfish comfort. Having instructed the butler to muffle the telephone, in order that he might not be disturbed, he settled himself for deep meditation; he was a thinking man.

As he lay back in his luxurious reclining chair, with one leg carelessly thrown over its sagging arm, and his evening pump dangling upon his toe, an immense black cat with luminous yellow eyes and glossy coat passed with stiffened spine and erect brush back and forth beneath the foot, purring his grateful acknowledgment of his share in his master's comfort, of which he seemed an essential part. From time to time he would daintily tap the dangling pump to see it swing and balance upon his master's toe. As his electrically charged coat pressed against the leather it gave forth a crackling sound and a multitude of sparks.

For some minutes the master encouraged the caresses of his pet animal, watching intently the electrical display, which seemed to increase with the cat's activity and excitement.

"What a marvelous thing the animal body is," he mused, as the cat humped his back to get greater friction. "It seems to be an electric battery. While living it is surcharged with electrical energy, and is one of the best of conductors, yet the moment *rigor mortis* sets in it becomes the most determined non-conductor.

"Therefore, the life currents must be the conductors of electrical currents, or perhaps electricity itself is intrinsic life, the living fire. All

animal kind love to feel the devitalizing friction and pressure which create the destructive spark, but what does this spark release? We know the ponderable residue is an ash, similar to that produced by fire, but what man dares to say he knows the true nature of the escenic entity which is set free?

“I am negative; this animal is positive; he thus assaults me and bombards my body with his electrical discharges and my soul with his sympathetic purring to awaken in me the love and affection which he craves. Therefore, it is vital energy he is expending. If he fails to arouse a reciprocal response his exertions are wasted and lost, a sense of disappointment or anger is felt within his soul and he has depleted his vitality to this extent. If he succeeds in stirring my sentiments and emotions and I display a responsive sympathy, his soul is correspondingly elated and every fiber of his body experiences satisfaction and stimulation. Yes, love, sympathy, and affection are essential to all animal kind.”

As though conscious of having established a confidence, the cat sprang to the empty arm of the chair, his usual resting place during his master's meditations, spread his great shining body at full length and purred contentedly, pressing his velvety paws upon his master's sleeve, occasionally allowing his sharp claws to catch lightly in the fabric to remind him of his customary evening caress.

“Ah, Monk, you want your back tickled,” and the doctor caressingly ran his hand over the beautiful satin coat which emitted a loud crackling and a shower of electric sparks.

"We are bully good friends, aren't we, old fellow?"

The cat understood the greeting, acknowledging it by reaching over and pressing both front paws upon his master's breast, at the same time uttering a plaintive "meow."

This affectionate scene between master and confiding pet was a nightly occurrence, and at this point it was customary for the doctor to lift his pet onto his lap and permit him to stand erect and play with his beard, while he himself shook and tickled the glossy body. Thus they had a rough and tumble play.

But this did not occur this night. As he reached forth his hand for the cat, it sprang with lightning speed and with a single bound, from the arm of the chair to the top of a nearby table, which was littered with books and magazines. Here he stood, with back erect and spreading brush, the very embodiment of virulent aggressiveness. His great red mouth was wide open, with lips drawn back to show his gleaming fangs, and his eyes emitting streams of fire and fury. Waving his bushy tail back and forth he growled and spat viciously towards the door leading to the front hallway, which was purposely darkened. He never removed his eyes from this direction.

The doctor had sprung to his feet in alarm and surprise. Undoubtedly the cat had seen something in the hall, but what could it have been? It was accustomed to the butler's prowling about; this would not have disturbed him. There was no other animal in the house. He had never before seen his

gentle pet thus excited. He was puzzled beyond measure as he watched the animal parade about the top of the table, always maintaining the same attitude of aggression.

Being a man of discretion, and quick both in thought and action, he concluded there might be some strange person hiding in the house for criminal purposes, and he rang for the butler, who promptly responded.

"Plimpton, look at Monk; what do you think of his actions? There must be some strange animal or person in the house," said the doctor.

"Not that I know of, sir," replied the butler, as much alarmed at the cat's strange antics as was his master.

"Well, he has seen something, that is certain. You can see he is on the alert and knows what he is doing, by the natural motion of his brush. There must be some live thing there somewhere. We must search the house. Call Cassello"—Cassello was the fat Italian cook—"we will go on a hunt," and he drew from a drawer of the table a small pistol.

The two servants came, Plimpton waving a large iron poker, and Cassello looking dangerous with a large bread knife in one hand, and strange to say, a tin pan in the other, doubtless intended for a shield, an instinct which marked him as a descendant of some ancient family of fighters, or perhaps his great-great-great-ancestor was a Roman gladiator.

But this was no time to criticise accouterments or arms. Quick action was the order. Plimpton went forward with the lamp, while the master backed him

up with the pistol, ready for quick use. Cassello seemed more afraid of a rear assault than of danger in front, and he kept his eyes on the alert in that direction and kept close up to the vanguard.

As they started towards the door the cat seemed to understand that it was to be a charge, for he leaped to the floor, sprang past them, and went tearing through the hall, up the stairs and down again, squalling loudly all the while. This action was so inexplicable and strange the procession stopped in perplexity, not knowing just what to do.

"The animal has surely gone mad," exclaimed Dr. McKim.

"He is mad, sure enough," said Plimpton, and he struck at Monk viciously with the iron poker.

"Don't strike him, Plimpton, open the door," said the doctor, and they all backed towards it to be sure the cat was let outside; but he again ascended the stairs.

Before the butler reached the door the cat came down with a rush, but stopped at the foot of the stairway, humped his back, and spat and growled in the direction of the door, and as they watched to see what he would next do, he slowly approached the door, relaxed his vicious aspect and sniffed along the bottom. Then turning towards Dr. McKim he meowed in his usual kindly manner, and seemed to have wholly recovered from his excitement. He seemed loth, however, to quit the door, therefore the doctor concluded to open it and see if there were any unusual signs there, before searching the upper part of the house.

As Plimpton turned the knob the door was

quickly thrust open, and a muffled figure fell in a heap upon the floor.

It was the body of a woman, who had evidently been huddled against the panel, dropping there exhausted, after finding herself unable to locate the bell.

They all started back, aghast at this uncanny apparition.

"Great heavens!" ejaculated Dr. McKim. "What can this be! At least, it is the explanation of Monk's excitement. But we must do something. Close the doors, Plimpton. Here, Cassello, lend me a hand—we will take her into the library, near the fire."

Before the outer door could be closed the form of a man was seen ascending the steps. He was muffled to the top of his head. "Is that you, Plimpton? Don't shut a poor fellow out in this devilish storm." It was the voice of Chester Von Comp and Dr. McKim recognized it and said:

"Oh, it is you, Chester; I'm glad you have come. Here is an adventure, sure enough. We have just discovered this poor creature, apparently frozen stiff, and huddled in a pile at the door. Plimpton, help Mr. Von Comp with his coat; then come into the library, Chester."

Cassello lifted the apparently lifeless body of the woman from the floor, carried her into the library and laid her upon the great leather lounge, which was then pushed in front of the glowing fire.

The doctor grasped her cold hands, opened her mouth, then examined her eyes.

"Thank God, she is still alive," he said, half to

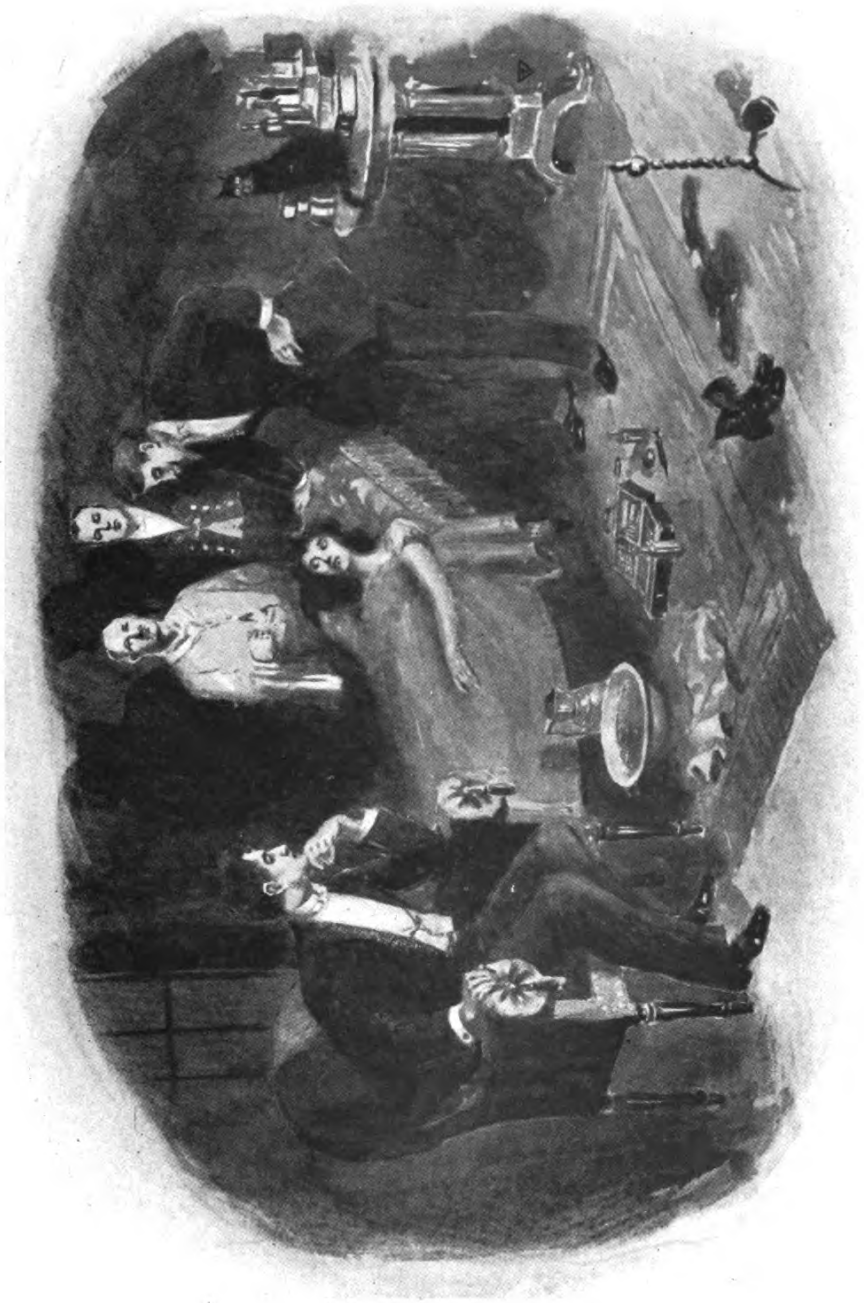
himself, "but some mighty prompt work must be done to save her life. Here, Plimpton, take this wet wrap. Huh! Only a thin raincoat. Remove her shoes, Chester. Cassello, bring a large basin of cold water, and a pitcher of hot water. Act quickly now, all of you."

With these quick orders he put them all on the jump. He himself opened his medicine cabinet and selected the strongest stimulants he could apply. Forcing her mouth open he groaned aloud to find she could not swallow. However, he forced a quantity down her throat. Then began the battle to restore respiration and circulation. Seizing his surgeon's scissors he cut the stays, examined her heart and groaned again. Tearing open the flimsy sleeve from her arm he used a hypodermic needle and injected a stimulant.

"Tear open that sleeve, Chester, and slap and chafe the arm. Here, Plimpton, do the same with this one. Don't be afraid of hurting her. Bring some towels, Cassello." Then he unhesitatingly drew off the poor tattered hose from her perfectly cold limbs, grasped a coarse bath-towel and began rubbing the feet and limbs vigorously.

"We shall not need the cold water, Cassello, empty that and bring the basin half filled with warm water, not hot. Bring your mustard pot and some whisky, quickly." With these he set Chester to bathing the patient's feet.

He now began to look for signs of returning life. There was little apparent sign of response to their vigorous efforts, still the doctor seemed satisfied, for he smiled and again used the hypodermic. He be-



“Thank God, the tide is turned!”

gan to aid by setting up artificial respiration, which seemed more successful. The bosom heaved convulsively and the patient gave an audible sigh.

"Thank God! we have turned the tide of life," said Dr. McKim, and he quietly watched the color creep back, first into the finger tips, then into the lips, and gradually mount to the waxen cheeks as circulation grew stronger. From time to time he directed the others what to do.

"Bring two blankets, Plimpton," was his next order. These were brought and spread over chairs in front of the fire to thoroughly warm them.

"You and Cassello may now retire, but remain in easy call."

As they stepped out of the room the doctor said: "Chester, you will have to turn nurse. This is no blushing matter; we must get her out of most of her clothes and into these blankets. While she is now on the safe side she is far from recovery. The reaction will, nine chances to one, leave her in a dangerous state of collapse, with brain fever in the end. I am going to prevent this, if possible.

"She would die before she could reach the hospital, should she be moved just now, therefore we shall exercise the license and prerogatives of a physician, where a human life is at stake, and put her in a more comfortable position. She will not be fully conscious for an hour. She may be told upon regaining her senses, that our housekeeper took care of her. We shall have to watch over her with utmost patience and care to-night, and one of two things will happen by morning; either she will be strong enough to help herself, or else she will be

plunged in a raging fever and be totally oblivious of her surroundings. We may prognosticate when she awakens, probably in an hour or two."

"My! but she is a beautiful woman," softly murmured Chester.

"Cut that out, young man, you are now a physician's assistant and blind as a bat. As a nurse you are not supposed to be able to differentiate between homeliness and comeliness," said Dr. McKim, with emphasis.

They removed her outer clothing and wrapped her snugly in the warm blankets.

"There, now we will watch life chase death back into his shadowy lair. He has lost, for the time being. If he ever had a victim snatched right out of his hands it was in this case. She did not seem to have one chance in ten thousand. Her heart had ceased to beat as far as it was possible to distinguish. We must have caught its last pulsation. We shall let her repose here on the lounge. It is as comfortable as a bed. After she recovers consciousness I will question her before calling for a nurse; it may be necessary."

Unconsciously, Chester had taken one of the patient's hands in his own and sat holding it in his palms. He could feel the pulse grow stronger and the small soft fingers, it seemed to him, yielded a response.

For quite an hour they sat thus, silently watching, the doctor occasionally administering his potent restoratives.

The face was now angelically beautiful. The calm white brow was splendid, while the rosy flush

of her cheeks, due to the tendency to fever, enhanced the sweetness of her features. A great mass of thick, clean, brown hair had become loosened, and now lay in tumbling billows about her fine shapely head. The strong round neck, peeping out above the edge of the blanket, was ravishingly delicate and beautiful, as well as sweetly clean.

There was no denying that she was a most attractive woman in her every feature, notwithstanding the evident signs of dire poverty.

Dr. McKim seemed to be reading the thoughts of young Von Comp, for he smiled and nodded understandingly.

The patient made a move as if trying to brush away the hair from her eyes. Chester gently pressed the offending folds back off her brow, still holding the hand. Again the doctor smiled, as he watched his earnest assistant administer the very best tonic to his patient, the magnetic touch of a strong, sympathetic, healthy being.

"You will have her yelling police pretty soon, if you keep that up, Chester," he whispered.

Presently a deep sigh heaved the bosom; the eyelids trembled; two great pearly tears escapd and fell upon the burning cheeks. She opened a pair of large brown eyes and a most pathetic smile flickered about her lips. It was the smile of a grateful soul, too weak to do more in acknowledgment of the exquisite feeling of peace and comfort she experienced. Her lips barely opened, the sweetest lips Chester had ever seen, while peeping therefrom were two rows of real pearls.

Quickly he dried the tears from her cheeks and

looked with joy in his face to see what the doctor would do. Leaning close to the face of the patient Dr. McKim asked, gently:

“Do you feel better now?”

The stately head bowed weakly, and the eyes again opened, giving Chester another peep into heaven.

“Remain perfectly quiet,” said Dr. McKim, “your strength will return rapidly now. You are in the hands of your friends. I am the doctor, sleep if you can.”

Reason was again enthroned, she heard what he said, and understood, for when he ceased speaking she looked at him, then at Chester, who still caressed the pretty hand, and, without attempting to withdraw it, she closed her eyes, and a deep blush covered her whole face.

She lay thus for another hour, apparently in a gentle sleep, but from time to time she opened her great brown eyes, with their sweeping lashes, and looked earnestly at Chester, as though she were vaguely trying to understand his attentions to her.

Suddenly she started up with a suppressed attempt to scream, turned chalky white, and stared across the room. Dr. McKim quickly arose to see what had frightened her, and there sat the great, glossy black cat, with his big yellow eyes gazing at the strange patient. The library table had been pushed to the far corner of the room, which was now dimly lighted, and Monk did look “spooky,” as he sat upon a pile of books in its center.

“That is only my house cat,” quickly explained the doctor, “you must not be alarmed; that will re-

tard your recovery," and softly crossing the room he took Monk in his arms and out of the room, instructing Plimpton not to allow him to return.

The fright had a most curious effect upon the patient. She trembled all over and became exceedingly nervous. Where her face was before sweet and peaceful it was now clouded and troubled. Anxious lines formed about the eyes, which seemed to grow smaller. She seemed to feel Chester was protecting her, for she clung to his hand tenaciously and at every little sound would start painfully and lean towards him. She was closely bordering upon a condition of delirium.

Dr. McKim was not pleased with the unfortunate occurrence. Calmness was most essential at this crisis in the case, to keep down the impending fever which he was trying so hard to control. Carefully examining the pulse and brushing his hand over her forehead, he said:

"Now, I want you to take this medicine and sleep awhile. We shall remain near you. You must not be afraid, but go right to sleep like a good patient." He slipped both her hands beneath the blanket and motioned Chester to take another seat, which he reluctantly did.

Like an obedient child she closed her eyes and slept for a full hour, while these two watched over her, silent and thoughtful. About midnight she awakened with a start, and half arose before the doctor could prevent it. The blanket was pushed back and one arm, white, round and beautiful, revealed itself. She quickly gathered her senses, however, and thrust it out of sight.

The doctor examined her pulse and said, with earnest relief in his voice: "This is most gratifying. I am surprised to find you so quickly recuperated. You feel much stronger now?"

"Yes," responded a sweet, gentle, musical voice, "but where am I, and what brought me here? I cannot recall what happened," and she looked from one to the other, in anxious bewilderment.

"I am the doctor. I do not want you to try to remember, just now; there is ample time for that later. It is more important for you to remain calm and to sleep if you can. It is impossible for you to go to a hospital to-night, or to your own home."

A shudder passed over her, and she seemed to be trying to shrink from sight. She remained quiet for some minutes, then she showed signs of recovering both mental and bodily strength. Chester had again seated himself near her. Looking intently at him for a moment, and doubtless thinking he, too, was a physician, she said:

"Doctor, did I see a big black cat?" and her eyes roved about the room.

To reassure her, and make her mind easy, both men quietly laughed as she was told that Monk was a real, live cat and would be glad of an introduction in the morning.

"He is an important member of my family," said the doctor, "but you saw him a little too soon. Would you like to see him again?"

"No, thank you, not now," she replied; then looking at Chester, she asked: "Are you, too, a physician?"

Before Chester could answer the question, so un-

expectedly put to him, Dr. McKim said: "No, he is not a physician, but he has been a most valuable assistant in bringing you back to life."

"Are there no women about?" was her next query.

"After seeing you made comfortable my aged housekeeper retired, understanding that a trained nurse could be called to administer to your further wants, if it were necessary," was Dr. McKim's white lie. "I have been waiting to see if it would be necessary, and I am pleased to say that I believe by morning you will be amply strong to help yourself. We can place you in a cab and send you to your home. You will find yourself quite comfortable in this room for the night, which is a dreadful one."

She shivered, apparently recalling what she had experienced early in the evening, and she said: "I am glad you did not call a nurse."

"May we send any message for you? Is there anyone to whom you would like to send word of your plight?" asked the doctor.

She seemed startled at the question; tears came into her eyes and she whispered: "No, there is no one to whom I can appeal."

The men exchanged significant glances, which she apparently did not see.

"Impossible," whispered Chester, as he pointed to a pair of dilapidated shoes upon the hearth, and quickly switching from the back of a chair and out of sight, a well-darned and well-worn pair of hose, which had been placed there to dry.

The dingy black skirt, which had also been placed

to dry, still remained upon the chair. Her eyes, now on the alert, saw this. Looking at the two men, she reddened with confusion, and seeming to read their thoughts, she laughed a bitter little laugh, and said:

"Yes, I am respectable. These are my credentials," and she pointed to the shoes and the skirt. There was bitter irony in this speech.

"Who removed my clothing?" she suddenly asked.

"The housekeeper," both exclaimed at once.

"Someone has been very good to me. I feel so comfortable. Yes, I am tired, I should like to sleep," she said pathetically.

Dr. McKim had been talking to Plimpton, and now the latter brought a steaming bowl of porridge. He had noticed symptoms which had indicated to him that possibly the patient might have partially collapsed from hunger, and the thoughtful fellow had helped Cassello to prepare the life-saving brew which he gave to Dr. McKim. The tempting bowl would soon tell.

"I want you to take a little nourishment before you sleep," said the doctor, kindly, "It will strengthen you." Motioning to Chester, he lifted her to a sitting position, and two large soft pillows were placed behind her back.

"Yes, but I cannot eat this way, my arms will be bare," and she laughed in real good humor.

"Why, of course," laughed the doctor; "how stupid my assistant is," and he reached for the pathetic fabric she had worn as a waist. "You must not be over-bashful. You know you are in the hos-

pital and must obey your nurse's orders. We will not look, slip this on," and he held the garment towards her with its now tattered sleeves.

With glowing cheeks and laughing eyes, she did as she was bidden, and in a minute was eating with an eager relish which betrayed only too plainly an abnormal hunger.

It was good to watch her. Her actions were almost childish, and she appeared so grateful when she had finished that it was pathetic. Both men were deeply affected; they were earnest and respectful in their interest in this forlorn woman, who was undoubtedly pure and perfect in spite of her poverty. Beauty and youth like hers need not be clothed in rags, were they but willing to pay the price.

Taking the now empty bowl from her hands the doctor assisted her into a comfortable position to sleep. Then, again feeling her pulse and passing his hand over her brow, he said kindly: "Now you will sleep soundly and by morning you will feel quite able to take care of yourself, then I will tell you how you happened to be here, and you may tell us anything about yourself you wish.

"I must also inform you that I am a bachelor doctor and reside here alone with my servants. Will you feel perfectly at ease to sleep here, where you are, till morning, with the knowledge that there are no women in the house? Of course, I assure you of your perfect safety and comfort. I shall require my faithful old butler to remain in the adjoining room to call me, should you want for anything. This bell will promptly summon him. I tell you this, be-

cause you cannot be removed from here to-night without great risk, and you would perhaps prefer to remain here, where you are quite comfortable, rather than be removed to a bedchamber above."

"Thank you," she said softly, "you are very kind to me. I am not at all afraid; I feel so comfortable here."

Chester arose; it was his place to withdraw. Taking the patient's hand, he said: "I am so glad you are now out of danger. I feel grateful that I was permitted to aid in bringing you back into the world. I shall trust the doctor to make it so I may have the pleasure of seeing you again."

"I can only say that I am very thankful for your generous kindness, sir," and she gave Chester's hand a responsive pressure.

Chester was helped on with his overcoat and after final good-nights took his departure. At the door he pressed Dr. McKim's hand, and said: "Old chap, I'll never forgive you if you do not let me see her again. Good-night."

The outer door was snugly closed for good that night. Dr. McKim and Plimpton re-entered the room and the butler was given his instructions.

Then, giving the patient a potion, he asked: "Now you feel safe and comfortable?"

"Yes, doctor, thank you," and she was almost asleep before he quietly left the room, drawing the door closed behind him.

At five o'clock the next morning a sharp rap upon his door awakened the doctor from deep slumber. It was Plimpton, come to say that, upon going into the hall, a few minutes previous, he had found the

library door open and upon looking within he was astonished to find the patient, whom they had left there upon the lounge asleep, gone; not a sign of her was left.

Dr. McKim slipped on his dressing-robe and, together, they searched the lower floor. They found the storm-doors ajar, which said conclusively that the patient had gone, even in that cold night.

"I fear her death will be upon your head, Plimpton. I am surprised that she could have gotten out of the house without your having heard the noise she made. This will surely kill her."

About ten o'clock Chester telephoned to ask about the patient. Dr. McKim replied that he would lunch at the club with him and tell him all about it.

Later at the club, when Dr. McKim related the circumstances of his patient's disappearance, at first Chester would not believe the doctor was telling him the truth. He was thoroughly interested in this strange, but beautiful woman, who seemed in dire poverty, and he believed that his friend was either teasing him or else was himself smitten and desired to deceive him and prevent his again seeing her, but, upon second thought, he knew such conduct on the part of Dr. McKim was wholly impossible.

Upon reaching his office at three o'clock the doctor was handed a note. It proved to be from his patient. It merely thanked him for his extreme kindness, and made humble apology for having left so unceremoniously, but it could not have been otherwise and not cause her great embarrassment.

It was impossible for her to disclose her identity,

and in view of his kindness she did not have the courage to face him and not do so. Some time she might be able to reward him. She also asked him to give her grateful thanks to his gentle assistant.

The next day he showed the letter to Chester, and the matter, from a professional standpoint, was closed.

CHAPTER III

DR. M'KIM MEETS EUDORA VON COMP

"PAUL, this reaction is not satisfactory. Everything has gone wrong this morning. I believe I have a touch of Christmas malaria." With these remarks Chester Von Comp began to divest himself of his long, white laboratory apron.

Continuing, he said: "I think a walk down the avenue with a peep into the shop windows will be a good remedy. Why not come along with me? You, yourself, are fagged; I can always tell by the droop of your shoulders. Really, to tell the truth, I enjoy the external Christmas displays as much as the women love to prowls around inside the shops and muss things up. Say quickly; I am off."

"Well, I'm something of a kid myself in that respect, besides I have neglected to do some Christmas shopping on my own account. I will join you. We shall indulge our greedy eyes with a feast along Fifth Avenue and Broadway. Please remind me I want to stop in at Tiffany's, Budd's and Knox's," and Dr. McKim began to shuffle off his own fighting togs, as he was wont to call the clothes he donned in his laboratory work.

They were soon swinging down Fifth Avenue with the easy, careless stride of men of leisure. A

splendid pair, these strapping, good-looking fellows, with handsome, happy faces, and well-groomed persons. Chester appeared a bit theatrical, in his big fur-trimmed coat, while his stylish surtout and carefully trimmed blond beard gave Dr. McKim a decidedly artistic aspect. Both looked smart, and whatever their profession, it was evident they were no amateurs.

Here and there they stopped to view the window displays along the avenue, finally becoming so enthusiastic that people began to stare at them. As they approached the bright windows filled with costly baubles and finery, each would vie with the other in pointing to and commenting on the novelties.

"Look there, Chester, isn't that a thing of art?" with which exclamation Dr. McKim drew his companion towards an elaborate exhibit of millinery, and pointed to an exquisite specimen of the Parisian hat. It was poised upon a slender metal rod and looked like a bird, ready plumed for flight.

At the very moment they cast their sacrilegious eyes upon the piece of finery, a slender white hand and exceedingly shapely wrist came through the lacy background and deftly whisked it out of the window.

"Ha, ha!" ejaculated Chester, "the vulgar eyes of men may not contaminate these pretty things. What a difference it would make, though, had we wives or sisters to whom to present a few of these exquisite bits of graft."

"Graft," exclaimed the doctor, "do you consider these artistic creations overestimated in price?"

Why, my dear fellow, it requires a genuine artist to produce these things. Yes, with a very high order of genius, comparing favorably with the best artistic talent of our leading landscape and portrait painters. It is not the materials used which give these picture hats their value, any more than do the daubs of paints and oils used by the artist who paints pictures give the intrinsic value to his paintings. It is the cunning twist, the ravishingly graceful lines which each turn and twist reveals, the beautifully draped plumes and feathers, and the harmony of color in ribbons and flowers; a truly mechanical art as well as the artistic combination of colors. There is a decided limit to the colors used by a portrait painter, while in this profession the limits of colors, lights and shades are boundless. Yes, my boy, this is the infinity of artistic skill. Long live the fame of the genius which produced that, for instance," and he pointed to another live thing in an angle of the window.

As in the first instance, no sooner had they concentrated their gaze upon the other hat than it, too, was confiscated by the same pretty hand.

Again Chester laughed, saying: "They have charged two of them up to your account, Paul. I have known them to send a half dozen to my aunt and my charming little cousin, Eudora, on less pretext." Then, with surprise, he exclaimed, "Ho! ho! speak of angels and you may hear the rustle of their wings. Here is a treat. Here is my Aunt Katherine now. Paul, we shall take a peep behind the scenes and view the inside works of a high-class millinery shop. It may cost me fifty, but it is worth

it," and before Dr. McKim knew what was doing he found himself being introduced to Mrs. Katherine Von Comp and her beautiful daughter, Eudora, Chester's pet cousin, of whom he had talked much, often scolding Paul because he had always seemed to avoid meeting them.

There was no avoiding it this time, however, for they had bumped into each other so unexpectedly there was no possible avenue of escape.

Dr. McKim acknowledged the introduction with becoming grace and dignity, although he was so visibly embarrassed that both the ladies stared at him curiously.

"So this is that wonderful wizard chemist friend of yours, is it?" said Mrs. Von Comp, looking intently at him. "Well, doctor, I thought you a myth, a sort of phantom being, existing only in the imagination of this dear boy of mine, so long has he been in presenting you to us. He talks of nothing else but you and your chemistry. I tell you, you are well represented while you have him as your advance agent."

"I fear he bores you greatly, then, madam, for both of these subjects are dry ones, I can assure you," replied Dr. McKim.

"Not at all! not at all!" she exclaimed, "On the contrary, he has worked us up to such a pitch of enthusiasm we have frequently threatened to trail him to your lair, there to confront you in the midst of your mysteries, and demand to know why you have so long held your interesting self aloof from two pining ladies desirous of making your acquaintance."

"You would have been sorely disappointed, and wholly disillusioned, had you executed this adventure, and honored my poor den with a visit," deprecatingly urged the doctor, with a deep bow.

He was all the while conscious of a peculiar scrutiny on the part of the younger lady. Her face wore a puzzled and questioning look, as though she were beating back in her memory, trying to recall something which his presence seemed to have only partially revived.

"Among other romantic things, doctor, we have been told that you have hunted the real live tiger in India, therefore you may imagine the feeling of trepidation with which we prowl about this jungle of Fifth Avenue, at the risk of life and limb, and approach this lair of a feline, which I know is closely akin to the tigers you have shot. We are going into this millinery shop to pauperize ourselves, and right behind that fair exterior is a member of the cat family as fierce as any you have ever hunted." At these remarks they all laughed jewel-like luster.

"Oh, do let us go behind the scenes with you, auntie," pleaded Chester, which request also provoked merriment.

"Why, of course you may, we should be pleased, yes, proud, to be accompanied by two such handsome and distinguished gentlemen, even though it does add twenty-five per cent. to the price of the millinery and other flub-dubbery we shall purchase. It will be quite a novel experience to have men assisting us in the selection of French millinery, will it not, my dear?" said Mrs. Von Comp. She patted

the plump shoulder of her daughter affectionately and started towards the entrance of the shop.

Chester had told them of their experience at the window a few minutes before their coming. "Ah! then one or the other of you will receive a bill for the hats, I will wager," said Mrs. Von Comp.

As they entered the shop they were profusely greeted, in French, by a stout woman elaborately gowned as for a grand reception. She was bedecked with jewels of apparently fabulous worth; her face was as fair as that of a young girl, although she could not have been under fifty, and her manners were those of a queen.

Mrs. Von Comp, in her hearty, jovial way, introduced the gentlemen by saying: "My boys wanted to peep behind the scenes, so I allowed them to come with me."

"Step zis vay, if you pleze," said the polite Frenchwoman.

"Do they look like this in India?" whispered Miss Von Comp to Dr. McKim, who smiled at the comparison.

They were ushered into a dainty little private reception room, and the French woman demonstrated her ability to understand an American joke by going Mrs. Von Comp one better. Pushing back a sliding panel she exclaimed, gleefully:

"You zee! Zere ees a behind ze zenes," and a view was had of some dozen or more pretty young women with deft fingers and artistic eyes dressing hats.

"Ha, ha!" exclaimed Chester, "not unlike the wings at the Metropolitan."

"He, he," giggled Madam, "ze young gentlemen ees vairy vell acquainted wiz ze back of ze zenery, eh?" which shut Mr. Chester up for a spell, and the ladies fell to examining the dainty head-gear.

No matter what position he took, Dr. McKim could not avoid noticing the quizzical survey of Miss Von Comp. It puzzled him at first, but later it annoyed and troubled him greatly, for her rare and delicate beauty had impressed him, and he was prone to like her at once. He could not understand the significance of her close scrutiny of him. He believed the others had not observed her curious actions. Whether or not her thoughts were inimical to him, her face did not betray, but a few minutes later his heart gave a throb of pleasure at something she said.

The two gentlemen remained about ten minutes, then said they would continue playing Christmas "hookey."

"I am really quite glad to have met you, doctor," said Mrs. Von Comp, "and now we may hope to see you in our home very soon. Chester, no excuses will go from this time forward."

"Yes, indeed, Dr. McKim, we do want you to come. You will come right soon, won't you?" chimed in the sweet, persuasive voice of Miss Von Comp.

Dr. McKim gazed deep into the pleading eyes as he thanked the ladies for their cordial invitation, and with a courteous bow, went out with Chester.

The sights were no longer the same to him. He could not join in the boyish glee of Chester Von

Comp. Everything now looked cheap and dowdy. They were mere shams to catch the eye and the almighty dollar. He had seen real intrinsic worth in the beautiful eyes of Eudora Von Comp. Her voice had brought a new sensation to his heart; one which he did not care to analyze. It was both teasing and pleasing. Her desire to see him again was genuine, there was no doubt about that, and he did seize the first opportunity to call upon the ladies. He and Chester stepped in and took tea with them a week later.

He had not the opportunity to more than pay his respects at this second meeting, but he was conscious of two facts after he left. Eudora Von Comp had again puzzled her brain in a vain effort to recall something to mind which undoubtedly concerned him, and she had been even more earnest in her invitation to him to call again. "Evidently, it is not inimical to my interests, therefore I shall await the solution by natural development," and with this philosophic view of the matter he dropped it from his mind.

Little did he know the true significance of Miss Von Comp's mental perturbation, and the grave consequences to grow out of it. It was all the more deplorable that he was ripe and ready to fall desperately in love with the charming young woman just budding into perfection, and, in fact, it was a question if he were not already enthralled to a dangerous degree. Furthermore, the young lady herself was suffering pangs which he could not dream of, nor could she attempt to explain them. She prayed and hoped that she might be mistaken, and

patiently awaited the time when she could know, beyond doubt, and yet she could not offend this man in whom she longed to confide. The situation was far more complicated in her case, because she dare not confide her suspicions to anyone, not even to her beloved mother, and she must not encourage the attentions of Dr. Paul McKim without first knowing the truth. She knew he had a strong, manly admiration for her. He had in perfection all the external signs which bespeak a noble and generous man, of good birth and high mental attainments. He was a man such as any woman would quickly love and confide in; sweet in disposition, gentle in manners and most considerate of others; it was a pleasure to be with him. But that awful suspicion still remained in opposition to all these attractions.

Poor little maiden! Eudora, worthy of a king's devotion, must yet have her metal tried in many fires ere she reaches that goal of the human heart—permanent, peaceful love.

It was a glorious winter's night. The ground was covered with downy snow, dazzling in its whiteness. Snow had ceased to fall at eventide; the clouds had quickly disappeared, and now the full moon showered its silvery light over the earth. As the light wind blew the fleecy snow into scintillant eddies, the air seemed to be filled with diamond dust of most exquisite brilliancy, and the window copings and fences were encrusted with the same jewel-like lustre.

It was an ideal night for Santa Claus, or the

fairies, to be abroad. The air was crisp and sparkling and one could not help being filled with joy as the invigorating ozone was inhaled.

It was Christmas week, and to-night every shrub and tree looked as though it were a Christmas-tree, laden with mysterious presents of glittering gems. With the approach of each set of tinkling sleigh-bells one instinctively turned to see if Santa Claus were not coming.

The slamming of carriage doors, as they deposited their loads of splendidly dressed people beneath the canopy leading to the palatial doors of Mrs. Von Comp, reminded one that this was the night of her great reception, always one of the most important social events of the year.

It was, indeed, a gay and fashionable throng. Perhaps the delightfully generous hostess was not aware that the good Lord had reserved this splendid night for her special favor, but she was just as thankful as though there had been a definite understanding about it.

Nearly everyone had some comments to make about the "snow, beautiful snow," congratulating the hostess as though it were an essential part of her entertainment.

The gay throng was in the full enjoyment of the evening when Chester Von Comp and Dr. Paul McKim were announced and were enthusiastically welcomed by the hostess. Very many of those present knew the handsome young nephew of Mrs. Von Comp. He was commonly mentioned as the prospective heir to a large portion of her fortune, and as a "great catch."

Dr. Paul McKim was not known as a society man. He was only occasionally greeted by some fellow club member present. He was a handsome man, with the refined and studious look of an artist or professional man. His splendid blond hair was quite luxurious, with a tendency to wave and curl about his fine white brow. His beard, while carefully trimmed, also showed an artistic training, as it came to a point upon the chin. He was a well-groomed man. His blond coloring contrasted splendidly with the dark hair and eyes and olive skin of Chester Von Comp.

Many persons promptly sought an introduction to the distinguished looking man, and none regretted it, for they found him literally bubbling over with keen wit and sparkling good humor.

Chester remarked to his mother that he had never before seen the doctor in such high spirits and so charming in his manners.

"This is no ordinary man, Chester," she said. "I have been watching him. He is a new man under my roof, and I naturally want to see how he bears himself. This is evidently not a new experience to him. What eloquent eyes he has.

"While I have accepted him as your personal friend, you are aware he is not known socially, therefore, we are sponsors for his future conduct with our friends. He will be popular, and we are responsible, be the results good or bad. I believe I can take the risk. I like him immensely myself."

"I will guarantee him, auntie; a finer chap never lived," enthusiastically replied Chester.

Dr. McKim had been most cordially greeted by

Miss Von Comp upon his arrival, but she had promptly disappeared soon after. More than once the doctor looked anxiously about in search of her.

An hour passed, when he became conscious that at frequent intervals a pair of dancing, gleaming eyes and a rosy face were close at his elbow, but, like a roguish elf, the possessor of these charming attributes would quickly flee upon seeing that she had attracted his attention.

Eudora Von Comp had listened to Dr. McKim's musical, sympathetic voice; she had closely watched his graceful and elegant manners; she had compared him with every other man in the house, even with her cousin Chester. There was no other man there nearly so polished, witty or intellectual. To her he was a revelation. He was a real man. Now she prayed she might be mistaken in her fears. She must know this night. Her whole future happiness might depend upon what she should surely learn this night about Dr. Paul McKim.

"At last, I have captured you, little lady," and Dr. McKim's beaming face looked down upon the flushed cheeks and bright eyes of Miss Von Comp, who was standing practically alone, in a partially shielded portion of the room. "You are as difficult to capture, in this room, as would be an escaped canary bird," he said; then they were soon seated together, laughing and chatting.

Again he was perturbed to find her earnestly searching his face, and especially looking at his forehead.

"Pardon me for saying so, Miss Von Comp, but I have noticed, each time we have met, that you

seem to be trying to recall some incident of which my presence reminds you. May I aid you in stimulating the return of the truant brain picture?" and he looked kindly at her.

"Oh! but it is warm in here, I am suffocating, let us step out into the conservatory," was her quick rejoinder.

He was impressed with the idea that this move was intended to evade answering his question. Moreover, he could see that this sweet young girl was just now laboring under a great mental stress, and he hesitated to place himself in an attitude which might help to increase her excitement, the consequences of which he could not clearly foresee.

He was a man of the world and knew the dangers of dealing with young and inexperienced women. It would have been quite different had he not observed the peculiar actions of Miss Von Comp on previous occasions. However, he could not do otherwise than comply with her request, therefore, he offered his arm, which she took willingly, at the same time looking into his face, beseechingly and earnestly. He could feel the beautiful hand trembling upon his arm as she seemed to cling to him.

His heart was bleeding now, as he realized there was something truly pathetic in her distress. Surely there was something urgent to cause her to act thus.

He was more and more puzzled to understand the meaning of this constant searching gaze, which was at once wistful and troubled. He was determined to insist upon an explanation, for her sake as well as his own.

"Let us sit here," she said, and they seated themselves upon a double wicker chair, which was quite surrounded by the shrubs and flowers.

Hoping to divert and calm her mind, Dr. McKim looked about the conservatory, and remarked:

"What a truly delightful home you have here, Miss Von Comp."

"Have you ever been here before?" she asked.

"Why, yes. I called with Chester and took afternoon tea with you, don't you remember?" he asked, with great surprise.

"I mean before that," she said, eagerly.

"No, I never was here previous to that time," said Dr. McKim, slowly, and he watched her face with some alarm. Surely this young lady was mentally wrong. Her actions, more than her words, giving this impression.

"You look like someone I have seen before," she said, softly, and the roses faded from her fair face, leaving it as white as the gleaming snow without, and her head drooped sadly.

How beautiful she seemed to him now, and how much she needed a strong mind upon which to lean. He had allowed full buoyancy to his spirits this night, as not before for many years. He had been buoyed up by a thought of this exquisitely beautiful young woman, and found it easy to lay aside his usual reserve and drop into the harmony of his surroundings. He had compared her fresh, youthful charms with everything else about him only to reach the same conclusion he had formed upon their first meeting: that she was real, genuine, intrinsic. By comparison all else seemed artificial.

The contrast was definite and convincing beyond cavil.

These thoughts quickly passed through his mind as he watched her, and realized that at a single bound he was plunged from the heights of hopeful and enthusiastic love, into an abyss of uncertainty and doubt.

Whether done purposely or not, Miss Von Comp reached forth her hand and pulled a cord, which opened a small ventilator in one of the conservatory windows. A strong current of air suddenly entered, and, as Dr. McKim turned to see what she had done, his soft blond hair was blown back from his brow.

Instantly, Miss Von Comp sprang to her feet. With open mouth and staring eyes, she stood, as though hypnotized. Then, with a painful gasp, she said: "Let us return to the drawing-room."

Wonderingly he looked at her, then bowing, offered his arm and they returned to the throng. As soon as she could do so, without attracting attention, she left him and disappeared from sight.

The evening was ended for Dr. McKim. His heart, bounding with joyous anticipation upon entering the house, was leaden now. He felt keenly the stubborn mystery of it all. He could put no plausible construction upon the actions of Miss Von Comp, whom he had so much desired to please and draw closer to him. For some unaccountable reason, she had fled from him, perhaps forever. What explanation could he offer to Mrs. Von Comp, and to Chester, for not again coming here? He surely would not risk meeting Miss Von Comp again,

without some word from her; this he felt quite certain would never come, for he feared that theirs was a permanent estrangement.

He was afraid someone would note his gloom and depression, and he sought out Chester and said he would pay his respects to the hostess and take his departure. His friend had long ago learned to respect anything the doctor proposed, without argument; and he responded, "All right, old chap, I am beginning to feel a bit bored myself. I'll go with you."

"Oh, no, no! don't think that," exclaimed Dr. McKim. "On the contrary, I have been most delightfully entertained. Do not let me take you away. In fact, Chester, I would prefer to go alone. I will see you to-morrow morning, or, perhaps you may care to drop in on me, say in an hour or so."

Chester looked sharply at him and said: "Very well, Paul, you are a stubborn fellow, have your way," and together they sought Mrs. Von Comp.

Bidding the generous hostess adieu, and expressing a regret at not being able to say farewell to the fair Miss Von Comp, the doctor was soon in his cab and bowling down Fifth Avenue towards his own house.

Reaching his home, the faithful butler, Plimpton, removed the doctor's top coat and the fur-lined outer shoes which covered his evening pumps, and saying he must not be disturbed by any caller excepting Mr. Von Comp, he passed up the stairs, entered his room, and changed his evening clothes for more comfortable ones. Seating himself at his

small writing desk in the reception room, adjoining his bedchamber, he gave himself up to thought. Suddenly he stepped in front of a mirror and surveyed himself critically for some seconds. "Who, or what manner of beast are you, that you frighten young ladies?" he demanded of his reflection in the glass.

"You do not seem so frightfully ugly," and he passed his long white fingers through his waving hair, revealing a heart and cross which marked his left temple.

He started back with the exclamation: "My God! it must mean this. But what can she know of these marks? I, myself, am ignorant of their origin and history, then how is it possible for her to know any more than I? What significance could they have for her? Pshaw! She is an over-sensitive, nervous young person, and easily frightened by such things.

"No, that cannot be either; she stared at me the first time we met, and I am positive she could not have seen these marks then or at any other time, unless it might have been in the conservatory this evening. Her thoughts did seem to culminate then. This would be of grave significance; it would mean that she was trying to identify me, and these marks were the final and convincing proof; moreover, it would also intimate a foreknowledge of these curious marks.

"I have a right to know the meaning of her peculiar actions towards me. She is most beautiful, and how I could love this dear girl. Doubtless she loathes me; but why? What kind of a crimi-

nal am I? These are the things I have a right to know; I *must* know. I shall write her a note and mail it this very night, so she may receive it to-morrow morning. Perhaps I am foolish, for she may feel insulted by such a liberty on my part; yet, I have a right to know. I will confide in Chester to-morrow, or to-night, should he come, for we are true friends.

"No, that is impossible, for this is our secret. Ha, ha, *our* secret, listen to that! As though a blatant fool like myself could share anything in common with that sweet creature! Yet why should I depreciate myself in this matter? I have done nothing to deserve it. Bah! I must be getting daffy."

Mechanically his hand sought pen and writing material, and he began to write:

MY DEAR MISS VON COMP:

I may be taking a serious liberty in writing you this letter, but I feel constrained to do so because of your strange actions towards me. In justice to myself——

"No, that will not do. It sounds too much like an accusation," and he tore it up, casting the bits into his basket. Then he alternately nibbled at the end of his pen-holder and drummed upon the desk with his nervous fingers.

"I must put it on less personal grounds, else she will consider me selfish. I will work in the friendship existing between her cousin, Chester, and myself."

"Miss Von Comp! No, I think it would be better to say My dear Miss Von Chester—ah—Miss Von Comp; that's it."

MY DEAR MISS VON COMP:

I first desire to express to you the extreme joy and pleasure I experienced this evening at your mother's delightful reception.

You are quite aware that I was most happy up to a few minutes before I left your house.

I was extremely unhappy at the time of my departure, and this prompts me to commit the egregious offense of writing you this letter, even before your reception is ended.

The pleasurable friendship existing between your cousin Chester and myself is sufficient guarantee that I would not wittingly do that which might cause you or your estimable mother to think less favorably of me. I deeply esteem your good opinion. It is a keen desire to retain these dear friendships which now prompts me to write you.

Miss Von Comp, pardon me, if I seem over-presumptuous in asking of you an explanation of your actions toward me this evening in your conservatory. I assure you, I ask this question with the greatest reluctance and trepidation. Rather than purposely offend you I would cut off my right hand.

I believe that you are just; I could not hold for a single moment the belief that you would withhold from me anything which might seem to reflect upon my character did you believe there was a possibility of error in the suspicion.

I have carefully pieced together your curious actions on all the occasions when we have met, and I cannot be mistaken in my belief that what previous suspicions you held in your mind concerning me cul-

minated this evening in your conservatory in full conviction, and I fear you have condemned me without a hearing.

You evinced this evening a sudden terror which shocked and appalled me. I have pondered long and earnestly over it, and I must confess I can find no solution to relieve my mind.

I assure you, my dear Miss Von Comp, I have never in all my life done anything of which I am ashamed; therefore I beg of you not to permit some misconception to cause you to condemn me in your good estimation. If you did not respect me in the beginning you surely would not have earnestly and cordially invited me to call upon you. My conduct toward you has, so far as I am able to judge, been that of a gentleman.

I probably would not take this liberty were it not that I cannot jeopardize my dear friendship with your cousin and the respect of your generous mother without a struggle, and you will appreciate the awkward position in which I am placed through complete ignorance of the cause of your sudden aversion for me. With this feeling, I cannot gracefully continue the same toward them, because I shall always feel guilty of some unknown offense which would surely condemn me in their eyes did they but know it; whereas, should you become convinced that you were in error, doubtless it would be your preference that they know nothing of the matter. Thus, you see, I am compelled, in self-defense, to risk the accusation that I have betrayed your mother's confidence by writing you so important a letter without her knowledge.

To be sure, I do not ask you to conceal this from either your mother or your cousin should you think best to consult with them. I can only throw myself

upon their generosity in such event. I am both humbling my pride and violating my ideas of rectitude in thus placing myself in an apparent attitude of ingratitude toward them.

While I feel certain that your cousin would plead for me did I but ask him, I dare not confide in him without your knowledge.

I beg of you to give me the benefit of a doubt and be frank with me. Tell me what it is that has given you mental distress on my account, as I have seen it portrayed upon your face. Just how you can do this I cannot advise. That I can only leave to your judgment, discretion, and pleasure. You will find me a man of honor, no matter what step you may take, although I seriously question the propriety of my writing you at all on the subject. It is only the distressing circumstances which impell me to do so.

Although I should feel hurt beyond expression should you ignore my pleading, I assure you of my most profound respect always.

Expectantly yours.

PAUL M'KIM.

"There!" he exclaimed, upon re-reading this letter. "By Jove, I shall send this to her if I hang for it." Then he sealed and stamped it, leaving it lying upon the desk.

Chester Von Comp did not come that night, and Dr. McKim retired to a restless couch. He slept quite late the next morning, and, as he leisurely dressed himself, he laughed, softly, at his impetuosity of the night before, congratulating himself that he did not have the letter mailed to Miss Von Comp.

"What a fool I should be to mail such a pre-

posterior letter to an irresponsible, inexperienced young girl. I ought to be horsewhipped for thinking of such a thing. I'll tear it up at once," and he stepped to the desk in the outer room.

"Great God! Plimpton! Plimpton!" That worthy was immediately at hand, and not the least bit disturbed, apparently.

"Yes, sir," he responded.

"Where is that letter I left lying upon this desk?" demanded the doctor excitedly.

"I handed it to the postman, sir," was Plimpton's laconic reply, without twisting a muscle of his mobile face.

"What on earth did you do that for? I did not want it mailed." There were tears in his very voice.

Plimpton only pointed his finger at the spindle on the desk, upon which was impaled a card bearing this legend: "Plimpton, get this letter into the first mail."

The doctor groaned aloud. He had stuck this order up there the day before and then walked out of the house with the letter and dropped it into a mail box with his own hands, forgetting to take down the card, which now loomed up like a sign-board pointing the way to perdition.

"Forgive me, Plimpton, it was all my fault. I would give much, though, to have that letter back. For better or for worse, it is gone."

"I am very sorry, sir," said Plimpton, sympathetically, as he left the room.

"I wonder what the result will be," mused Dr. McKim. "I wonder how I shall live till I know."

CHAPTER IV

THE DISCHARGE OF "OLD SEC."

PROMPTLY in response to Mrs. Von Comp's call Sergeant Brompton, of the police department, had appeared.

Upon seeing "Old Sec." in the cage he evinced no surprise. There was a twinkle in his crow-footed eyes, and an extra hitch to his big weather-beaten jaws as he looked through the wire screen at her, then gave Edgerton a hearty dig in his tender ribs.

The caged secretary's malicious glance showed plainly there was no love wasted between them. He had as wholesome a disrespect for her as she had a hatred for him. Edgerton seemed entirely neutral, whatever his thoughts may have been.

Brompton had found it quite profitable to be faithful to Mrs. Von Comp, and in order to remain independent he had held himself aloof from her employees, who knew he would execute her orders with religious zeal, without fear or favor. Moreover, he would be uncompromising, no matter whom it might involve.

At this particular moment Edgerton was secretly congratulating himself that he was not where Mary McBirney was. Nevertheless, had Brompton or Mrs. Von Comp been more on the alert they

would have noticed positive evidence of his displeasure that "Old Sec." was there, and that a sympathy of a very emphatic kind existed between them.

McBirney had taken a position near the wicket in the screen, and Edgerton leaned carelessly towards her on the other side.

Apparently there was some common interest between the two, or else Edgerton feared her, and was anxious to put her under obligations to him.

McBirney had a brother who was a police lieutenant in another district, and she evidently counted upon this brother to help her out of this scrape should Mrs. Von Comp decide to place her under arrest.

She did not feel that she could in the least avenge herself directly upon the president of the Saving Society, for whom she had a wholesome fear, notwithstanding her present insolence towards this all-powerful dignitary: this was a natural element in her malicious nature, and she could not help exercising it, if she hanged for it.

"Sergeant," said Mrs. Von Comp, "I am now ready to take action in Mary McBirney's case. I have a complete case against her for theft, embezzlement, and breach of trust. Moreover, she can, at my instance, be prosecuted for numerous violations of the postal laws. I am going to place the matter in your hands in order that I may avoid the annoyance of appearing as the prosecutor in the case.

"Here is a list of the letters which she has stolen. The inspector has proved that they were

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stolen here, and I have the proof positive that this disloyal woman took them. She confiscated three letters from my mail this morning. Here are the fragments of one, which she found it necessary to destroy quickly, but the other two she still has in her possession, unless they, too, have been destroyed.

"The severity of my treatment of her will depend upon her own conduct. I want all of the plunder she has taken from the Saving Society, and to the extent that she makes good will I be lenient with her.

"I want you to go to her rooms and search them for the stolen property. She shall remain in this cage till you return. Before going, however, I want to have her person searched."

At this startling proposition McBirney betrayed excitement, and seemed to stagger against the wire partition, and a clever trick was neatly turned by herself and Edgerton. In that brief moment she had slipped through the small wicket an official-looking envelope and a bunch of keys to Edgerton, who quickly put them into his own pocket.

Mrs. Von Comp well knew the vicious nature of the woman, and it was to awe and subdue her that she allowed her to overhear what she had to say to the police officer, and it undoubtedly had the desired effect. Mary McBirney was not timid by any means, but she well knew that she could not trifle with the chief of the Saving Society with impunity. She had often said that Mrs. Von Comp should be chief of police, a high compliment for her to offer.

Mrs. Von Comp pushed a button and there appeared a plump, rosy, but determined looking woman, at the sight of whom both McBirney and Edgerton stared. For three weeks she had been scrubbing, polishing, and dusting about the offices, and they had both given her the little consideration usually given to a scrub-woman.

They were still more shocked when Mrs. Von Comp introduced her to the police sergeant as the "new secretary." McBirney gasped audibly, for now she knew that Mrs. Von Comp had many tell-tale scraps pasted together as evidence against her. She had on one occasion scolded this very woman for leaving upon the floor pieces of a letter which she had unlawfully opened, and which she had seen her open. She looked little like a servant at this moment; her firm jaw, while fresh and red, did not relax easily, and her steel blue eyes were steady and fearless.

"Mrs. Beal," said Mrs. Von Comp, "step into the cage and behind that screen and search the person of this woman. Sergeant Brompton will protect you if she resists. Edgerton, open the gate and let Mrs. Beal pass in."

McBirney's ugly face bore a contemptuous smile as she stood waiting.

"Will you step behind the screen?" said the new secretary kindly, but firmly.

"You'll search me right here or not at all," was the savage reply.

"As you will," quietly responded Mrs. Beal, and with a dexterous twirl of her fingers, she unbuttoned every button up McBirney's back, and had

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her dress-waist half off before the latter knew what she was doing.

The now thoroughly enraged woman caught the newcomer by the hands and gave her a vicious whirl which sent her spinning half across the room, and then attempted to rearrange her garment. This exertion proved her undoing. As she turned, with her back towards those outside the screen, there could be seen protruding above her stays on the back of her shoulder something yellow. The plucky little secretary deftly drew this from its hiding place and handed it through the wicket to Mrs. Von Comp, who unfolded and held up two new fifty-dollar bills. McBirney was so confused she knew not what defense to make, and she made no claim to the money. She submitted to further search, and the two missing letters were found in the same place, but neither gave any explanation of the money.

Mrs. Beal left the cage and Mrs. Von Comp instructed her to take her dictation of the case.

Turning to Sergeant Brompton she instructed him regarding the search of McBirney's rooms, saying she would remain there till he returned.

To Edgerton she said: "I will send for you should I need you."

Sergeant Brompton went down through the office building, but Edgerton, having that privilege, passed out through the turnstile on that floor.

The moment he was out of sight he flew like the wind into the alley, and by every short cut to a house on Forty-ninth Street, west of Sixth Avenue; went tearing up the stairway to the third floor as

though thoroughly familiar with the way, quickly unlocked a door and entered.

Snatching from his pocket a scrap of paper, which had also been handed to him with the keys, he examined it for a moment, then proceeded to unlock and take from the top tray of a trunk several packages of letters and papers.

He relocked the trunk and the door, then started down the stairway. He had reached the second floor when he heard the voice of Sergeant Brompton.

"Show me to the room of Mary McBirney," he said.

There was a murmur of disapproval on the part of the woman who kept the house.

"Thin yous'll have to come wid me to the station and explain," said Brompton, who was bluffing his way in.

Evidently the woman was bluffed, for the door was closed and they started up the stairway.

Edgerton had slipped into a small chamber at the end of the hall, watching them through a crack, ready to jump the moment the way was clear. When he heard the housekeeper's key turn in McBirney's door, and their feet shuffle into the room, he went bounding down the stairs, six steps at a jump. Then, off like a shot, he was soon back at his post at the Von Comp residence, awaiting orders.

It was an hour later when Brompton rattled at the rear door, which Edgerton opened.

There stood the officer and a negro with a pushcart, in which was piled a load of McBirney's bag-

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gage—a trunk, a dress suit case, a small bag, and a large wooden chest of decided English make.

"Help me get these upstairs," said Brompton gruffly.

When these were laid down before Mrs. Von Comp she looked surprised.

"They was all locked, mum," explained Brompton. "I thought it was unnecessary to break the locks, so I brung 'em all along."

"Where are your keys?" asked Mrs. Von Comp of McBirney.

"They are at my rooms," was the sullen reply. She was evidently much disgruntled and doubtless frightened to see her junk there. Edgerton had passed her a sign which told her he had done his part well. He had her keys, and it was not going to be an easy matter for her to get them from him. They would probably force open the boxes if the keys were not forthcoming.

Suddenly she became much agitated upon seeing Brompton take from his pocket a small flat piece of steel and insert it into the crevice of the chest lid, and with a few dexterous twists spring the lock and raise the lid.

Placing her hands against the wire partition McBirney looked with appealing eyes to see what he would next do.

"My word for it, there is not a thing in that box belonging to you, Mrs. Von Comp," she said; "they are my old personal papers. You may examine them if you wish, but please do not let others do so."

This appeal, made in a voice so thoroughly

broken, touched Mrs. Von Comp, who said to Brompton.

"I will take charge of these, now, Brompton; wait one moment and I will let you go." Then turning to her new secretary she dictated the following:

"PRESIDENT OF THE SAVING SOCIETY:

"I hereby, and without coercion, confess that I have unlawfully opened letters addressed and delivered through the mails to you and to the Saving Society. I deliver to you my trunks and other receptacles, and authorize you to search them for those things which you believe I have confiscated.

"I hold you and the Saving Society blameless and free from all claims for damages, and I throw myself upon your mercy."

Pushing this paper through the opening, she said:

"Are you willing to sign that of your own free will?"

McBirney painfully hesitated, then took the pen and signed it. The new secretary being a notary, attested McBirney's acknowledgment.

Mrs. Von Comp had Edgerton and Brompton to witness the document, then she turned to the latter, saying:

"Sergeant, I thank you for your services. I can now handle this case. I will promptly send for you should I need you," and she handed him a sealed envelope, which he carefully tucked away. He knew what it contained.

A new light came into Edgerton's eyes as he fully

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grasped the meaning of the paper just signed by McBirney. She had plead guilty to many crimes.

He had always suspected she knew of his own secret predicament, and had felt a corresponding fear of her. Now he was master. He felt certain, from a hasty examination of the papers and letters which he had taken from her trunk, that he possessed practically all her most dangerous secrets. She had no other alternative but to trust him.

He did not know, though, that she was not fully cognizant of his being a "probationist" in the employ of Mrs. Von Comp until the latter had unwittingly given her light, when she ordered Edgerton to put her in the cage. The papers bearing upon his case were numbered, as were all the papers referring to such cases. With certain facts in her mind she at once recognized Edgerton as the name which fitted the number in a very extraordinary case, in which she had filched the papers in the belief that they referred to another person.

Edgerton was not positive that she actually had these papers in hand, but had supposed that, as secretary to Mrs. Von Comp, she had access to them and necessarily knew of his case, which was not wholly true.

Almost on top of one bunch of papers he had taken from her trunk he had found his "case" nicely docketed; therefore, he was much elated, but he was more than elated when he found that McBirney had actually sworn to her own perfidy. He no longer had the same feeling for her, but rather one of contempt for her own blundering weakness. He did, though, entertain some fear of her police-

man brother. He dared not betray his change of heart to McBirney, fearing she might squeal on him. He knew that, though the stuff he had in his possession would greatly strengthen Mrs. Von Comp's case against "Old Sec.," until found in her possession, they would not count against her. He accordingly felt quite secure for the time being.

He really did not know what the large envelope which McBirney passed to him from the cage had contained. He did know, though, it was sealed and addressed to McBirney's brother.

He had carefully hidden the papers which he had taken from the trunk in an unused closet on the lower floor, intending to smuggle them away at the first opportunity, and had added this letter to the lot.

A woeful fatality overtook Edgerton at this critical point.

It was found that some small keys in the possession of the new secretary would open the trunk and the handbag. These were examined and everything found therein belonging to the society, which practically amounted to nothing, was taken out, and the trunk and bag relocked, ready to be returned to McBirney's rooms.

She said that the dress suit case only contained old newspapers, and the chest, old personal papers; therefore, Mrs. Von Comp could retain these to be examined at her leisure.

McBirney gave a great sigh of relief as she viewed the trivial things on the president's desk, and she looked gratefully at Edgerton.

That individual had an actual heartstroke when

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Mrs. Von Comp personally took a huge padlock from the wall, motioned the secretary to bring the dress suit case, and Edgerton the chest, and paraded them down the side stair and to the very identical closet in which he had secreted his own treasure.

Bidding them place their burdens therein, she instructed Edgerton to place the big iron hasp across the door, and she snapped the lock through the staple with her own hands and placed the keys in her own reticule.

"I will ask for them when I want them," she said, and they all returned to the upper office.

"McBirney," she said, "I am going to release you on parole on your own recognizance; sign this release paper which requires you to report at this office every third day or at any time I send for you. Will you respect this order?" McBirney nodded and signed the paper.

In a few minutes she had gone, and Edgerton, as usual, was ordered to keep her under surveillance.

Had Edgerton been watched it would have been found that he went as directly to McBirney's rooms as she herself did.

They both knew it was the safest rendezvous they could now select.

The discharged secretary preceded him and eagerly awaited his coming. They were both on excellent terms of equality with the landlady, and the trunk and bag soon coming in, it was an easy matter to explain away the facts of the search of McBirney's rooms.

"Where are the letters and papers?" asked McBirney of Edgerton.

It was with genuine tears of vexation in his eyes that Edgerton explained the embarrassing predicament of the closet.

The woman went into a regular paroxysm of rage. She swore and cursed till Edgerton warned her that she would alarm the house.

She accused him of treachery, and of having aided in her betrayal to Mrs. Von Comp.

"Where is the letter I gave you to send to my brother?" she demanded.

Edgerton gave a start at thus having his mind called to the letter, but recovered himself sufficiently to convince her that it, too, went the way of the other papers.

This was a startling piece of news to her. She very materially calmed down. Coming close to him she whispered:

"Edgerton, if that letter is found by Mrs. Von Comp, I am doomed to the penitentiary. It is, I firmly believe, worth thousands of dollars to me. I don't know why, but for several days I have felt an impending calamity, and was just about to mail this letter to my brother so he might be able to act on what I know should anything happen to me. It was the fear of having it found on my person that caused me to slip it to you. Now, Edgerton, I hope you will not abuse this confidence. I promise that you shall share liberally with me any profit I realize out of it. I will explain the whole thing to you when we again get these papers.

"They must be had at any cost. I will help you commit burglary to again secure them. They would be useless to you without they are explained

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to you, and useless to me were they known to exist by Mrs. Von Comp."

This was the first time Edgerton had ever seen "Old Sec." really excited. He could not help admiring the fire and hidden force which were suddenly kindled in her, yet, he knew it was something extraordinary which caused her extreme anxiety regarding the papers, therefore, he made a mental reservation not to allow her to again see them until he, himself, had examined them.

He had one faithful chum, Barney McGowan, in whom he would confide should it become necessary. He would hold him in reserve.

A few days after the discharge of McBirney Mrs. Von Comp made a superficial examination of the contents of the two packages. But one was taken out at a time, however, giving Edgerton no opportunity to secure his own batch, and he was ever fearful that they might by some unforeseen accident, be discovered, which would now implicate him in any crimes with which the discharged secretary might be charged, for he had heretofore been the keeper of this lower office room.

Mrs. Von Comp, finding that the papers, including many newspapers, all seemed to bear upon a subject wholly foreign to anything which she had in hand, thought little more about the matter, leaving them undisturbed. The strangest thing about the case now was, not a soul was permitted to enter this lower room without the knowledge of the new secretary, who carried all of the keys to the office building.

This was a puzzling thing for both Edgerton and

McBirney. Their secrets were safely locked up there without Mrs. Von Comp's knowledge, yet to secure them would necessitate the forcing of the outer doors as well as the closet door within.

Edgerton's hope of secretly procuring a key which would fit the padlock on the closet door, and biding his time in opening it, was thoroughly dashed by this new arrangement.

Should this secretary take a notion to look about the place she would be certain to find the papers, and this thought was a constant worry to Edgerton and McBirney.

Days passed into weeks and weeks into months, and yet the situation remained the same up to the time of Mrs. Von Comp's winter reception.

McBirney had, without the knowledge of Edgerton, made certain reports and representations to her brother regarding the letter. By some hocus-pocus he had been transferred from the uniformed force to the plain clothes detective force, and was getting many important assignments for evening receptions. He was quietly, but surely, drawing near to the district in which Mrs. Von Comp resided with the view of familiarizing himself with the interior plans of her residence.

On one occasion he had been sent to the offices of the Saving Society upon some trivial pretext, but he found there a stubborn, tubby little woman who knew her business, and he was almost thrown out. He told his sister and Edgerton that he thought the new secretary a "bird."

He was playing a deep game, however, and was most patient.

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It seemed that certain of the papers taken from Mary McBirney were absolutely essential to carry out the scheme which they had in view. Without them the risk was too great, or else they could not prove their case.

They were not confiding in Edgerton; they did not trust him since learning that he had been deposed as keeper of the lower office. However, they kept in constant touch with him, because of his knowledge of the situation, and knowing that he was also most desirous of recovering the stuff which he had secreted. They were in constant fear that he might regain possession of them and keep them in ignorance of it. "Old Sec." seemed most worried about the letter which she had passed to Edgerton through the bars at the time of her discharge.

At last the critical time had come. Mrs. Von Comp had applied for a squad of evening-clothes men for her grand reception, and this assignment was given to Detective McBirney. Three of his men were ex-convict "snitches," put on duty that night to accomplish one object, to obtain all the facts regarding the locks about the office building, which was on this occasion used by the extra assistants.

When notes were compared the next morning by his men, McBirney had in his possession impressions and data regarding every lock accessible from the outside. This was the first essential step toward reaching the inner closet, with its coveted treasure.

But another and unexpected thing happened that night. It reflected upon McBirney, because of his having charge of the detectives on that eventful

evening. A string of costly pearls was lost by one of the guests. McBirney knew that they would be reported as stolen, whether lost that way or not. He did succeed, however, in suppressing it from the newspapers, and no one but the parties immediately concerned knew of the loss.

After the reception there was a most important conference held in Mary McBirney's rooms. She and her brother had decided to confide in Edgerton and convince him that it was to his interest to work with them. Early in the evening of the reception Detective McBirney sought Edgerton and asked him to watch an opportunity to see one Dr. McKim, whom he would point out, and determine if he had ever met him before.

It was unnecessary for McBirney to show Dr. McKim to him, for he had once before seen him there with young Mr. Von Comp, and had at that time racked his brain in an effort to place him. But he had not forgotten his familiar face.

When Mary McBirney, her brother and Edgerton had locked the door at two o'clock that morning, Dr. McKim was on trial.

"Now, Edgerton," said Detective McBirney, "what would you think if I told you that this Dr. McKim is none other but the tramp, Peter Kelly, who escaped from you?"

"By Gad!" exclaimed Edgerton, "that's the chap; why did I not remember him? Oh, it's him, all right."

"To-night, when he left the reception early, where do you think he went?" continued McBirney.

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"To a house on Fifth Avenue between Thirty-eighth and Thirty-ninth Streets?" queried Edgerton.

"Exactly, which proves that you know your man," replied McBirney. Then continuing, he said:

"Edgerton, I know that you are a 'probationist' under the surveillance of Mrs. Von Comp; I know you may be prosecuted at any time for embezzlement; you know my sister here is accused of certain indiscretions by Mrs. Von Comp; you both know what Mrs. Von Comp does not know that Dr. McKim is Peter Kelly, a 'derelict' of the Saving Society, and may be arrested and prosecuted for obtaining one hundred dollars under false pretenses. He is a 'society burglar,' that is what he is, and a bunch of money can be made out of him; to do it we have got to work together, but we must first get back the papers which are locked up in your closet over there. Now, will you play fair with us if we will with you?"

Edgerton studied a moment, then asked:

"What will you want me to do?"

"Nothing that will incriminate you," quickly responded McBirney. "You must help us to get the papers, and then to identify Peter Kelly."

"I don't see any risk in that, except I may get pinched in trying to get at the papers," said Edgerton.

"You need not take the risk even of that," said McBirney. "I will have keys which will fit all the outside doors of the office building, and upon getting the impression of the lock on the closet I will

soon have a key for that; then either you or I will undertake to get at the papers."

"You will have keys for the outside doors?" exclaimed Edgerton in surprise.

"Yes, but don't ask me now how I expect to get them," answered McBirney.

"And you want me to use your keys to get inside and get the impression, is that it?" asked Edgerton.

"Exactly," answered McBirney.

"I think I can do that without any trouble," said Edgerton.

"Then we will act quickly. It will take a day to make my keys, but the day after to-morrow I shall come and ask for you and slip the keys to you. You can get the impression some time during the day and bring it here that night. I will have the other key made the next day."

"And then?" queried Edgerton.

"I shall have to formulate a plan," replied McBirney.

Edgerton's eyes gleamed as he listened to McBirney's scheme.

He was capable of doing some consecutive thinking himself. He did not for a single moment believe the two McBirneys would play fair with him, therefore he deemed it no crime to use them for his own ends. With this running through his mind he said:

"I believe the whole thing is easy. Go ahead and get your keys and count on me."

With this understanding the conference ended. The McBirneys congratulated themselves that soon

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the keys would be in their hands, by which they would obtain the incriminating papers which they considered as dangerous in Edgerton's hands as in Mrs. Von Comp's.

The morning after Mrs. Von Comp's reception the loss of the pearls was reported, the lady claiming that she did not miss them until she entered her own home from the reception.

This rather changed the situation, and Detective McBirney hoped to get an opportunity of procuring an impression of the lock on the closet door himself, but this did not occur.

He and his chief assistant called upon Mrs. Von Comp in regard to the loss, but could not see her for an hour. While waiting they prowled about the yard in the rear of the house, trying to get a lay of the land. They were standing directly beneath a small ventilating window in the conservatory, the very one which had been opened the night before by Miss Von Comp.

"I feel certain I can put my hands upon the right man in an hour," said the voice of Detective McBirney. "He is a 'gentleman burglar' and was a guest here last night. Do you remember the fellow I pointed out to you and told you to watch, Dr. McKim, the chap with the yellow hair and beard? That's the one. He got the pearl necklace and skipped early in the evening.

"I will go slow for a few days and watch him until I get ready to gather him in. There is no danger of his jumping, so I will not swear out a warrant now. I may get some better evidence."

"What evidence have you now that this Dr. McKim is the one?" asked the other man.

"Well, I know him to be a police character. Peter Kelly is his stage name, and he is now wanted for bilking the Saving Society out of a century."

Only the tops of the hats of the men were visible above the edge of the opening, and this was quite well shielded by shrubs. McBirney would have felt embarrassed had he known that, standing at the opening directly above his head, was a beautiful young woman with her arms half filled with flowers which she had been gathering. Miss Eudora Von Comp had heard every word of the conversation and had watched the men disappear with Edgerton.

They had made her more than sad and unhappy.

This seemed to corroborate her first belief that Peter Kelly was no tramp and Dr. McKim was none other than Peter Kelly, and the case was closed so far as she was concerned.

But this young lady found it was no easy matter to stifle the rising hopes of a sympathy deeply touched.

CHAPTER V

DR. M'KIM, PICKPOCKET

ALL things in New York move in narrow circles. A great world in itself, confined to narrow limits, greed and selfishness taint all its institutions. Crime is classified and segregated into concentrated communities.

By an instinct, engendered by a common belief that all the world outside of the great metropolis is legitimate prey, criminals fraternize in clans or organizations which gives them a certain distinction and immunity against too stringent encroachment upon individual rights and privileges by the municipal government, while, individually, by their own methods, they obtain their part of its spoils.

For generations political government in this great city has been made, by corrupt protection and manipulation, a system of wheels within wheels; each smaller circle having its peculiar graft, its distinct set of criminals and crimes, and its set of political manipulators to see that the general government does not interfere with the even tenor of their daily criminal life.

The "Tenderloin," with its glitter and grills, is as distinct from the "Ghetto," with its perambulating haberdashery and Hebrew signs, as the Battery is from Harlem.

In political campaigns these different sections

vote practically as one man, according to the dictates of the needs and rights of the community as interpreted by the political bosses who watch over their destinies. There is absolutely no thought of the personal fitness of a candidate. It is the promises and pledges made before the candidate is selected which concern the voter. Under this system, as a rule, majorities are very large, and unfit men become popular idols.

Criminals do not prey upon individuals of their own community. If a person is well known in his own district he may prowl about at night to his heart's content and with perfect safety within the limits of his own bailiwick. But let him stray a few blocks from his own beat and he is as liable to be held up and clubbed half to death by a policeman as by any well-regulated footpad.

This is not necessarily a specific reflection upon the integrity of the New York police. The police of all large American cities are exceptionally bad and dangerous, and as long as the theory exists that the instrumentality of law is the law itself, this will be true. By this system police officers are given privileges which the courts themselves may not exercise with impunity. When a chief of police instructs his officers to shoot a fleeing person who has not committed a capital crime he is guilty of willful murder. Yet this is a daily occurrence in American cities.

It cannot be proven by statistics that this criminal method on the part of police departments lessens general crime or compels respect for the law; on the contrary, it undoubtedly engenders a deep

hatred for all legal machinery, which is nursed until it vents itself in some vicious retaliation. Not many years ago the policemen of the large cities were paraded as the "finest"; to-day they are a lot of hulking, skulking brutes, with an ever-ready club or "billy" for the head of him who dares to look askance at them. They are trained in the belief that they are the law.

The tendency in New York is for all classes to mix promiscuously when night comes with its rev-eries. The rich man knocks elbows with his own butler and apologizes, and he may receive a black-eye from his neighbor's coachman with less chance of escaping a night in the lock-up than has the fellow who struck him.

Thousands of men who are staid and dignified in their business offices during the day may be found among the rounders at night, bandying vulgar stories and jokes with bartenders and waiters as they go from one resort to another. In New York a man may do all of this and yet be considered wholly respectable. What he does in the daytime and what he does at night are wholly different things; the one cannot reflect upon the other, as long as he keeps out of jail—and the newspapers.

It is in these resorts that the high-class criminals, pickpockets, strong-arm men, and rogues of every kind have tipped off to them by the waiters and bartenders men who may be fleeced with impunity. Here also they are warned not to molest certain rounders of national reputation. They help to make this night life exciting and attractive to strangers who visit the city. Every precaution is

taken to avoid giving publicity to these crimes, on the theory that it is injurious to business. Not one case of theft in a hundred is reported, because of the notoriety it would give to some business man having "a night of it."

On many side streets may be found small, secluded restaurants where revelry and loud talk are not permitted. These places are a distinct part of the system. Here the genteel criminals meet to arrange serious crimes or to divide the plunder already secured. As a rule, these places are run by former headwaiters or captains of the larger resorts. Some may even be found holding such positions and running these small restaurants at the same time. They know every crooked waiter and professional rounder in the great underworld, and from this class are the patrons of these quiet, secluded places. Strangers are not wanted, and anyone creating a disturbance which attracts undue attention to the place may never enter there a second time. Rounders and rogues are good eaters. Therefore the cuisine in some of these exclusive restaurants is often superior to that in the most expensive and pretentious places in New York.

These places are commonly located in old residences, and are without conspicuous signs. This gives a plausible excuse for many small rooms, in order that seclusion may be assured to those who wish to engage in quiet conversations of an incriminating nature. Such a meeting may be between a man rated as "respectable" and a lackey, or it may be between the most desperate characters in New York's underworld.

It is a hazardous thing for respectable persons to be seen entering these places; yet many men, knowing their reputation for high-class specialties, slyly patronize them.

It was on the third night following Mrs. Von Comp's grand reception that Dr. Paul McKim found himself in front of a semi-respectable French restaurant on Thirty-fourth Street. It was near midnight, and he felt tempted to enter the place and indulge in some savory dish before going home.

The place was bright and cozy within, and everything looked especially inviting. He had never been in the place before, but he had seen keen, smart-looking men passing in and out of it, therefore he did not scruple entering it himself at this hour.

The room was tastefully fitted up, with the tables separated in stalls partitioned off by curtains.

The polite waiter evidently classed him as a "regular" and treated him with utmost courtesy, recommending certain specialties, which he ordered and ate with great relish.

He asked the waiter to bring his check with his coffee. He had just paid his bill, when two men passed and entered the stall next his own. Fortunately the waiter was standing directly in the entrance of his stall, thus shielding him from view. One of the men wore a heavy tan-colored overcoat with large white pearl buttons, whom he instantly recognized as Mrs. Von Comp's man, Edgerton.

His own back was almost directly against the curtain which separated the two stalls.

Entering their stall rather noisily, the two men drew off their topcoats, Edgerton hanging his upon a peg directly where the dividing curtain touched the wall.

For a moment it swayed back and forth, then hung with one large pocket looking Dr. McKim impudently in the eye, held in that position by a corner of the brown velvet collar protruding through the space between the wall and curtain.

Dr. McKim thought nothing of the bulging appearance of the coat pocket, nor of the corners of a number of papers sticking therefrom; but he did smile to think that he could, without especially eavesdropping, hear the conversation and know what kind of a chap Mrs. Von Comp's man was. He was little prepared to listen to what was actually uttered by this same Edgerton.

Edgerton began by saying in a boastful tone: "I say, Barney, I have had a strenuous day this day, my boy, but I brought home the goods."

"Now what divilment have yez been up ter?" said Barney.

"Oh, I can tell you a story to put Sherlock Holmes out of his job," continued Edgerton.

"I'm thinkin' it's a wunder they haven't made yez inspector uv polace this long ago," sarcastically responded Barney.

"Don't make sport of it, Barney; it's as good as reading a book. Now listen to what I tell you. It is important, and there may be a lot of money in it for me, and, maybe, for you; that depends."

At this point Dr. McKim saw a hand dip into the coat pocket and take therefrom a bundle of letters

and papers. Still he was not interested beyond knowing something more of Edgerton's story to Barney.

After taking out the papers Edgerton continued:

"Barney, these papers may be worth a fortune. Do you remember of my telling you last summer of picking up a vag. in Central Park, and of his being paroled, with a century plant in his mit, and how I lost him?"

"Yes, I remimber thot, very well," replied Barney.

"Well," continued Edgerton, "that chap was not a tramp—just as I said at the time—but now he turns out to be a 'gentleman burglar' who attends swell receptions and all that, and who do you think he is? Do you recall that I followed him to a house on Fifth Avenue, between Thirty-eighth and Thirty-ninth Streets?"

Dr. McKim pricked up his ears at this.

"Now, listen, Barney, and don't fall out of your chair," said Edgerton.

At this moment the waiter entered their stall, and by the clink of glass and the fizz of the syphon it was apparent that two highballs were made.

"Success to yez," said Barney, and the glasses were touched. "Go on wid yez Skylark Holmes story; I'm dapely intheristed."

"Well," said Edgerton, "this gentleman burglar is a personal friend of Mr. Chester Von Comp, and his name is Dr. Paul McKim."

It was fortunate that the waiter had again entered the stall and was rattling things about, for instead of Barney falling out of his chair, Dr.

McKim came near taking a header. To say he was astonished was putting it mild; yet being a man of rare discretion and nerve, he quickly gathered his rattled senses and waited impatiently to hear more.

The waiter having again left the compartment, Edgerton continued:

"Now, I will tell you the Sherlock Holmes part. This chap's stage name is Peter Kelly. That's the name he gave at the time I picked him up in the Park and took him in for inspection by Mrs. Von Comp, who is president of the Saving Society. Against my advice she gave him a hundred plunks and paroled him, on his own face, for three days. Of course he never returned, which makes him due for obtaining money under false pretenses. You see, he was to return the money or turn up himself in three days. He did neither, and Mrs. Von Comp holds his acknowledgment.

"Now what do you think of this fellow's nerve; he actually had the gall to call, with Mr. Von Comp, at the house and to come to Mrs. Von Comp's reception. That's where I nailed him, for sure.

"Well, it seems 'Old Sec.' had it on this duck for something else, and she recognized Peter Kelly—at least that is what I think, although I have not got through with my investigation. 'Old Sec.' was fired three days after Peter Kelly was paroled. She had stolen a lot of stuff from the Saving Society and the old lady nailed her; they found one hundred dollars on her person. Well, I told you of my devilish luck about some papers which I took from 'Old Sec.'s' trunk, and how 'Old Sec.' and

her detective brother were turning heaven and earth to beat me to them. Ha, ha! it makes me laugh; that smart aleck actually had keys made for the outside doors of the office and gave them to me to get inside and take the impression of the inside lock, even showing me how to do the business; then he was to make a key. I took the impression all right, all right, and, Barney, thanks to you, I got a key made first; and, by gad, Barney, here are the papers and here is a photograph of Dr. Paul McKim, or Peter Kelly, or whatever his name is! I haven't looked at them myself yet."

At this juncture the waiter again entered and was putting some dishes on the table. A man, apparently a headwaiter, came to the entrance of Dr. McKim's stall and asked if he had been served. The doctor lifted his coffee cup, as though drinking, and nodded in the affirmative, and to his great relief the man passed on.

Suddenly there was a rustling about the coat hanging on the wall, and a hand was seen pressing the package of letters again into the pocket.

"We'll hurry through, Barney, and then go to my room and go through these papers," said Edgerton. "You let me in once, and if there is anything in this, you are in on the game."

The coat swung back and forth, with the buttons scraping against the wall, as though undecided whether to balance with the pocket toward Dr. McKim, or to whirl back the other way, with the papers on the other side, finally, though, favoring the doctor.

It was the most trying moment Dr. McKim had

ever experienced in all his life. It seemed an age before anything occurred to break the spell.

The drinks were taking effect, and the waiter, it seemed, was too slow to suit Edgerton, who now began to swear and fuss with him.

Taking advantage of the noise, Dr. McKim, with lightning quickness, lifted the letters and papers from the pocket, thrust them into that of his own great coat, and, in another minute, was fleeing from the place like a hunted thief.

It seemed a mile to the first corner, and even after he had turned this, and was eagerly looking for a cab in which to quickly get away from the vicinity, he thought he could hear the murmur of excited voices and the shuffling of a pursuing mob. Hurrying on, he gained the second corner without mishap, and then feeling secure, he more leisurely walked to Fifth Avenue and to his own house. His first experience as a fleeing thief was not devoid of exhilaration and stimulating excitement.

He was eager to see what his first effort at picking pockets had netted him. Feeling guilty, he did not care to face honest old Plimpton; therefore he let himself in with his night-key and went directly to his rooms.

Drawing the bulky package from his coat pocket, he found it consisted of four parts—first, a large packet of letters bound together with a strong cord, perhaps thirty or more of them; then there was a package containing some half dozen or more neatly folded legal-looking documents. The third contained a photograph, surely of himself, though the beard was shorter. There was the waving hair

drooping over the same brow in the same manner. The eyes had his expression; the mustache drooped exactly like his; in fact, every feature was his. Yet there seemed to be an unkempt or careless something about it that was disagreeable for him to contemplate. He never had but one photograph taken in his life, and that was years ago, while yet a beardless youth. Here, indeed, was a mystery.

Laying the picture down he picked up the fourth section, which was a large envelope rolled about a lace kerchief and secured by a rubber band. The band being removed, the envelope straightened itself out and showed that it had been sealed and had not been opened. It was addressed to James Mc-Birney, at a number on Fourth Avenue.

Taking the perfumed handkerchief by one corner he shook out the folds cautiously, and gasped as he saw drop upon the desk a magnificent pearl necklace.

"This Edgerton is a professional thief," he said under his breath, "and he has caused me to become the custodian of his plunder. My God! what is this mess in which I am tangled?" and he picked up the picture and again scrutinized it long and earnestly.

"This is undoubtedly my double, and I am the victim of mistaken identity. This matter is no joke. This necklace is a very embarrassing and incriminating phase of the case, but to what extent am I involved? Edgerton declares I am a 'gentleman burglar,' whatever that title implies."

Again he ran the beautiful pearls through his fingers, and he wondered who the unfortunate

owner could be, and how he could go about restoring them. The handkerchief only bore a daintily embroidered "S" in one corner. Then he began to examine the packages of papers. Opening the bundle of letters, he selected the first one, opened and read it:

To the Honorable President of The Saving Society.

DEAR MADAM:—Herein I return to you the one hundred dollars (in two fifty-dollar bills) which you so graciously loaned to me yesterday. Kindly destroy my obligation. which you hold.

I desire to express to you my gratitude for your willing generosity, and to wish for you and your estimable institution the very best success.

I may, at some future time, be able to explain to you my ability to return this loan so promptly. I do assure you now that it was honestly and honorably obtained. I am not a criminal. The greatest crime of which I can conceive would be the abuse of such generosity as yours.

With sincere thanks, I beg to remain

Most respectfully yours,

PETER KELLY.

As he finished reading this letter Dr. McKim exclaimed:

"Well, Peter, you have been grossly slandered and imposed upon, even if you have placed me in an embarrassing position. You are no 'derelict,' providing, of course, you did return the hundred, and I take it that the hundred found on 'Old Sec.', whatever that is, was your honestly obtained money."

One by one the letters were examined—all of

this package referred to Saving Society matters. "Old Sec.," it was evident, had confiscated much money belonging to the Society. It seemed, too, that the letters were kept for blackmailing purposes. Those who returned money advanced to them by the Society would be the very ones who desired to regain respectable standing, and, in time, might regain a position to make it worth while to "touch" them occasionally.

There were two letters indicating that "Old Sec." had made financial connections with former "society acquaintances."

With the exception of the Peter Kelly note, these letters were not of interest to Dr. McKim. Pushing them aside, he now took up the bundle of papers. They seemed to promise a more entertaining story. Spying the long envelope which had been wrapped about the pearls, he picked it up, read the inscription, and pondered a moment before deciding to open it.

"I wonder who James McBirney is and who addressed this to him," he mused, as he fumbled the letter.

Taking up his paper-knife he ran it along the edge of the envelope, and then drew forth the contents.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "this is interesting. This Peter Kelly must be an important personage."

The contents consisted of some pages of legal cap, being a copy of the notes taken on the occasion of the examination of "Peter Kelly, tramp," and that which astonished and dumfounded Dr. McKim was a letter addressed to James McBirney by

his sister, Mary McBirney, who reveals herself as "Old Sec." It read:

MY DEAR BROTHER JAMES:

I have reasons to think that Mrs. V—— suspects me. Of what, I do not know; but I see her watching me closer than ever. I think she has been put onto the fact that Mr. H. loaned you \$50, for she asked me yesterday to show her the record of his case. Fortunately I was able to quickly produce it; so you see I was right. Not for twice fifty could I kill these records, but H. need not know that the negative and the copies of the records in his case, signed by me as secretary of the Saving Society, are not the originals.

The significant thing was she asked me if I had a brother on the police force, and if you knew anything about this H. case, or had had any business dealings with him.

Now you will understand why I told you that it is dangerous for you to come to my rooms. She is a foxy old duck and would just as leave put a detective to watching her secretary as anyone else. While I believe Edgerton is safe, I do not wholly trust him. I think it wise though to let him think I do.

But what I especially want to tell you will not keep, and fearing the unexpected might happen, I am going to drop this into the mail this evening, and I will try to see you about it at the earliest day that I think it is safe.

I enclose the record of one of the most puzzling cases that we have ever had here. Mrs. V. picked up in the park day before yesterday, a tramp; that is, he was playing tramp, or I am no judge of crooks.

Mrs. V. seemed to be hypnotized by the man, and only asked him a few simple questions, which you

will find on another sheet, then handed him one hundred dollars and turned him loose, with a promise to return the money or report in person to-day. Edgerton thought he lost him and so reported to Mrs. V.

Now, I knew this was a prize package, and you will not scold me too loudly when I tell you that I turned thief and steamed open the letters until I found one from Peter Kelly, containing two brand-new fifty-dollar bills, which I now have in my possession, together with his letter. I would not take five hundred dollars for this letter and the negative, which I have also swiped.

Doubtless you are wondering why. I will tell you. This Peter Kelly is a high-toned crook. As a tramp, evidently for some criminal purpose, he is Peter Kelly, chemist. As a gentleman he is Dr. Paul McKim, chemist, and close personal friend of Mr. Chester V. What do you think of that?

I will tell you how I learned this so promptly. Edgerton lost his man at No. — Fifth Avenue. He is too dumb to see what I saw about this fellow, and to put this and that together. Yesterday I got leave of absence for the whole day after nine o'clock. Opposite No. —, you know, is Mrs. Leason's place. I went up there and asked her to allow me to sit at her window and watch the avenue for a certain carriage to pass. She knows I often do this, and asked me no questions.

You can imagine my surprise when, about eleven o'clock, I saw Chester V. and Peter Kelly—I am positive it was he—go up the stoop of No. — and go in.

Now, James, if you ever had a chance to do a little real clever work this is it. Of course I do not know how confidential these two men are, but if it can be established that they are friends, then the photographic plate and the note which I have are easily

worth a thousand. This is why I am anxious to get this to you before anything can happen here. I am positive she has no evidence by which she could openly accuse me of anything criminal. I do not care much if she does get angry and discharge me. I have enough important cases in hand to put me about right for next winter.

I will describe Peter Kelly. Oh! I quite forgot to say the mail carrier, whom I know, told me that Dr. Paul McKim, a chemist, lived at No. — Fifth Avenue.

He is a tall, fine-looking fellow, with blond hair and beard; his good clothes do not disguise him. After seeing him once one will not forget him. When I see you I will give you a closer description of him. After to-day he will be a 'derelict' on the books of the Saving Society, therefore you are perfectly safe in giving him a good hard bluff.

There is something about this man that I cannot describe, which makes me think I have seen him before. Doubtless you will think me foolish, but there is a close resemblance between his picture and that of the Duke of Hurlstone. You, yourself, must admit this when you see the two.

Would it not be strange if we should find this lost son after all these years? Of course I am almost crazy to get a look at his forehead, to see if the family mark is there, but that is, I suppose, next to impossible. I had no particular reason to think of this until I had thought about the matter, or I might have been more inquisitive about Peter Kelly at the time of his examination. I was then only impressed by the idea that he was not a genuine tramp.

I have not had time to look over the old Scotland Yard record in which the reward was mentioned, but will before I can see you.

I do not think it wise for you to see me until I learn more of what she knows about the H. case. In the meantime you get a careful line on this Dr. McKim, and I will so queer him here that should he be arrested there will be no kick-backs.

It is most important to ascertain on what terms of intimacy he and Chester V. are, also if he has any club or social standing.

I will be at the drug store 'phone, as usual, at 6:30 o'clock to-morrow, and you may let me know if you get this letter. But you must not talk business too much over the 'phone.

MARY.

After reading this letter Dr. McKim sat for several minutes pondering over the mystery. Suddenly he leaped to his feet and exclaimed excitedly:

"My God! this is no laughing matter. Under ordinary circumstances I would go to police headquarters and expose the thing, but there are elements of truth here which prove conclusively that these people believe me to be Peter Kelly.

"Evidently this crooked old secretary will soak me for her derelict vagabond, if she has her way.

"Great heaven! I had forgotten Miss Von Comp's actions towards me. Can it be possible she, too, has recognized me as Peter Kelly? I believe I now have a reasonable explanation of her conduct. But she, undoubtedly, based her conviction upon this mark upon my forehead. What bearing could it have upon the Peter Kelly case, and why should she care enough about a tramp to so fully remember his features? Maybe the old secretary is

in her confidence. Ugh! the very thought nauseates me. It is impossible that this sweet girl could deign to speak familiarly to such an old wildcat.

"I curse the hour I allowed my senses to leave me long enough to write that devilish letter to her. Yet she must read my innocence in it.

"What can I do? I dare not confide in Chester in either case; yet prompt action is essential. I at least have been spared up to this time, doubtless due to Edgerton's having gained possession of these papers, and I, as evidently, now hold the same advantage over all of this plotting crowd. Was there ever such a remarkable coincidence before, in a similar case?

"Ah, but these pearls; that is a dangerous element. Should they be found in my possession I would surely be in a plight. To whom can they possibly belong? I have read of no recent robbery. I wonder if these papers will reveal anything." And he took up the bundle of documents and examined them superficially.

They seemed to throw no light upon the subject, and he was about to gather them up to put them away, when he observed that the last one was very unlike the others. The paper was an old-fashioned English parchment, quite yellow with age. It was bulky and tied with tape, the knots being sealed with wax. It was apparent it had not been opened for many years.

On one side was the filing memorandum, designating its nature and purpose, but this gave no clue to Dr. McKim, beyond the fact that it referred to the Duke of Hurlstone, of whom the secretary

had written in her letter to her brother, James Mc-Birney.

This then was the document which she was to examine before seeing him, therefore, it might be very interesting.

Assuming that this would be worthy of careful perusal, he gathered together all the others, excepting the McBirney letter, and the papers bearing directly upon the Peter Kelly case, including the pictures, and making a package of them, placed them in a small iron safe in his bedchamber.

He studied the string of pearls for a while, then also slipped them into the safe, but with some hesitancy.

"They will be as safe there as anywhere," he said, "but should they be found in there by any accident of fortune, what possible explanation could I make?"

Closing the safe, he took up the yellow document. It read, on the outer fold:

Case No. 16,487.

Matter of the Duke of Hurlstone.

Recorded in book 70, page 309.

Date of entry —

Abandoned, and filed as closed—

Breaking the seals and the tapes Dr. McKim unfolded the document, which covered many pages, and was to him like a message from the dead past.

He glanced at the little red clock which stood upon the top of his desk, and was surprised to find it was near two o'clock in the morning. He hesitated, then his curiosity prevailed, and he settled

himself to read the story of the "House of Hurlstone."

The document proved to be more like a manuscript than a legal record. The first pages were a legal form which stated the nature of the case when first presented to the Scotland Yard detectives. A reward of five thousand pounds sterling was offered for the discovery and return to the Duke of Hurlstone of an infant son who had been abducted.

The record recounted that all diligent effort had been made through a long period of years without locating the lost or stolen infant, and that in the opinion of the best experts the child was no longer living. Then to complete the record there was attached to these papers a carefully prepared statement, or rather a story, made by someone, and which did not seem in proper place, after the death of the Duke of Hurlstone.

It is this history which is worthy a special chapter in this story.

Evidently the story had been prepared for some other purpose, and had been added to the Scotland Yard records at a period much later than the time of marking the case "closed," for it would seem that many of the details were of a nature to be relegated to the family closet rather than deposited in the archives of a police department. Moreover, it recounted occurrences of later periods.

We will relate the story in full. The impression it made upon the mind of Dr. McKim may be easily imagined.

CHAPTER VI

THE HOUSE OF HURLSTONE

"FOR more than a century no ax had marred or maimed the impenetrable forest, which, like a primeval jungle, encircled the great landed estate of Hurlstone.

"James Malcomb Hercroft was a soldier of fortune under King George, and was made a duke, as a reward for some special service during the wars which decimated Poland, which is not recorded in the family history, and matters less for the purpose of this story. He was a rover, this soldier duke, and his son and heir inherited this trait, as, in fact, did the subsequent line of dukes, in a greater or less degree.

"Not until the time of the second duke does it appear that the dukedom was a large apportionment of land. At that time, it consisted of a vast area of uncultivated marsh, surrounded by a virgin forest of heavy timber. In the center of the marsh was a high piece of ground, upon which the first duke had erected a ramshackle castle, without architectural grace or picturesque arrangement.

"Men and animals lived under the same roof, and the mode of life was semi-barbaric. This was the will and whim of the first, rough, soldier duke, and remained practically the same during the life

of the second duke of 'Hercroftden,' as the place was named, simply by the addition of an appropriate descriptive affix to the family name.

"The second duke kept about him a large retinue, and because of the fact that little of the land was tilled or cultivated, and that no visible signs of support were there, strange stories of the devious ways by which the old duke's outfit was maintained were circulated by gossip. A definite accusation of piracy, on the part of the master, might frequently be heard, embellished by the positive statement that both the second duke and his father were wont to go on long, secret excursions, returning laden with rich plunder.

"Were this gossip, truth, or fiction, it matters not; it is sufficient that this savage old duke of Hercroftden was as free from the embarrassment of government as any man in England. He liberally contributed to the King's treasury, and without the embarrassing process of a tax levy. The King was satisfied, so was he, and differences ended there. He remained unmolested, in a life of barbaric splendor.

"It was recorded, on very good authority, that the King himself occasionally sneaked out to this rendezvous of mystery, and he and the Duke used to curse each other soundly over their brew, the King even chiding him for living a life of greater ease and freedom than he himself enjoyed.

"It remained for the third duke of Hercroftden to organize and develop the estate. He established a code of laws to govern his yeomanry, adopted the best known agricultural methods, built a church,

provided for the education of his people and for their betterment generally. Before his death he had the joy and pleasure of seeing a well-regulated and governed community about him.

"The organization was complete and a working success, when at a ripe age he died, his only son becoming the fourth duke.

"In this fourth generation of the Hercrofts began the eccentricities which marked the subsequent line.

"The fourth duke manifested the roving spirit of the first and second. The jungle life did not suit his fancy. The humdrum of taking care of the affairs of the estate was most irksome to him.

"His father had brought the unincumbered lands under a high state of cultivation and they were now so profitable the young master could not begin to spend his income with his present environments. He felt a desire to expand, in both mind and body, consequently he devised a scheme whereby he could assure a loyal and faithful yeomanry in his absence.

"Obtaining the privilege of changing the name of his dukedom, he assembled all of his people in order to announce and execute his eccentric plans.

"When all of his men had gathered about him he drew forth from a buckskin bag a round stone, and harangued them thus:

"'I am going to perpetuate this estate by distributing the use of its lands to my people, whom I shall designate as my tenantry. I shall, at the same time, develop hereon, a yeomanry, renowned for great physical strength and endurance.

"'The strength of the son shall be gauged by

that of his father, and when he falls short of his father's strength he shall not participate, directly, in the use of any of my lands. This direct benefit shall be a reward towards which the son shall strive, and when his strength exceeds that of his father it shall bring its own reward in proportion to this excellence.

“ ‘This stone weighs one pound. I am going to cast it from where I stand ten times, and a circle drawn about this castle corresponding on all sides with the distance of my ten throws shall constitute the immediate grounds of the manor house.

“ ‘The great circling forest surrounding the estate shall be maintained as it is, as a hunting preserve for myself and my friends. It shall be exempt from the occupation and use of anyone else and shall at all times be under the exclusive protection and control of my game-keepers and wardens.

“ ‘Between the castle grounds and my great forest are all of my tillable lands; the use of these I shall apportion among you, who are twenty-one years of age or older, in the following manner: Each man shall stand upon a designated spot and shall hurl this stone in four directions from a center, and, the lands comprised within the space marked by lines drawn to the spot where the stone lies shall be wholly for his use so long as he remains a tenant of my estate. The intervening spaces shall remain free for future distribution. This will encircle my castle with my own loyal tenantry.

“ ‘Each tenant shall pay annually unto the estate, tithes equal to ten per cent. of the gross value

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of his crops, and the kinds of his crops shall be governed by the steward of my estate, who shall also fix the valuations placed upon the crops.

“‘As your sons grow to manhood, at the age of twenty-one years they, too, shall in like manner draw their homesteads from my lands, until all the remaining land is exhausted. Thus I hope to develop a strength in the new generation far exceeding that of the present, the sons casting the stone to far greater distances than their fathers, thereby securing greater rewards in land.

“‘This estate shall, from this day forth, be called “Hurlstone,” and my title shall be the “Duke of the House of Hurlstone.”

“‘This stone shall remain in its treasury as the standard measure for its lands in dealing with its tenantry.’

“Then he himself cast the stone first.

“The first tenant to cast the stone was James McBirney.

“When this wise and generous distribution of the use of his lands was perfected, it established for the first Duke of Hurlstone a yeomanry second to none in all England. Moreover, it yielded him a tremendous income—much greater than he could spend. In his privacy he laughed long and boisterously at his own acumen. He could now go and come at his pleasure with the certainty of always finding at home a full coffer and friendly cohorts.

“Calling to a confidential interview his parish clergyman, a man of forty, he entrusted to him the accounts and the treasury of the House of Hurlstone.

“ His wife, the Duchess, was an ordinary woman without family or fortune. She had died leaving him one son. Entrusting this son to the care of the clergyman, and instructing him regarding his early education, he started upon a long journey out into the brilliant world. It was known that he found and partook of about all of the revelry and dissipations of that period.

“ From time to time he would return to his estate, look over things, give some trivial order regarding the conduct of his son, and then start on new adventures.

“ At the age of nineteen years the heir to Hurlstone was given a tutor and a valet, and was himself permitted to see the teeming outside world.

It is probably fortunate that history does not authentically chronicle the escapades of this eccentric progeny of an eccentric father.

“ Not less than a half dozen times in three years was all England astew over him.

“ His worthy tutor was sent to a madhouse in London because he insisted that he had under his charge two, instead of one, sons of Hurlstone. This illusion became in after years a theme of discussion on the part of the most learned scientists in the world. It was declared that the *enfant terrible* had impressed the old man's mind with two separate and distinct individualities—the one, a splendid youth of fine, manly and moral qualities, while the other was a very devil incarnate.

“ From time to time it was necessary to ask the aid of the constabulary to locate the wild and way-

ward youth turned loose upon the world without a guide.

"He was often found in remote or obscure country places, in dire financial distress, yet perfectly contented with his sodden associates of the lowest type.

"Again he would be found about the music halls, drinking, dancing, or fighting. It was said, at this time, that one of the marks of identification was a chronic black eye.

"He had no thought of the value of money; in fact, had little need of such mental worry, for his father's was an unstinting hand.

"‘Let him go the limit,’ was the Duke's order. ‘He will find his craw good and full before the age when I began.’

"Finally, however, his notoriety became greater than even his profligate father could withstand, and at the end of three years of unbridled liberty he was ordered home to Hurlstone.

"The Duke was a selfish, unthinking man, and without mercy when it came to executing any plan which might develop in his own eccentric brain; therefore he would listen to no protests, but married his son to Betty March, eldest daughter of Henry March, the good clergyman who had practically raised him as his own son till he was the age of nineteen, and who was the faithful steward of the estate.

"He and Betty had always quarreled and fought with each other like cats and dogs, therefore this union was most unhappy.

"The perverse Duke evidently knew the injus-

tice and incongruity of this forced union, as was shown by the reason he gave for it. 'I'm going to breed some wildcats for my forest,' he said.

"Shortly thereafter the Duke died, and the erstwhile dissipated son became the second Duke of the House of Hurlstone, and Betty March, the clergyman's daughter, became a duchess.

"Although they had fought before their marriage, Betty made a good wife and a diplomatic duchess. To the great surprise of all, she took the Duke in hand, and, for a brief time, made something of a man of him. Nevertheless he longed to again join the ranks of the joyous. He loved the chorus girls, the singing girls, the dancing girls. One year after his marriage, and but a few weeks after his father's death, one morning he was missing, and for three weeks no trace of him could be found.

"He as suddenly returned home, and no one questioned him. His appearance was quite sufficient to tell where he had been and with what companions he had associated during his absence. He had gone on one of his oldtime debauches.

"He now became ugly and morose. His eccentricities emphasized those of his ancestors, and he accentuated what they had done before him.

"Where formerly the great woodland had been kept stocked with ordinary game, he imported a herd of wild boars of the most vicious type and turned them loose in the woods.

"To the amazement of all the country about him, there arrived one day an immense iron cage, divided into compartments, each part containing a

wildcat, lynx, or some other vicious beast. Another cage contained some fifty or more American raccoons and foxes.

"All of these, including the wildcats, he turned loose in his hunting preserves.

"The whole surrounding country was scared half to death. He laughed at and increased their fright by declaring he had on the way from India a whole cargo of tigers, lions, and elephants; but these never came.

"His spells of fiendish deviltry lasted from two to three weeks, then would follow periods of relaxation, good temper, and sweet disposition. Hope would rise in Duchess Betty that her crazy lord would recover his senses, only to be dashed by the never-failing symptoms—a lowering countenance, dull eyes, curled lip, and uncertain movements, as though watching for an opportunity to escape unseen. It was very curious, too, that he was seldom seen to take his departure, but would suddenly be missing from the house, when a great horn would be blown to arouse all the tenantry to the fact that the master was on a 'rampage.'

"He possessed a wild black stallion which seemed to imbibe his master's fiendish spirit, for he would fiercely attack everything he could bring down with his ever-ready hoofs and teeth. This dreadful horse was called 'Satan.'

"It was the crazy Duke's delight to mount Satan and run amuck over his estate. In this way he had maimed a large portion of the stock of the tenantry; and hence the reason for sounding the alarm. When three long blasts of the horn were heard the

tenants hurriedly housed their cattle and barred their doors; then, trembling, they would listen for the hoof-beats of Satan, hoping and praying he might take some other course than by their houses to reach the great forest. Within this forest he would remain for days at a time; no one dared to search for him there for the fear of meeting a violent death.

"The gamekeepers, like the tenants, hid when they knew the Duke was coming. Once one, more bold than the others, crept through the forest and watched his master for several days. He reported that he saw him kill some of the game, build a fire, roast, and eat it; then he talked to some imaginary companions. Satan remained near his master, and the man swore he saw his master feeding raw meat to the horse.

"He used neither bridle nor saddle when riding Satan.

"On one, and perhaps the last, of these escapades, the Duke remained away longer than usual, and the Duchess feeling certain he was insane, became uneasy and sent out the whole tenantry to search for him.

"With hounds and horn they searched the great forest without avail, and they had gathered about the stables awaiting further orders, when they were startled into a panic on seeing black Satan, with his ears flat to his head and his vicious teeth snapping to the right and left, coming at full speed toward them. Upon his back was the Duke, sitting with his face toward the horse's tail and yelling like a madman.

"Satan dashed into the yards, and his master, dirty, unkempt, and haggard, dropped lightly to the ground, laughing loudly at the discomfiture of the tenantry. Saying not a word, he entered the house, leaving them staring in open-mouthed wonderment.

"It was inevitable such a man should sooner or later bring upon himself the fear and hatred of all about him.

"The Duke himself seemed to realize this, gave up his escapades with Satan, and almost ceased leaving his estate.

"He knew absolutely nothing of business affairs, and seemed to care less. His income was much greater than he could spend, yet, singular to say, he was not a spendthrift, requiring little money for personal expenditures. He made occasional visits to London, remaining but a few days, and returning in a downcast and remorseful state.

"It was natural that the Duchess should shun him. They seldom addressed each other. The father of Betty went plodding along, attending to the young Duke's affairs with the same careful and scrupulous precision that had been his wont while the elder Duke lived, seldom consulting his young master. In the meantime wealth piled upon wealth, and the tenantry thrived and were happy, their only cause for fear being their master's eccentricities.

"Eighteen months after his marriage to Betty March a boy baby was born to her, a most beautiful, strong, and healthy child. Duchess Betty made an ideal mother and felt compensated for the estrangement between the Duke and herself. But a dark cloud hovered about the horizon of Hurl-

stone that day, and at the very hour an heir to the manor was born, this cloud hung over the cottage of one of the under gardeners.

"Beneath that humble roof a handsome, dark-eyed, olive-skinned young woman gave birth also to a male child, exactly at the same hour the noble heir was born.

"A few days previously this young woman had stopped at the Duke's hunting-lodge, upon the border of his forest, and had sent for the master himself. Later the Duke was seen talking to the under gardener, and that night the young woman was secretly conveyed to the cottage.

"It was quickly known that the young woman was Pretty Laffelle, a singing and dancing girl from one of the leading London music halls. She did not hesitate to say that the Duke was the father of her child, nor did the Duke, to anyone's knowledge, deny her charge; on the contrary, he demonstrated by his solicitude for her welfare and comfort that he would not shirk the responsibilities, even though it did appear like two establishments under practically one roof. He was not a man to balk at trifling scruples.

"Necessarily the Duchess learned of this disgraceful state of affairs, and she at once estranged herself from the Duke and denied him the privilege of seeing his own child.

"The Duke was very angry at Betty's display of spirit, and at once began to assert his ferocious self again.

"While he was never seen with Pretty Laffelle, there was an understanding established between

them, and it was at his command that she was supplied with every luxury, including flowers from the conservatories.

"At last it was revealed that the mediator was one raw-boned, high-cheeked Meg McBirney, wife of the under gardener, James McBirney.

"Secrecy was no longer practiced. Each day, and sometimes twice a day, Meg McBirney was seen entering the Manor House, where she would speak briefly with the master, then some new luxury would be bestowed upon Pretty Laffelle, whose bright-eyed baby had begun to appear daily in the brawny arms of the under gardener's wife.

One day Meg was seen to enter the Manor House with a large basket upon her arm. The butler drove all the servants to remote places, and from any points from whence they might see what the basket contained; but it was said that some lusty cries made it essential for Meg to retreat hastily, and betrayed the fact that the master of Hurlstone had expressed a desire to see a part of his brood. This, reaching the Duchess' ears, angered her more than ever, as well as adding much to her burden of sorrow and shame.

"Thus things progressed till midsummer, when the children began to appear each day in the sunshine. The nurses were less scrupulous and delicate about the matter, and found occasion to drift together and compare notes. All the servants about the place, even the tenantry, took a sly peep, and all agreed that the babies were as alike as two peas in a pod. One could have sworn they were twins.

"One day the two nurses placed their separate

charges side by side upon the turf. They were dressed identically alike. Suddenly the Duchess' nurse snatched up her baby and fled precipitately to her mistress.

"Excited and breathless, she attempted to explain something to her mistress, utterly failing in which, she fell down upon the floor in a fit of hysterical weeping. Upon being calmed, she was able to explain that she had placed the child upon the ground for a moment, when Meg McBirney came along with the child of Pretty Laffelle, placed it by the side of the other baby, and then engaged her in conversation. Then James McBirney, the under gardener, sneaked up and changed the positions of the children. Had it not been that she had seen the act with her own eyes she never would have been able to tell which was which, for they were dressed exactly alike, and each had the family birthmark upon its right temple—a red heart.

"Upon hearing this story Duchess Betty was much alarmed. She could see how easy a matter it would be to exchange the babies and not a living soul would know it.

"This Pretty Laffelle must be a bold, bad creature, or else she would not thus parade her shame; therefore she would be just such a person as would connive to steal from the legitimate heir his heritage. Moreover, it was not beyond belief that the equally shameless Duke would aid in this treacherous scheme.

"No more was the Duchess' child permitted to go beyond the nursery until proper steps could be taken to protect it against this imminent danger.

She was determined not to allow this mistress of the Duke to substitute her illegitimate child for the true heir of Hurlstone.

"She was almost prostrated by this new calamity, and on the fourth day she could stand the strain no longer, but summoned a trusted courier and sent an urgent message to an eminent London surgeon, who later was smuggled into the house in the disguise of a servant.

"This surgeon placed upon her baby boy some secret mark known only to him and herself. She alone attended the child during the healing of the tiny wound. The surgeon assured her that the scar would never be eradicated by natural growth. The nurse and all the other servants remained in total ignorance of what had been done.

"Now the child began to appear in the open again. The Duke was much puzzled to know what was going on, began to make careful inquiries, and soon learned of the surreptitious visit of the surgeon.

"Divining the purpose, he flew into a dreadful rage and went posthaste to London, no one knew for what. But in a few days he returned, apparently satisfied with his visit.

"One bright sunny morning the Duchess' nurse sat peacefully under the shade of a drooping honeysuckle vine, crooning over a sweet-faced cherub which rested in a large basket at her feet. Without warning a strong pair of hands clasped her from behind, and before she could make an outcry she was gagged and bound to the strong trellis upon which the vines were trained. Then she was

told that if she remained perfectly quiet no harm would be done her and she would soon be released.

"It was perhaps ten minutes before she felt the cord which bound her relax, and she cautiously released her hands, snatched away the bandage from her mouth and eyes, and looked about her. She only saw a man wearing a blue blouse fleeing through the dense undergrowth of shrubbery. She declared it looked very much like the form of James McBirney, the under gardener.

"The basket was in disorder, and the child almost smothered with the downy covering.

"Seizing the basket, the nurse ran wildly to her mistress to tell her of the strange adventure, at which story that worthy lady was much frightened.

"Taking up the boy, she made a hasty examination and quickly observed what the excited nurse had not seen, a tiny cauterized wound on the right side of the forehead and directly beneath the little red heart, the birthmark. A close inspection revealed that a perfect cross had been cut in such a manner as to make certain that the scar would remain there forevermore. It had been done by a skilled surgeon. Pinned to the child's clothing was a note advising the treatment to insure a prompt healing of the wound.

"It was evident this disfigurement was the only harm done to the child, and it required no deep thought to guess that it was perpetrated by the Duke in revenge for what she had done for the child's protection, and which she believed was her own profound secret.

"When the children again appeared it was found that both had received the mark of the cross beneath the red heart birthmark.

"Things went along in about the same manner until the children were about one year old, when it was whispered that the Duke had quarreled with Pretty Laffelle, had provided her with funds, and was to send her and her baby to London, to the great relief of Duchess Betty.

"Pretty Laffelle wept copiously upon taking her departure, and begged to see the Duke at his hunting lodge before leaving. The fact that he would not comply with her tearful request gave truth to the rumor of a misunderstanding. As the coach left the manor grounds the pretty dancing-girl-mother stood up, holding her baby aloft, and swore vengeance against the House of Hurlstone.

"Meg McBirney had a daughter, Mary, fourteen years of age, and a son, James, thirteen. Little Mary McBirney went with Pretty Laffelle to London as nurse, and a year later young James McBirney also went to London.

"When the heir of Hurlstone was two years old a great calamity fell upon that house; the child was kidnapped in the glaring light of day. There was not a single clue by which he could be traced.

"The Duke, awakened by this disastrous event, aroused himself as never before. He exhausted every possible means to recover his son and heir, but to no purpose. Not even the offer of a reward of five thousand pounds produced results. Scotland Yard detectives scoured the world, without a single clue.

"It proved that not even the McBirneys shared the secret, for Mary was found acting as assistant nurse in a London hospital, and James was doing messenger service in the Scotland Yard headquarters. It was shown conclusively that they knew absolutely nothing of the case. Mary had been turned away by Pretty Laffelle shortly after reaching London.

"That Pretty Laffelle was the culprit was quite certain, for she had wholly disappeared, leaving not the slightest clue behind her. The Duke of Hurlstone had paid her a large sum of money, therefore she was well provided with funds.

"There was one single clue, known only to the Duke himself. There was a young physician and chemist in London who had formerly known Pretty Laffelle before she became a popular music hall singer. By diligent inquiry the Duke ascertained that this same physician had paid constant attention to the pretty singer after she returned to London, and it was thought he had married her. He, too, was gone, no one knew where.

"This young man's name was George Bernard McKim. He and his brother were noted in London as chemists, as well as physicians and surgeons.

"The search for the missing heir was continued, and the reward stood, but never a clue was obtained. After many years the case was marked closed and the papers were filed away among the 'Mysterious Disappearances.'

"James McBirney prospered and became recorder for Scotland Yard.

"Duchess Betty was totally prostrated by the tragic loss of her son and became a recluse, as did also the Duke. His remorse was pitiful. This mutual grief finally mollified Duchess Betty's resentment toward him and they were in a degree reconciled.

"Eight years after the disappearance of the son a girl baby was born to the House of Hurlstone, and she was named Elizabeth Malcomb Hercroft. After this Duchess Betty was an invalid.

"One day, after little Betty was a year old, a strange man came to Hurlstone House and stole her away also, and she was as completely swallowed up in mystery as was her brother. Pretty Laffelle had indeed kept her cruel oath. Hurlstone was despoiled.

"Duchess Betty died of grief within a week thereafter.

"The now desolate master of Hurlstone began to prepare for his own end. His early dissipations had sapped his energies and vitality, leaving him an old man early in life; but he survived for several miserable years, alone and lonely.

"About five years after the death of the Duchess an old English Colonel, whom the Duke had known in London during his halcyon days, came to visit him at Hurlstone. In the conversation this soldier said:

"My dear Duke, I saw an old friend of yours in Delhi while my regiment was stationed there. Who do you think it was? None other than Pretty Laffelle, the singing-girl whom you used to love so ardently; she who used to dance at Wick's Bridge.

She was greatly changed though, and was no longer beautiful. She had with her a fine boy about fifteen years of age. I did not care to renew the acquaintance, and as she seemed to want to avoid me, I passed her by. Glorious days, those, my dear fellow, and fine girls they were, eh?'

"This again started the search, but nothing came of it. Although Pretty Laffelle and her boy were traced to Calcutta, there the trail was again lost. It was said that she was known in Delhi as the widow of Dr. George Bernard McKim, who had died there of the plague some time previously.

"The Duke died suddenly and mysteriously in London at the age of forty, leaving an elaborate will which provided for three trustees to administer his large and wealthy estate.

"One of these trustees was his father-in-law, the old clergyman, whose long and faithful stewardship had been the indolent Duke's mainstay. The estate was to remain practically in his hands, with two other trustees to aid him in emergencies. One of these men was a sort of legal representative of the tenantry, who had also been long in the service of the Duke. The other was the old solicitor of the House of Hurlstone. The provisions of the will were most explicit, but its details were known only to the administrators.

"Duchess Betty had confided to her father alone the secret by which her son, the real heir, could be identified, should he ever be discovered. Up to the present time but few uncertain clues have been picked up indicating that the children are living.

"The old Colonel had seen Pretty Laffelle in India when her child was about fifteen years of age.

"The detectives had traced them from Delhi to Calcutta and thence to Australia, and the supposed father, Dr. George B. McKim, was said to have been dead but a short time. The widow was supposed to be quite well off. It was thought most strange that no actual record of the death of George B. McKim could be found.

"No clew had ever been found of the real heir to Hurlstone, James Malcomb Hercroft, 6th, the third Duke of Hurlstone.

"A single early clue of the girl baby was discovered in London. She was in the possession of the matron of one of the public institutions, but the blundering detectives gave away the secret before securing the child, and immediately both the matron and the child disappeared, which made it evident that the child was being systematically cared for, and that the woman knew the secret. The whole of Europe was searched without avail.

"In tracing the connections between the matron and her secret principals a very curious and significant thing was ascertained. One Dr. Emanuel McKim, chemist, of Covent Gardens, was frequently seen with the matron and the child, but he was a man of reputation and no complicity could be fastened upon him in their disappearance."

Here the document ended.

Dr. Paul McKim was amazed. He was about to fold the paper, when a yellow sheet fluttered to the floor. Picking this up, he found an explana-

tion of how the document became attached to the Scotland Yard papers. It read as follows:

MY DEAR SISTER MARY:

At last, mother got at the old man's papers, and among those she brought away was the very one I most wanted. A history of the Hercroft mystery, which I knew was there. I have the original evidence of the reward being offered, together with all the docket of this case. They are so old no one will miss them. I am sure, from some things I have found out myself, that at least some of these lost ones are in the United States, and there is a chance to get five thousand pounds.

I am going to get a leave of absence and come over to see you. If I can get onto the force in New York I will stay there.

I herewith send these papers to you so you may know all about the case. Maybe you can get a clue. Take care of these papers; they are valuable. I have no time now to make copies. The work here is getting too heavy. I want to get out of it.

I am glad to know you are doing so well; maybe I may be as lucky when I come over.

Mother is getting very old and will not live much longer; she is quite feeble just now.

Keep your eyes open. I will tell you anything that happens here.

Your affectionate brother,

JAMES.

There was no date on this letter to intimate when it was written, but it belonged with the papers, and was quite stained with age. James Mc-Birney had been in New York long enough to become a lieutenant on the metropolitan police force.

This revelation upset Dr. McKim greatly. His familiarity with his own life of course added a new chapter to this remarkable story.

It would excite any man to suddenly be told that he was a duke, and heir to one of the largest estates in England.

It was evident that either he or Peter Kelly was the third Duke of Hurlstone—but which? Here was a distressing phase of the case. Notwithstanding it was intimated by the story that he was the true heir, would it not be reasonable that Pretty Laffelle left her own son in London, in the care of her lover's brother, to be educated, while she took the child of Duchess Betty, her hated rival, to the uttermost ends of the world to lose him, and forever remove the possibility of his interfering with her cherished plans?

Doubtless the abduction of the infant daughter was a part of her scheme, and the finding of one with a knowledge of the facts would probably reveal all.

He at least had this advantage now over all who were interested in this case, but to search out the truth might prove him to be the illegitimate son and make Peter Kelly, probably a criminal, Duke of Hurlstone. It was a matter for prompt and careful handling.

The little red clock chimed three, and Dr. McKim retired, to lie awake and ponder the question for several hours.

CHAPTER VII

DR. M'KIM HAS AN UNEXPECTED CALLER

THE morning after Dr. McKim had come into possession of the papers in such a strange and exciting manner, he found himself wide awake, earlier than usual, notwithstanding he had slept not more than two hours during the entire night.

He was disturbed and feverish. It all came back to him with a sickening distinctness, and the first thought to enter his mind was that which was last in his mind when he went to sleep: "Who and what am I?"

Turn and twist the matter as he would, it was perfectly clear to him that there was as much probability of his being the illegitimate son as that he was the true heir of Hurlstone. "There is but one way to settle the matter, and it were better settled at once. I will go immediately to England and declare myself, and bring the question to an issue," he said, and he bounded out of bed and began dressing.

He found himself again reading the papers when Plimpton brought in his coffee, and he did not lay them down until eleven o'clock, when the butler announced that a lady wanted to see him.

A lady! Who could want to see him at this hour?

Placing the papers in the safe he closed and locked it; then making the finishing touches to his toilet he went calmly down to the little reception room, where he saw a woman fashionably dressed, but heavily veiled.

"I am Dr. McKim, madam; what may I do for you?" he said politely.

There was a mysterious and painful silence for a moment, then the lady arose and asked in a faltering voice: "Are we quite alone?"

"Yes, we are quite alone," replied Dr. McKim, surprised at her actions.

The woman covered her veiled face with her hands for a moment, while the amazed doctor stood looking at her.

Suddenly, with a desperate effort and a burst of passion, she threw back her veil and exclaimed:

"Forgive me, doctor! I know you will forgive me! But I had to come; I could not resist," and again she buried her face in her hands.

"Miss Von Comp!" exclaimed Dr. McKim, scarcely able to believe his own eyes, and he stood staring at the shrinking figure.

Recovering his wits, he said: "Oh, Miss Von Comp, I know something most urgent has caused you to come here! Be brave and tell me. I need not assure you that you may place the utmost confidence in me. Tell me at once why you have come."

She was more calm, but still greatly agitated and embarrassed as she said:

"Dr. McKim, this is the first really indiscreet thing I have ever done in all my life; and I am

amazed now to find myself here. I have been almost crazy since I received your letter. Oh, I know you are an honorable gentleman, and I cannot see you made a victim of some mysterious, mistaken identity. If we are quite alone and will not be interrupted, I will hastily tell you all and hurry away from here; but tell me first, doctor, do you think I have done something dreadful?" and she looked appealingly into his face.

The doctor, now fully recovered from his surprise, betrayed his anxiety over the strange predicament in which he was placed. Chester Von Comp was likely to come at any moment, and it would be a deplorable calamity should he discover his fair cousin here. He did not answer Miss Von Comp's question, but summoned Plimpton.

"Do not admit anyone; I am not in to anyone. Do you understand?" and he looked fixedly at Plimpton.

"I understand, sir," replied Plimpton.

The doctor now closed the door, and turning to his visitor, he said, in a manner to impress her of the importance of what he was saying:

"Miss Von Comp, I understand you have come here in response to my letter. I must beg a thousand pardons for having written it. I do not know you sufficiently well to justify such a presumption. I wrote the letter in an excited moment, and my butler mailed it before I had fully decided to send it to you, otherwise you would have been spared this awkward situation.

"However, it is done, and it is useless to regret it now. It is much more important to get you

safely out of this embarrassing position. I must be frank and say that you have, in the goodness of your nature, committed a serious indiscretion. You will understand me when I tell you that each day your cousin Chester comes here about this hour. We are on such terms of intimacy that it is almost an insult for me to intimate that I do not desire he should know who my visitors are, should he ask.

"I will do my utmost, for your sake as well as my own, to get you safely away. I will simply reassure you, on my own behalf, that every word I said in my letter was true. I am neither a criminal nor an outcast."

Miss Von Comp sat looking at him while he talked. When he paused she extended her hand to him saying: "Dr. McKim, I know I am not deceived, despite the curious coincidences of which I will tell you. I will hasten my story, relating only that which is essential to give you the facts.

"My mother is the president of the Saving Society, an institution for helping needy persons who have fallen into the clutches of the law. Last summer we found in the park a man in the guise of a tramp. He was brought to the Society office and examined. Mother was impressed, as I was, that he was not a vagabond by choice, but for a different reason.

"I was from the first convinced that the man was in disguise. I will not explain now why I thought so. Mother took his receipt and loaned him one hundred dollars. I said to mother that I felt certain he would return the money, but apparently I was mistaken.

"This man gave his name as Peter Kelly, and—please forgive me—our man Edgerton followed him and saw him enter this house the day he was released."

Dr. McKim started at this statement, but only nodded for her to continue, and Miss Von Comp said:

"When I first met you, Dr. McKim, I was astonished to recognize you as Peter Kelly, as I thought. I did not, however, fully make up my mind in the matter until the night of the reception. I felt certain that I had noticed an identifying mark upon Peter Kelly's forehead which escaped both my mother and her secretary.

"Dr. McKim, that mark is upon your brow. It was the sight of it in the conservatory that evening which so unnerved me. Is it possible that such an unusual mark could be upon the brows of two men who otherwise resemble each other so closely?"

The doctor listened patiently, from time to time softening his face with a reassuring smile. As she paused, he pushed his fine blond hair back from his brow.

"Is that the mark you saw on Peter Kelly?" he asked. At the sight of it she started, then almost whispered:

"Yes, that is it."

"Is that all your story, Miss Von Comp?" he asked.

"No, indeed," she exclaimed excitedly. "The worst is yet to come, and one thing which made me believe in the truth of your letter is the most distressing part.

"On the evening of the reception one of the guests, Mrs. S., lost a beautiful and expensive pearl necklace, and I heard the detectives declare that you are Peter Kelly, a gentleman burglar, and that you stole the necklace before leaving the reception."

Dr. McKim sprang to his feet at this statement and exclaimed:

"Great heaven, Miss Von Comp! do you believe this?"

"I do not," she said calmly. "You might be Peter Kelly, and you might be a gentleman burglar so far as I know, but I know you did not steal the pearl necklace."

"How do you know that?" he inquired eagerly.

"Because I saw her take off the necklace, wrap it in her handkerchief, and place it in an inside pocket of her wrap long after you were gone," she replied earnestly.

The doctor was now quite nervous and showed he was worried. He paced across the floor once or twice, then asked, "Is there more?"

"Well, only this: The detective has you under surveillance and will, he says, swear out a warrant and arrest you at the proper time, believing you to be Peter Kelly, a 'derelict' of the Saving Society. He will charge you with obtaining money under false pretenses, then call upon the records of the Society for evidence to convict you. Doubtless the evidence that you stole the pearls is a myth, or else he may trump up evidence against you.

"Now, Dr. McKim, if they can be so mistaken in one belief, they may be in the others. I know how dearly my cousin Chester loves you. My

mother also likes you very much, and——” Here she faltered and averted her face.

“And what?” said Dr. McKim smilingly, as he stood boldly facing her.

“I believe you innocent,” she murmured softly.

“I am, my dear Miss Von Comp; you have not misplaced your confidence,” he exclaimed. “I am not Peter Kelly; I am not a gentleman burglar, neither did I steal the pearls. Moreover, it is possible for two men to be marked or maimed in the same manner. All of which I shall prove to you in due time.

“I also have great love for your cousin, a high regard for your estimable mother, and a deep esteem for yourself. I am not going to forfeit these sweet associations simply because a curious fate has brought about these singular coincidences which seem to have chosen me for a target.

“Miss Von Comp, I will not tell you now how deeply I feel the compliment of your believing in me and coming to warn me of impending danger at so great risk to yourself. I will ask you though one question, which I beg of you to answer by a simple yes or no.

“Will you trust me until I place in your hands the positive evidence that I am an honorable and respectable man? Until I can do this I will not again see you.”

“I will trust you,” was the simple answer.

At this moment the doorbell rang, and the doctor recognized the vigorous pull of Chester Von Comp.

Miss Von Comp surmised what was in his mind

as he sprang to the door, and she, too, arose, seeking a position where she could not be seen from the hallway. She was now thoroughly frightened.

The large panel-doors were drawn back and only curtains separated the reception room from the hall.

"Good morning, Paul," rang the cheery voice of Chester Von Comp.

"Good morning, Chester," responded Dr. McKim. "Go on up to the laboratory; I will come up soon. I have a visitor with whom I am not quite through."

"I will sit in the library and wait. I cannot remain this morning," said Chester, looking at Dr. McKim in a curious manner.

"Well, I do not know how long it will be," said the doctor, betraying slight impatience. "Can't you drop in later, or I will see you at the club at two o'clock?"

Chester Von Comp knew the meaning of every whim and action of his friend, and could not avoid noticing his haggard and agitated state now. Looking quizzically at the doctor for a moment he said:

"I do not want to appear rude, Paul, but I should like to see the person who could so rumple your disposition and your appearance," and he laughed a suspicious, jerky little laugh.

"Oh, it's no one you would care to see," quickly rejoined the doctor.

It was something very unusual for the ever-polite and gentlemanly Chester to betray rudeness toward anyone, but now he seemed to be seized with a belief that he was, in some way, concerned in

this matter, and that Dr. McKim was over-anxious to conceal something from him. To his friend's surprise he made no move to go, but stood silent for a moment, then throwing his head back, he demanded in a loud voice: "Is she in there?"

"Who?" asked Dr. McKim, himself aroused to anger.

"You know whom I mean," excitedly exclaimed Chester, and he made a move as though he would attempt to enter the room, but Dr. McKim stepped in front of him, and, with the fire flashing from his eyes, said:

"You are forgetting yourself. Do nothing rash. Who do you mean? Speak—if it is that person, I will say so."

"Miss Malcomb," said Chester.

"I know no such person, and you have no right to thus insult me. I beg of you not to intrude upon my private affairs. This cannot possibly concern you, and it is not a matter which I care to discuss with you, or could if I wanted to. Now, if you value our friendship, please go," and the doctor plainly motioned him toward the door.

Chester looked sullenly at the floor, took two strides toward the door, then throwing his head into the air he held out his hand and exclaimed:

"Forgive me, Paul, I did not intend to insult you as I have. Tell me you forgive me and that will be sufficient. I trust you; you are my friend."

Dr. McKim caught the outstretched hand, and there were tears in his eyes as he said, "Yes, I am your friend; I will never purposely betray your confidence."

Awaiting the closing of the door, Dr. McKim stepped to the window in the reception room, and, concealed by the curtain, watched Chester's form cross the street and go rapidly up Fifth Avenue. Miss Von Comp could now depart with safety.

That thoroughly frightened young woman stood trembling, as though the next moment would spell her worst calamity.

Feeling assured that Chester would not play him false, he turned and said: "Now, Miss Von Comp, I deem it wise for you to go. Believe me, I am most grateful to you, and I shall prove to you that I am worthy the confidence you have placed in me. I beg of you not to lose faith until you hear from me again. You must not risk compromising yourself in my behalf again, no matter if you hear they are preparing a scaffold for me. You will find I am thoroughly capable and able to defend myself, and I value your good name above my own life." With this he extended his hand, which she took in her own, and there was a mutual confidence forever established between the two.

To insure the safe departure of Miss Von Comp, Plimpton escorted her, heavily veiled, to Sixth Avenue, then to Broadway and Thirty-third Street, there placing her on the Elevated, which would take her near her own home.

Upon his return the faithful servant was surprised to find his master walking the floor in great excitement and agitation.

"Plimpton," he said, "I must start immediately upon a trip to London. Pack my trunks for a thirty-day trip. I want you to accompany me.

Cassello will remain here and care for the house while we are gone. Ascertain this morning when the first steamer sails and secure two staterooms, one for me and one for yourself. I will instruct Cassello. Not a living soul must know where we are going, not even Cassello."

"What name shall I use in buying the tickets, sir?" asked Plimpton.

"Another alias—ha, ha! this is getting exciting," he laughed mysteriously. Then after due consideration two appropriate names were selected for the passenger list.

It would be forty-eight hours before sailing, and this time was spent by Dr. McKim in laying plans to thwart the schemes of those who were plotting against him.

He wrote to Chester Von Comp, saying briefly that he was leaving the city for a short time and that the house would be closed during his absence. He hoped his friend would not try to see him, and he did not.

Then came more urgent and important things. Going carefully over all the papers he had taken from Edgerton's coat pocket, he selected those he would need for immediate use, then made a careful package of the others and locked them in his safe.

He spent several hours thinking out a plan of action which would prevent any accident to himself due to his possessing the papers, and especially the embarrassing string of pearls.

"I am not positive this Edgerton stole the pearls himself. I will give him a chance by not exposing

him directly, but he is a dangerous witness against this Peter Kelly, and, as far as I know, Kelly would be a more respectable and useful kinsman out of jail than in. I will tamper with justice and get this witness out of the way." And he wrote the following letter to Edgerton, whose address he readily found in the directory:

MR. NATHAN EDGERTON:

If you will accept a friendly tip without trying to find out who is sending it to you, I can tell you something you will be glad to know before it is too late for you to protect yourself.

You have been betrayed by people who claim to be your friends. You are positively accused of having stolen a pearl necklace on the night of Mrs. Von Comp's reception. Witnesses are ready to prove that the pearls were found in your possession.

Mrs. Von Comp has agreed to let them arrest you on an old charge, to hold you, because she was told that you concealed valuable papers which she was trying to recover from her discharged secretary.

It means twenty years if you are convicted. So you would better jump at once. Don't trust anybody.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Dr. McKim. "If that does not put Edgerton on the run then I am greatly mistaken. He will never appear against Peter Kelly.

"Now, to clear Peter Kelly's good name by taking it off the Saving Society's books as a 'derelict.'" And he penned the following lines to Mrs. Von Comp:

DEAR MADAM:

I am connected with a department which gives me a knowledge of your valuable Saving Society, and having come in possession of some information desirable for you to know, I herewith give you the facts.

On your books is the name of Peter Kelly as a "derelict." This is quite wrong. Your discharged secretary confiscated the letter in which he returned to you the one hundred dollars you advanced to him. The money (one hundred dollars) which you found on her person was this refunder. I enclose the letter in which it was mailed to you. The envelope will show, by the date stamped upon it, that had it not been intercepted it would have reached you in due time. This letter, with many others, was taken out of Mary McBirney's trunk. To prove to you that this is authentic I also enclose one other paper taken by her.

At the proper time I shall restore to you many others, but at present they are needed to aid in breaking up a dangerous criminal gang to which your discharged secretary belongs. I call your attention to the Peter Kelly matter to enable you to set him right on your records.

Very respectfully,

A FRIEND OF YOUR INSTITUTION.

"There, that should repair the rent in Peter Kelly's reputation. I wonder if he really has one. Perhaps I am piling up trouble for myself. To complete this conspiracy I must put Mary McBirney on the rack.

"It will be their own fault if these half-breed criminals do not thank some unknown friend and jump from justice." Then he wrote to "Old Sec."

Confidential:

Edgerton has made a full confession to Mrs. Von Comp, and turned over to her the letters and papers which he took from your trunk. Among the letters is one written by Peter Kelly, in which he returns one hundred dollars to the Society. He has been found, and agrees to prosecute you. A warrant will be sworn out and held until an investigation can be made of the theft of valuable records from the files of Scotland Yard by your brother. You will be put under surveillance at once. You would better jump if you do not want ten years in Sing Sing.

A FRIEND.

"There, 'Old Sec.,' that should put you out of the game," mused Dr. McKim.

"I must protect Mrs. Von Comp from possible notoriety regarding the loss of the pearls, and this is the most delicate thing of all. How shall I go about restoring them, without risk of betraying myself. I feel more concerned about this than any other phase of this peculiar jumble. I hesitate to subject someone else to the risk and I dislike to assume the task myself; yet the value of the pearls is too great to allow them to be handled carelessly. It is essential that they should go directly into the hands of Mrs. S. herself. Moreover, Mrs. Von Comp must be made aware that the pearls have been restored, without the detectives being aware of the manner of their restoration. They must also be called off the case without Edgerton being made aware of it.

"Let me think. Edgerton is sure to skip out immediately upon receipt of his warning. Mary

McBirney will probably do the same; therefore I have nothing to fear from these two. If the detectives are called off the 'pearl case' they will hesitate to follow up the Peter Kelly matter.

"Oh, I am overlooking something! Miss Von Comp stated I was under surveillance. Then, should I attempt to reach the steamship before the detectives are called off this case they are liable to nab me, sailing under an assumed name, which would look bad. I wonder if it is possible they already know, having watched Plimpton? By Jove, this is annoying to a man with a clear conscience. Suppose I should go into the street with these pearls on my person and should be arrested. Great guns! this is no trifling matter. I begin to feel hunted already. I wonder if this is the feeling a regular thief experiences after he has bagged his game. It seems more difficult to get rid of the swag than it is to get it in one's possession. Really, I am thoroughly nonplussed."

Thus Dr. McKim pondered for some time, finally deciding to go out himself and mail the several letters he had written, leaving the matter of the pearls for an evening adventure. Should he be under surveillance this would give him an opportunity to have a brush with the detectives and try their skill.

"Plimpton, call a cab immediately," he said. Gathering up the letters, he placed them in his pocket, and in a few minutes he stepped into a cab and hurried down Fifth Avenue. At the Waldorf-Astoria he alighted, discharged his cab, hurried inside, and deposited the letters in the mail-box.

Passing through the long corridor to the Thirty-fourth street entrance, he plunged into another cab, with orders to deposit him at his own door. The whole trip consumed about twenty minutes.

"I defy anyone to shadow me in that act without a foreknowledge of my movements," he declared to himself upon entering his door.

That evening he took up the subject of the pearls. He took them out of the safe and examined them to see that none of them were missing. Searching about, he found a small box which bore no label and contained some soft white cotton. Carefully packing the pearls, first in the handkerchief, then in this cotton, he wrapped the box in clean paper, bound it with a good strong cord, sealed the knots with red sealing wax, and they were ready to go somewhere in some way. Then he wrote a note:

MADAM:

I herewith return to you the pearl necklace which you lost on the evening you attended a reception given by Mrs. Von Comp.

They were not stolen, and you would have received them before this, but I have just learned authentically for a client, for whom I am acting, that they are your property.

I return them anonymously because of the fact that the police are searching for them, on the theory that they were stolen. No reward is desired, and I wish to save all concerned needless notoriety.

In consideration for this act, on the part of my client, who is a most reputable person, will you be good enough to call up by telephone Mrs. Von Comp and inform her of their restoration, and ask her to at once notify the authorities that the pearls have

been "found," that unjust suspicion may be removed from persons under surveillance, suspected of implication. It might save you much annoyance did you request Mrs. Von Comp to decline to give particulars. I should feel grateful, too, should the authorities be notified at once.

Very respectfully.

Sealing this letter, the doctor wrapped it about the box, rewrapped and placed an outer seal upon it, and then addressed it to the name mentioned by Miss Von Comp.

He now waited patiently for nightfall to come that he might steal out and get this box out of his possession. As the hour approached he became more and more fearful that he might be caught "with the goods on him."

"It is no sinecure, this being a 'gentleman burglar,'" he declared to himself. "Suppose I were starving right now, with this twenty-five-thousand-dollar necklace in my possession, what good would it be to me? None whatever. I would be apprehended for a thief the moment I attempted to dispose of it. I presume a regular burglar has his avenues for disposing of his plunder, but an amateur certainly stands a better show of getting into prison."

Informing Plimpton he would dine out, he wrapped himself in a great topcoat with a high collar, and having a cab summoned, he stood ready to spring into it the moment it stopped at the door. The package containing the pearls seemed to weigh a ton.

The cab arrived. He simply said, "Waldorf, Thirty-third Street entrance. Hurry, I am late!" and he was off on his nerve-racking adventure.

Arriving at the Waldorf, he handed the cabby his fare and discharged him and was lost in the crowded corridor of the great hostelry the next moment. He quickly went to the telephone and called up the number of the person to whom he intended sending the pearls, and the following brief conversation ensued:

"Hello! Is this Mrs. S——?"

The answer was evidently in the affirmative.

"I am just sending to you a very important message, and as it is a personal matter, I wish to have it come directly into your hands. Therefore I have called you up to learn if you are at home. You will receive it within twenty minutes," and he rang off.

"Now for quick action," he said, and he stepped out of the booth, paid the toll, hurried to the Thirty-fourth Street entrance, jumped into the first cab at hand, and directed the cabby in a loud voice to drive to the Twenty-third Street ferry. As they turned into Broadway he told his cabman to stop at the Twenty-fourth Street entrance of the Hoffman House.

Entering, he quickly sent a messenger to pay the cabman and to say he would remain there; then he passed into a secluded corner of the restaurant, where he could have a full view of the room, and where he could see anyone entering without their discovering him.

Giving some simple order, he waited for it to be served, then asked that a messenger boy be summoned for him.

"There is no likelihood of questions being asked of the messenger boy in this case," he thought, "and there will be no occasion for an investigation afterward. I am certain that all concerned will prefer to avoid notoriety, therefore it is safe, I think, to hand this package to the messenger myself," which he did a few minutes later, with explicit instructions and a liberal fee. There is a better quality of loyalty to be found in well-paid New York district messenger boys and in cabmen than in any other class of public servants, and they are practically free from blackmailing tendencies. This is doubtless due to the fact that the messenger and cab systems, as a whole, must be kept reputable to insure public patronage. Often the most profound secrets are entrusted to messenger boys with perfect safety.

Thirty minutes later Dr. McKim again called up by telephone Mrs. S. and asked if she had received the package.

The answer was evidently satisfactory, for he smiled and gave a deep sigh of relief as he stepped from the booth.

He adopted the same precautions in returning to his home, although greatly relieved that the burden of the pearls was off his mind and person.

Later, when he and Monk were seated in their accustomed place, he pondered over the events of recent hours. It was curious to note how these events,

taken consecutively, each became a branch of the parent stem, the taking from Edgerton's pocket the papers and the pearls—it was a definite lesson in criminology.

The whole fearful suspense was due to the possession of intrinsic property—the pearl necklace. To have kept this would have been criminally dishonest, even though it were not purposely stolen. The first act which placed it in his possession might have been justifiable under all the circumstances, and doubtless was; but having by this act obtained the necklace, as a collateral accident, it involved him as a thief by accident, and he would remain such until he had restored it to its rightful owner, who had been, by a similar accident, revealed to him by Miss Von Comp.

The law of self-preservation is always the first law in nature. No government has ever been permitted to write it off of nature's statute books. He was wholly justified in bringing about conditions to protect himself against unjust and needless notoriety, by writing the several anonymous letters, even though such course might, at some future time, retard the law in bringing to justice Edgerton and Mary McBirney. Nothing could be more absurd than to intimate that he owed a duty to the law which required him to sacrifice himself in order that others might be punished; this would repudiate God's unwritten law of self-protection.

The object of the law is to equalize justice, and any act which balances justice is itself just. What he had done was to divert from himself injustice, which had been directed toward him by a curious

mistaken identity, for which he was in nowise to blame.

If fate was against him, he surely had a right to play his own game of self-defense to checkmate this uncompromising opponent, which had assailed him without invitation.

No one who fears the law respects it. Fear never begets love or respect, and he who feels safe in secrecy will not aid the machinery of law, because it is in the machinery of the law that the cause for contempt, disrespect, and hatred is found. The masses despise the sight of uniforms, clubs, pistols, and the gew-gaws which must embellish and distinguish the personality of the law. They are symbols of a contravention of the laws of both God and nature, and retard immeasurably a true civilization.

The theory that these barbaric trappings and the cruelties and injustice they so frequently carry with them inspire respect for law is wholly disputed by fact and irrefutable statistics.

The whole system of establishing laws for governing the great masses of the world is wrong and contrary to the basic laws of nature. It is all storm and no sunshine; whereas in nature the storm is brief and the sunshine prolonged when the greatest bounties are yielded.

Thus did the mind of this thinking man drift into a contemplation of the higher aspects of the subject which had been opened up by his strange experiences. Viewed from every angle, he acquitted himself of wrongdoing. He made a full and careful review of the case and felt secure against fur-

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ther encroachments upon his preserves during his absence, and the next day he and Plimpton went aboard ship for England.

Among the last letters he received before going was one from Chester Von Comp. This he thrust into his pocket, to be read after going on board.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TAG STRINGER OF THE ATTIC

It was no small relief for Dr. McKim to feel himself safely aboard ship and rapidly leaving New York, temporarily, at least, behind him. There were no letters or telegrams wishing him *bon voyage*, because no one but himself and Plimpton was aware that he was sailing.

Finding a snug place in the salon, he looked over the unread letters which he had brought with him. The last was from Chester, and he felt quite certain it was one of contrition and apology, and he wanted to think over it.

He was not wholly mistaken, but it was something more than contrite. While it profusely begged his forgiveness, it also contained a most startling confession. Chester Von Comp declared he had rediscovered the strange woman whose life they had saved early in December. He boldly admitted that he was deeply interested in her, and that he had practically taken her under his protection. His actions toward Dr. McKim a few days previously were due to an insanely jealous and wholly ungrounded suspicion that Miss Malcomb—this being her name—was the strange visitor in the doctor's office, and that he was prevented from seeing her there.

He called himself a mean, selfish dog, unfit for

a friendship with so generous a man, and he could only hope that upon his return the doctor would give him an opportunity to redeem himself and restore to him his dear companionship and confidence.

The whole letter was in this strain, and the doctor laughed heartily, as he thought of his friend's needless discomfiture. "I think," he said softly to himself, "did he know the truth he would be sending me a challenge to a duel."

While Dr. McKim is upon the high seas we will return to a day in December, when Chester Von Comp had his faith in a "friendly fate" quite curiously confirmed. That fate smiled upon him that day was evident, for he found her for whom he had so long vainly searched.

Dr. McKim and he were finishing up some work in the laboratory when the doctor remarked: "Chester, I wish you would go with me to examine some new microscopes which our old German friend, Miller, has just imported. They are extraordinary in their powers and very simple in construction. You know, I have long threatened to buy a real good microscope, an up-to-date one; these we have are very good for ordinary laboratory work, but not for some of our experiments."

Early that afternoon they climbed the steep stairway leading to the humble workrooms of an old German instrument-maker, located in a rear loft of a building on Thirty-eighth Street, west of Broadway.

While Dr. McKim was engaged with the instrument-maker, Chester picked up a pair of field-

glasses, adjusted them to his eyes and looked out of the window. The view was limited to the rear elevation of a long row of old-time houses fronting on Thirty-seventh Street. They were of the three-story and attic type of red sandstone common to that locality, and were once the best class of residences in New York.

As he turned the glasses here and there in search of some object to test their power, his vision centered upon an attic window, where he saw a pair of splendid, round, white arms vigorously polishing the outer side of the window-panes. First one arm would appear, and then the other, in an effort to reach the whole window. For a single moment a head was thrust out of the window, just when Chester Von Comp had the strong glasses leveled directly upon her face.

It was not the beauty of the arms which transfixed him—he was not seeking an adventure with servant girls or scrub-women—it was the face, the great pile of brown hair, and the perfectly poised head which caused him to suddenly lay down the glasses as the figure disappeared from the window.

There could be no mistake; it was she. But could it be possible she was living in such a place, or perhaps was even a servant there? He remembered that her appearance of dire poverty corresponded with what he had just witnessed; nevertheless he would make certain.

Going to Dr. McKim, he said in as calm a voice as he could command: "Paul, if you will excuse me, I think I shall leave you here and go on a little errand which I had quite forgotten," and without

waiting for a reply, he shot out of the place as though pursued by demons.

The doctor smiled at his impetuosity; it was no unusual thing, and recently it had increased in its violence. He was quite well aware that his young friend was continually seeking some clue of their lost patient.

Chester had carefully noted the house, in the garret of which he had seen the girl washing the windows. Hastening to Thirty-seventh Street, he entered the hallway.

Two old residences had been remodeled and converted into one cheap apartment house—tenement would be the more appropriate term.

At the end of the hall was a coop-like place, which proved to be the janitor's office. That important official was emerging from his kennel with a hatchet in one hand, a board under his arm and a mouthful of wire nails, as Chester reached the door and asked:

"Are you in charge of this building?"

Shifting the nails into his ample cheek, he replied: "Yep."

"Have you a few minutes to spare? I want to make some inquiries regarding one of your tenants—at least I think she may be a tenant," said Chester.

The man looked him over with the impudence of a policeman before replying. While this angered Chester, he refrained from showing resentment.

Turning back to his coop, the janitor kicked open the door and motioned Chester to enter. Spitting the nails out of his mouth upon the table, which

was littered with every conceivable kind of petty junk from the last gas bill to an ash sieve, he sharply asked, "What do you want?" while his eyes took on that vibration in color, from an ashen hue to a greenish brown, indicative of suspicion.

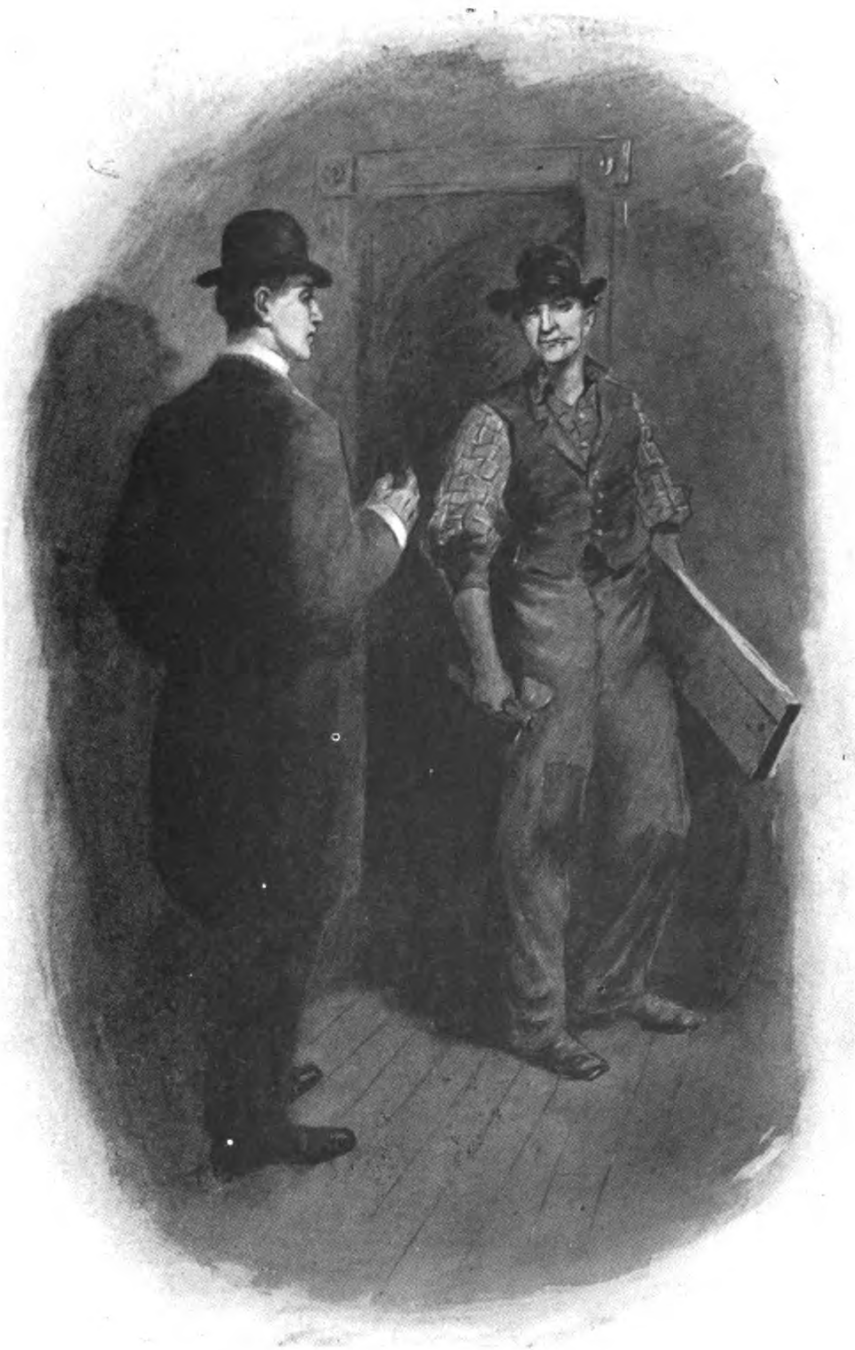
"Oh, it is not important," said Chester, with an assumed air of careless indifference, for he felt certain that this first interview would make this perhaps all-important individual a useful friend or a dangerous foe.

"I am a secret officer of the Saving Society," he continued, "but I want to assure you that if I cannot be of service to you I shall not ask you to favor me. Moreover, I have not come here to annoy you or any of your tenants; on the contrary, I want to entrust to you things which I wish done secretly, and for such service I will compensate you liberally. You have a family, have you not?"

"Yep; wife and three children," laconically replied the janitor, still distrustful.

"Very well, I shall speak of that later," said Chester. "Now tell me something about the tenant you have in the back attic rooms. Is she a worthy person?" He was guessing as to whether the back attic tenant was a man or a woman.

"Only a lady lives in the attic. It was a lumber room. I used to sleep up there o'nights 'till I moved over on Sixt' Avenoo. This is a respectable house, an' it wouldn't be healthy for anybody to come around here a-hintin' that Miss Malcomb is not all right. That's her trouble. She's too respectable for her income." He was interested now. He had dropped the hatchet and the board with re-



“What do you want?”

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sounding thuds upon the floor and seated himself, as master of the situation, in the only available chair, prepared to resent any undue aspersions against the character of the tenant in the back attic.

Chester had struck the right chord; the janitor was friendly toward the strange woman.

"I cannot tell you how pleased I am to have you say this about Miss Malcomb," he said. "Your judgment is correct. She is too stubborn or too proud, whichever you may call it, for her own good. We know she is a respectable woman for this very reason, but this should not prevent her friends helping her. Do you think so? Her own pride keeps her in a garret, rather than allowing those who would gladly better her condition to place her in a pleasanter home. But that is a secret, and this is where you are going to be useful without her even suspecting that you have secretly interested yourself in her case by aiding the Saving Society.

"As soon as I feel at liberty to do so I shall tell you why it is important not to let her know that strong friends are quietly working for her. The case has been entrusted to me and I am going to work it out in my own way, with your assistance, and in doing this I assure you that I will not abuse the privileges I shall ask of you; together we will carefully protect her respectability. I never saw her but once in my life, and that was under the saddest circumstances. I question whether she will remember me or not. I cannot take the liberty of calling on her alone, therefore I will ask you to go up to her rooms with me, and we will judge by her

actions as to the best course for us to pursue with her afterward."

Chester perceived, by the man's eager countenance, that he was thoroughly interested, and he concluded not to let him talk or have time to get his wits back before he had worked on his selfish side a little. Therefore he continued:

"Now, I have not much time. Before we go up to see Miss Malcomb I want to inquire about your own little family. Do you not find it quite a struggle to support a family of five persons on your salary?"

This had all been neatly rattled off with an air of authority quite convincing to the shallow-brained fellow. This solicitude regarding his own family had thoroughly overcome his reserve and allayed his suspicions. He was now perfectly amenable to any suggestion Chester might choose to make. The reference to his own troubles kept his mind away from Miss Malcomb and prevented his forming new suspicions or distrust until his sense of greed could be awakened. With something substantial in sight for himself, all questions regarding the sincerity of Chester's purpose were suppressed.

Replying to Chester's question he said: "Well, sir, we do have to pinch a bit. My wife is not a spender, except in one way; she spends too much in getting the children out into the country. Why, she would rather go on an excursion on the water than to go to the horse show in Madison Square Garden, or to the opera with Nordica in the cast."

Seizing the cue, Chester said: "Good! good!

Why, man, you are condemning your wife for a most excellent trait. Encourage it all you can afford. What is this money compared to the getting of your children out of the smoke, noise, and dirt of the city? You doubtless save more than this amount in doctors' bills: their nostrils tickled with pure air and their lungs inflated with the ozone of a clear atmosphere will make them expand in mind and body.

"Now, I have an idea. Doubtless, feeling that you can ill-afford the money for this little luxury of occasional jaunts to the country, you frequently make it a cause for differences between yourself and your wife. You do not look like a naturally ill-natured, quarrelsome man; therefore if we can devise a way by which these health-renewing excursions may be continued without an extra drain upon your pocket, doubtless all your little family tilts will cease. So let me take the matter in hand. I will strike this bargain with you. I am a rich man myself and represent other very rich persons. It is a large part of our pleasure to help make less fortunate persons more happy and comfortable. If you will not be impatient to know all of the facts in the case of Miss Malcomb, for there is a family secret involved in the case, and will aid me in protecting her good name as well as my own, with the understanding, mind you, that I will in no manner abuse your confidence, I will allow you ten dollars a week, at least during the balance of the winter. This will enable you to lay aside sufficient to offset the amounts spent by your family in their excursions when spring and summer come.

"I will pay you the first week's allowance now, and will continue to do so, provided my interview with Miss Malcomb indicates she will remain here with you. In the event of her leaving your rooms for other and more comfortable quarters, I will recompense you properly for the loss of your tenant." With this he handed to the janitor a crisp ten-dollar bill.

That individual, though eager-eyed, took the money with hesitation and embarrassment. Drawing it through his fingers in a gingerly sort of way, which seemed to say, "I am perhaps selling my soul, but I can't see where the harm is to come from it," he suddenly arose from his seat, saying: "Do you want to go up now and see Miss Malcomb?"

The game was won, and safety assured, and Chester nodded in the affirmative.

There was no elevator in the building. Only the narrow, old-time stairway led to the various floors above. It was a typical tenement, with dark, ill-smelling corridors, dank and dirty, with here and there a tattered pretense of carpet or rug.

At the extreme end of the long, narrow hall on the third floor was a rickety excuse for a stair leading to the attic chamber, scarcely wide enough to permit one person to ascend. The door opening into the upper chamber was directly at the head of the stair, with no preliminary landing, the last step being the threshold of the trembling door.

Leading the way up this wailing stair, the janitor knocked upon the door. In a moment it was opened slightly, and a soft, musical voice said ques-

tioningly, "Yes?" Recognizing the janitor she opened the door, which seemed to squeal a protest, and bade him enter.

Chester, standing in the dark background, had not been perceived by her until the door was wide open. Upon seeing the form of a second person behind the janitor she gave a little exclamation of surprise and partially closed the door.

"Don't be afraid, Miss Malcomb, the gentleman wants to see you on a business matter. He is all right. I had a talk with him before we came up. His visit is a respectful one."

Chester now said: "I assure you, madam, I am not an intruder. I make due apology for thus presuming upon your privacy. My visit is wholly one in your own interest."

"Come in," replied a wavering voice.

The janitor pushed Chester in advance of him and into the room, then stamped heavily down the stair in a manner to notify him that he was playing fair.

It was the mysterious lady, and she at once recognized him.

A look of surprise and terror overspread her face as she saw in her presence the man who had aided Dr. McKim in bringing her back to life on that terrible December night. Surely he must think her unworthy and ungrateful for having run away in so unceremonious a manner. She regarded him with fear and shame. She could not surmise the reason for his coming, nor could she guess how he had succeeded in discovering her humble abode.

Many things flashed through her mind in the

moment of silence, following her first recognition of him. She could not easily forget his tender efforts to bring back into her benumbed body the life and warmth which had almost forsaken her on that fearsome occasion. Her cheeks flushed as she remembered how pleasing and soothing was his touch, as his strong, soft hands held and chafed her cold fingers and pushed the truant hair back from her eyes.

She distinctly recalled those few conscious minutes, and this made her wonder what she should say to him now, as he stood there smiling reassuringly. It was the same solicitous smile she had seen then, and it brought back the memory of a large, comfortable room, warmed by a glowing grate, and she lying so comfortable upon the great, soft leather lounge, with two strong, handsome men watching over her. Then, she again saw a great black cat with two luminous yellow eyes, like twin stars, looking at her.

No, she had not forgotten, and when this all flashed back upon her and she realized that one of those men had, for some reason, sought her out and had found her in this degradation and poverty she was overcome by shame and mortification. She dare not bid him go away, and she could not welcome him there.

Placing her hands over her face she dropped into the only chair in the room and wept, not daring to look at him or trust her voice.

For a minute Chester surveyed her. She was, in her dire poverty and amidst this squalor, an exceedingly beautiful woman. Although clad in the

cheapest, simplest garments, she was nevertheless a superior being. Neat and clean were her clothing and every nook and corner of the humble garret.

Her own person betrayed her refined and cultured nature. Her hair was a crown of glory, clean, bright, and beautifully braided and coiled about her superb head. It was the head of a goddess, proudly poised upon a full, round, white neck, which peeped above her simple dress.

Chester did not feel at liberty to intrude upon her embarrassment, and he patiently waited for the shower to cease and the sunshine to come. Her confusion and tears were a good sign; she would not rudely send him away.

Espying a canary in a little cage near the window, the very window which had brought him luck, he walked to it and tried, with low chirrups and persuasive little whistles, to induce the little bird to sing.

A slight rustle caused him to turn again towards Miss Malcomb.

She was standing erect, and, instead of the sunshine which he had expected, her face betrayed the settled anguish of deep mortification and sorrow.

"Why did you come here?" she demanded.

He did not let this show of angry resentment upset him, notwithstanding his surprise at this unexpected turn. He could not help admiring the dignity and power in her attitude. She was no ordinary woman in any circumstances.

Coming near her, he said:

"Were you convinced that my coming is wholly honorable, and that no woman living has more pro-

found respect from me than yourself at this moment, would you greet me thus?"

"How can you respect me in this degradation? If you respect me you would surely spare me this humiliation."

Her face was now scarlet, which made her most beautiful.

"You do yourself great injustice, Miss Malcomb. Moreover you reflect upon my sincerity and good sense when you intimate that your surroundings could alter my good opinion of you. While I might not wholly approve of this extreme, at the same time, were I looking for evidence of your respectability, and—if you will pardon my plain speech—your chastity, I should be abundantly convinced by these same surroundings of which you speak so disparagingly.

"If you will calm yourself and view this in a cool, deliberate way, eliminating false sentiment and putting me on the friendly footing of a willing brother, I can convince you in a few minutes that my visit need neither embarrass nor alarm you. You will, too, have a better respect for me when I tell you that I have searched in vain for you, only to find you by the most curious accident, an accident that would have changed my mind had I desired to find you for other than respectful purposes. Please do not condemn me too quickly. I have no evil designs. Would I seek adventure in a garret?" He was talking pleadingly and earnestly. Lifting a small flower-pot containing a scrubby little geranium plant from a soap box, he drew it near to where she had again seated herself, and continued:

"You are a sensible woman, capable of reasoning. I am not given to seeking the acquaintance of servant girls. I saw you, awhile ago, cleaning that window. That did not make me think you a servant, though I saw you doing the work of a domestic."

She started as he said this, and her cheeks burned as she viewed him with surprised eyes.

"Now, I come here and find you surrounded by all the evidences of poverty, the best evidences of a beautiful woman's virtue and self-respect—and you are a beautiful woman. Do be sensible and give me credit for seeing in you more than has been betrayed by our limited acquaintance and by your humble surroundings; then reserve your opinion of me till you know what my motives are, and I am sure you will be convinced that my intentions are perfectly honorable."

She watched him carefully as he talked, with her cheeks aglow, and her eyes gleaming like a tigress at bay.

Continuing, Chester said:

"Miss Malcomb, I admit it is unbecoming for me to force myself upon you in this sort of place, but I have no alternative. I could not ignore the appeal to my manhood which your appearance made upon me that fearful night when you lay there, the embodiment of death. I helped bring you back to life. I saw then your poverty. I saw then your beauty, and I was convinced that you were a woman accustomed to luxury, that you were not a common person, and I was determined to help you honorably, and mentally resolved to convince you of my

disinterestedness by having my own people come to your aid could I induce you to accept it. But you unceremoniously ran away, giving me no opportunity to offer to assist you." She was perceptibly softening, and as he paused, she said, almost with a sob:

"Forgive me, perhaps I was ungrateful, but you do not know. I am suspicious of everyone, because I am a stranger to your customs here. You may know some time why I could not trust even those who brought me back to life. God knows I am much in need of someone in whom I can trust. I have struggled so hard to remain independent to the end, but, sir, it isn't fair to any woman for a gentleman to thus pounce upon her, situated as I am. I surely have some pride, and in spite of my poverty, I can still blush."

"Now, you do not mean that," interrupted Chester. "You are a strong, sensible, well-bred woman, therefore capable of taking a philosophical view of the inevitable, and surely this humble life you are leading is inevitable, and not of your own choice. False pride should be as foreign to your nature as sunshine from shadow. Why should you care a rap what I think of your surroundings when the cause is none of my affair. But as a man, I have a right, even as a stranger, to offer you my candid assistance until such time as you may again assume your independence. If you are convinced of my respect and sincerity you are doing yourself injustice and perhaps irreparable harm in declining this opportunity of temporary relief from hardships to which you are unaccustomed, and which, if long

continued, must necessarily depress you mentally, morally, and physically.

"I live and move among the best class of people we have, therefore I know when a person is out of the position in which he or she belongs. That is sufficient apology for the poverty and squalor about you. You would be no better surrounded by all the wealth and luxury of the world. I care nothing for wealth beyond its comforts; its display and blare are distasteful to me.

"I admit your case is acute. By all appearances you have tasted the very dregs of poverty; doubtless you have felt even the pangs of actual hunger, but these things have not impaired your intrinsic self. Evidently they have strengthened you, else you would defy conscience and public opinion and go the way many women situated as you are would go, before you would live like this.

"Your only possible reason for feeling so disgusted with me for having discovered you thus is the fact that you think, like almost everyone, that poverty and abandonment go together.

"If I thought well of you before, I think much more of you now. I feel flattered that you are embarrassed to have me find you in this predicament, for it intimates that you value my good opinion and would rather have made a better impression upon me, with less display of the simple life. Do not disabuse my mind of this belief. I shall cherish it."

Thus he rattled on, never giving her an opportunity to reply to him. Finally with a little gesture of impatience she stopped him by saying:

"There, there; I ask your forgiveness. I acted

hastily, I admit," and with an air of freedom and greater composure she said, "Now will you please tell me how you found me in this den?"

He briefly told her of the curious incident of the field glasses, concluding by insisting that it was quite evident fate intended he should again find her, and it would be wholly wrong to ignore this fact, and the best should be made of it.

"Now, Miss Malcomb, I am going to be perfectly frank with you. I greatly desire to assist you in any manner you may devise that will leave you your freedom in every way. I will not intrude myself upon you. You may always draw the line when you think your conscience is being compromised. Moreover, you may take your own time and way of beginning. Treat me as a brother upon whom you may call for assistance and protection. Time will prove my earnest sincerity."

Then he told her of his arrangement with the janitor, including the excursions for the children.

She smiled amusedly at his impetuosity and zeal.

"You would make a good brother, no doubt," she said, "but your proposition is too far developed under the circumstances. I will promise not to be rude and wholly decline till we have examined it from every viewpoint. You may outline to me what method you wish to pursue in helping me. What do you know of my needs. Maybe I am self-supporting; maybe I am an impostor. What do you know about me to justify your enthusiastic desire to be of service to me? What is your true motive? How are you to be recompensed? All of these must be made clear before I may accept your aid with

self-respect." She paused and looked keenly at him as though trying to fathom his thoughts.

"These are matters which may be easily disposed of as they arise," he said. "The first and most urgent thing is for you to believe in and trust me. To be sure it would be embarrassing for you to quickly accept from a stranger substantial aid without knowing that it is not intended to shield some ulterior purpose. Now, in your case, I know practically all about you. I helped to bring you back to life. Should I not feel a deep interest in your welfare?"

"I did not ask the janitor one word about your circumstances, how you subsist, or what your habits are, but he did volunteer with commendable spirit that you are an eminently proper person and desirable tenant. I gave him my word of honor, as a gentleman, that I would not abuse the privilege of visiting you in your apartment."

She could not resist laughing outright at the mention of her apartment, which consisted of one dingy room with plain board floor, cracked walls, and threatening ceiling. There was one piece of well-worn matting upon the floor, and a cheap, red calico curtain partitioned off a portion of the room, concealing probably her boudoir. Without interrupting him, she allowed him to continue.

"I know without your telling me you will be slow to accept aid, especially from me, and you will doubtless insist upon remaining here for a while. You know you do not have to remain here an hour longer if you wish to accept a better home. If you would but compromise with your pride, I will bring

my aunt and my cousin here, and you may feel more inclined to listen to them."

"No, no, not that," she exclaimed excitedly. "You do not know what you are saying. In the first place it is sufficiently humiliating to have you find me here by accident, and in the goodness of your heart offer me assistance, without bringing women into the case. They would not view me as you do. No, I would rather trust you, and you alone. I have kept my secret till now, and you shall not expose me to the scorn of others. You, I believe, are sincere and good. Perhaps there is a way by which you can help me. We shall see. Yes, I believe I may trust you, but you must not allow even your friend, the doctor, to know.

"Moreover, I have not always lived thus, as you surely know, and I hope ere long to be able to give up this poverty. There is a very possible chance, therefore, I cannot afford to have this degradation known to others. When I feel that I can wholly trust you I shall tell you, without reserve, my story. Till then be patient."

Chester had arisen and was standing near her as she asked:

"Now, answer me this one question. How do you expect to be recompensed for any aid you may render me?" There was a tremor in her voice and anxiety in her face as she asked the question.

"The satisfaction I shall feel in having lifted a part of your burden and made you more comfortable will be quite sufficient," he said gently.

"I am in great distress," she said. "I am sadly tempted to say I will trust to your generosity and

honor, and perhaps some day kind fate will find a way for me to repay you," and she looked wistfully into his strong, sympathetic face.

Extending his hand, Chester said: "Then you will trust me?"

Arising, she placed her hand in his, and her answer was hardly audible. "Yes."

"The only favor you need grant me at this time, Miss Malcomb, is to permit me to come here frequently and cheer you up, and to allow me to make you more comfortable where you are. Your society friends will not find you here," at which she sadly smiled.

"You may come again, but I do not even know your name. I may be consoled by someone in whom I can confide. Your friendly calls may help me to bear my burden till a way is found to relieve me wholly of it. In the meantime, please do nothing that may cause gossip among the tenants. This is the first time I have ever received anyone here. I am glad you made peace with the janitor. He has been quite kind and respectful to me. I know none of the cave-dwellers below the attic floor."

Chester had drawn out a card case while she was speaking. As she ceased, he said:

"Allow me to present to you my card, Miss Malcomb. I have chambers, and receive my mail at the ——— Club. At any time you send a message or telephone to me there I shall receive it the moment I arrive there. In an emergency you might need the aid of someone, and I am always at your service. I have been here now quite long enough for a first visit, therefore I shall go, with

the pleasing satisfaction of having found you as sensible and reasonable as I had judged you to be.

"You must try to be happier now; I will do nothing to embarrass or annoy you, but you must learn not to resent anything I do. I shall make my hour of calling eleven o'clock in the morning, if you make no objection," and he moved towards the door.

She seemed reluctant to let him go, but at the same time showing the most becoming modesty in her demeanor towards him.

"I feel deeply grateful to you, Mr. Von Comp, and shall trust to your honor and discretion. Good-day," and he descended the complaining stair. Upon reaching the janitor's floor he found him mending a place in the hall floor.

He looked up as Chester passed him, and with a familiar grin asked, "Well, what luck?"

"Better than I expected," replied Von Comp. "I am to give her time to think it over. She will remain your tenant for a while. Thank you for your assistance. I will see you again soon. Should anything come here for her it will come in your care, and you see that she gets it without messengers going to her room. Will you do that for me?"

"Good, that I will," he exclaimed, and went on about his work as Chester passed out.

CHAPTER IX

BUCK

CHESTER VON COMP found the task of taming his mysterious protégée a very curious and delicate undertaking. He could not resist calling the next day, preceding his visit with a basket of delicacies and some potted flowering plants, all of which caused his co-conspirator, the janitor, to first sit up and notice, then wink hard at himself before the three-cornered piece of looking-glass nailed on his office wall.

Carrying the articles to the top of the attic stair he placed them upon the floor, knocked hard on the door, and hurried down again. He did not know just how to act his part, because he was totally at sea as to what was shaping in his establishment. However, he felt no particular misgiving about the matter.

Promptly at eleven o'clock Chester passed in and to the sky apartment.

In response to his gentle rap Miss Malcomb opened the door and bade him enter.

She did not seem in a happy mood. Her eyes were red with recent weeping, which she tried hard to conceal, yet her smile was pathetic and uncertain.

"Come in, Mr. Von Comp; I did not think you would come again so soon, but you are welcome. Of course you sent me all these nice things, for

which I am grateful," and her tearful eyes rested on the bright azalea which now occupied the place of honor on top of the soap box, the sickly geranium having been given a place on the window sill.

Chester felt flattered to notice that her hair was most beautifully dressed, and she had an air of neatness which seemed to intimate that she did expect him. Moreover, there was a second chair in the room, doubtless a compliment on the part of the willing janitor, perhaps at her request.

He was careful not to greet her too eagerly. He knew she was in no state of mind to accept advances. After wishing her good morning, he said, in a careless, easy voice:

"I believe were I in prison and should be asked to choose one thing to embellish my cell, I would choose flowers. These pretty blossoms do brighten your room, Miss Malcomb. Please do let them cheer your soul a bit. I simply followed to see if my connections were safely established. You received them without trouble, did you not?"

"Yes, I found them at my door. I presume it was the janitor who knocked. That is it, that is it, Mr. Von Comp, this stealing to me with comforts, whether I accept them gracefully or not, without even knowing whether or not I am worthy of kindness; this surreptitious charity hurts me."

"Now, Miss Malcomb, you are violating the terms of our protocol. You are to remain neutral, or at least receptive, until we can formulate a plan for the future. We can make no headway if you are to be cold and hungry, simply to appease an over-pride. You have said you would trust me—

surely you do not want to punish me by prohibiting my trifling favors, intended to cheer and encourage you. It is not surreptitious, neither is it charity. I will listen no more to your complaints. I will continue along selfish lines and send such things here as I think will make this dingy room more cheerful to myself, and you dare not throw them out, because of your promise. Wait and see if they do not cease to pain you. Do not scold me. I am not trying to offend or hurt your feelings."

An hour was the limit of his visits. Each day, rain or shine, he mounted the stair to the attic, preceded by some nice thing for Miss Malcomb. They were growing quite friendly, and he was always welcomed now by a bright, sunny face, and a happy smile.

"Funny charity, this," mused the wise janitor. "Every day roses and bonbons. I am wondering if the Saving Society does this same in all cases. Ha! Ha!" and he thrust his hard fingers into his waistcoat pocket and felt of the new banknote which Chester had just handed to him.

Chester had paid his daily visit to the "Sky-dweller," as he called his protégée, for ten days. It was a Monday morning. The usual bunch of flowers had gone up to the attic room, and this was soon followed by the willing contributor.

In vain he had tried to imagine how she earned her living. Only the day before he could curb his curiosity no longer, and had asked her to tell him in confidence how she supported herself. She had laughed at him and replied:

"Since you came I have lived on sunshine, smiles

and flowers, and I like them. Do I look emaciated?"

"I must confess they agree with you for you look charming," he said, and pressed the question no further.

For some reason he had called an hour earlier on this day, and it proved to be quite disturbing to Miss Malcomb.

"I am sorry you did not come at your usual hour, Mr. Von Comp," she said to him, and he thought he detected uneasiness in her manner. He was at once suspicious and jealous, and before he could check his unruly tongue he had asked her:

"Do you expect someone else?" There was a slight tinge of sarcasm in his tone.

She looked at him reproachfully for a second, then seeming to catch an inspiration, she dropped her head and picked at her sleeve in a most embarrassed fashion as she said in a reluctant voice: "Yes, I expect someone, and I should not like him to see you here."

"Him!" almost screamed Chester. "I thought you told me no one visited you here," and he stared at her in jealous alarm.

"Who is this man, and how often does he come here?" He wondered if there was another Society worker on her list of callers.

Without raising her eyes, she answered: "He comes every Monday and Saturday. He is very kind to me; I could not very well forbid his coming."

Chester had arisen and stood white and still in front of her, seeing visions of an injured husband.

At this moment there was a rap at the door, and with a ringing laugh, she opened it to admit one of the most comical beings Chester had ever seen. A diminutive Samson, about four feet tall, with an abnormally large head, grotesque in a shock of fiery red hair. On his arm he carried a basket twice as large as himself. It was heaped high with square packages; the whole being covered with a cloth, which was held in place by a leathern strap extending around the rim of the basket.

For an instant this homely little dwarf looked at Chester with surprise, then he dropped his basket with a thud upon the floor, and with a snort of anger he doubled his stubby fists and demanded:

"Is dis de chap wat sends yous de flowers?" He eyed Chester with an air which plainly said: "You intruder!" Standing between them, Miss Malcomb said:

"Mr. Brown, allow me to present to you my friend, Mr. Buck Finnerty." Then, by way of explanation, she continued:

"Buck, Mr. Brown is a very dear friend of mine who has called on some business matters. You need not feel alarmed to find him here. Mr. Brown, Buck is my best friend. He calls each Monday and each Saturday to deliver to me my week's task and receive that which I have completed. Indeed, for many weary weeks his visits have broken my monotonous loneliness, and he has rendered me kindly services for which I shall ever feel grateful."

Chester felt so ashamed of his own conduct a few minutes before Buck entered that he hardly knew what to do to appease the latter's resentment

at finding him there, but stepping forward he extended his hand, saying:

"Buck, if you have been Miss Malcomb's friend I am your friend."

The lad took his hand, but there was a sullenness about it which plainly intimated he was not fully assured that things were just right.

Miss Malcomb attempted to draw the basket towards the calico curtain, but both her friends sprang to her assistance.

"Please be seated for a minute, Mr. Brown," she said. "Buck and I are accustomed to doing this—you will only get yourself in the way."

Chester understood that he was not to see behind the curtain, and he heeded the request.

In a moment Buck had another equally bulky basket upon his stout arm ready to go.

"Wait a minute for me on the lower floor, Buck; I will walk part way with you," said Chester, as the former went out.

Buck nodded assent and went thumping down the rickety stair.

Turning to Miss Malcomb, he said in a penitent voice:

"Will you forgive me?"

She extended her hand to him and smiled sweetly as she replied:

"Of course I forgive both my boys," and then in a more a serious tone, "What do you want with Buck?"

"I only want to make him feel easy about finding me here, that is all. You do not care if I talk with him?"

She thought for a moment, then said :

"I suppose not, but please do not quiz him too closely."

Bidding her good-day, Chester hurried down to catch the red-headed lad who shared with him the privilege of visiting the tenant in the attic.

He found Buck in an earnest talk with the janitor. For a moment he stood on the stairway looking at them, and he overheard the following dialogue :

"Ah, go on, Buck, you're jealous; the gentleman has a right to be up there or I wouldn't have it, see?" and the janitor pushed the large basket to one side with his foot in order to back out of the small room with a dilapidated old lounge, which Buck was helping him move into the hall.

"Yes, I knows des chaps, da's allus ready to help a lady when she's a good looker, but y'u don' see 'em about when sh's like old Frances Grit, in de second-story back; she's older an' poorer den Miss Malcom'. Now, a'nt I about kerplunk on dat, eh, jan'?"

"I guess your talk is nearly right, Buck. Beauty al's does draw the biggest pay. What chan'st old Frances have agin Miss Malcomb in the front row at the Casino; ha! ha! But, me lad, I know so'thin' about this case, and it is all right. I'll guarantee tha's nothin' wrong 'ith 'em. You ought tu know that, Buck, as well as me." And the janitor brought from the room a large woolen cloth, saturated with oil, and began to rub the wood of the lounge briskly. "I'm goin' to fix this up for Miss Malcomb; I'll cover it with that green carpet, and look

at this wood, it polishes up great. It'll look as good as new."

Buck looked sullenly on till disturbed by Chester coming down the stair.

"Well, come on, Buck, old chap; I'll walk part way with you," said Chester, at which the janitor pricked up his ears and looked curiously after them.

"That chap's either all right or mighty wrong," he growled, and went on with his polishing.

Buck trudged along, his body at an angle of forty-five degrees, to balance the basket, which was really too heavy and cumbersome for his diminutive stature.

"How much of this kind of work do you have to do, Buck?" asked Chester, in a kindly voice.

The boy was full of suspicion, and he was still sulky.

"Oh, I don't haf to do dis for a livin'. I does it fur"—and he looked sharply at Chester through his slanting eyes,—“fur Miss Malcomb.”

"That's it, eh? She tells me you have been very kind to her," said Chester. "You take these up to her and come for them when they are finished, but you don't do this for everyone, is that it?" and Chester tapped the top of the basket and attempted to raise the corner of the cloth, but he was foiled by the strap. No opening had been left.

"Dat's 'bout it," laconically growled the dwarf.

"How does her work compare with that of others?" he asked, merely to keep the talk going in the right direction.

"Bad, till last week, but faster'n any of 'em now, twicet as fast," replied Buck with some enthusiasm.

"You are glad of that, are you not, Buck?"

The boy set his basket down for a breathing spell and he pushed out his abnormal chest as he answered this question.

"Say, boss, I don't no who yous is, but if yous is a old friend o' Miss Malcomb's, it's mighty funny how's you don't no anything 'bout what she's a been doin'. Why, if yous had jes seen dat woman tree mont's ago and sees her now yous couldn't tell she was de same person at all. I found her out; she's gittin' along fine an' dandy now, all right, all right. At first she couldn't string two hundred tags a day; dat made only ten cents a day. Now she makes her dollar and a half and two dollars a day right along. She can string more tags in a day dan any five wurken' for Dingle & Co. I is de only un wat kno's how she does it, too, and I an't tellin' no un, you bet. Dis is de second batch she trun out on her new machine. I tells yous, it's suthin' great."

While this was being delivered in short, jerky sentences, Chester was gasping for breath. He had without effort drawn from this loyal little dwarf practically the whole story.

Miss Malcomb was formerly in dire straits; this lad found her. He probably obtained for her this humble means of support—stringing tags for Dingle & Co.

She had devised some means by which she did more than others employed at the same work, enabling her to earn the munificent sum of perhaps ten dollars a week—less than the cost of his cigars for the same period. How long had she been earning this much? That was the question.

Placing his hand upon the boy's shoulder, he said:

"My dear Buck, I want you to understand that I am really a friend of Miss Malcomb; I have just discovered her whereabouts; I am glad she had so faithful a person to watch over her.

"You are not going to be ousted from this position, but you and I will work together, and you take my word for it, we shall soon put her where she belongs. You know, Buck, without my telling you, she is too much of a lady to be doing this, and we will gradually coax her to give it up. Will you trust me, old chap, and wait for me to prove my color?" and he extended his hand to the boy.

"Yes, I'll trust yer, but you better do right by Miss Malcomb," he said.

"Where is Dengle & Co.'s place?"

"On Forty-fort' Street, near Fort' Avnoo," said Buck.

"And you have to carry this basket away up there?" said Chester in surprise.

Coming close, Buck said in a stage whisper:

"In course not. Do you tink I's goin' to queer Miss Malcomb's job? Why, ef I took all dese back dere, as de work uv one person, Dengle & Co. 'ud whack de price in two, quicker'n a wink.

"Say, yous is Miss Malcomb's frien'. I don't mind tellin' you. I takes dese tu a place on Fortiet' Street, den I puts dem in two baskets, and take em back to de store, see? Dey is de work uv two persons, see? I collect the pay for two people, see? Den I gives it all to Miss Malcomb, an' dey knows no better," and he looked all-wise and important.

"Buck, you're a wonder!" exclaimed Chester. "We'll work together like a team. But, old chap, I want to have a talk with you the next time I see you about yourself. I have more money and time than you have, and perhaps we may find a way to use both of them to good advantage. How are you fixed now, yourself?"

"Ah, go on. I's got all de money I needs. Guess yous better keep on blowin' your'n fur flow'rs and tings fur Miss Malcomb," and Buck picked up his basket.

"They did help brighten up her den, didn't they?" asked Chester in a manner to appease the underlying jealousy in the mind of this independent and self-reliant fellow. Continuing, he asked:

"Can you make it so you can spend an hour at Miss Malcomb's room when you come on Saturday?"

"Yep," was Buck's brief reply.

"Very well, I'll see you then. Glad I met you, Buck. By, by," and Chester started to go.

"So long," was the boy's parting salute.

Suddenly Chester hurried after him, calling:

"Oh, Buck, wait a moment. This is the first talk we have had. Write your name and address on one of these tags. I may want to see you before the end of the week. I'll keep the card for a souvenir of this eventful occasion."

The lad placed the basket upon the sidewalk, slipped the covering off its edge, and deftly drew out an ordinary marking tag, with the name of Dingle & Co. in small letters about the eyelet, through which a short cord was looped, leaving

the two ends extended by which to attach it to articles for shipment. Hesitating for a moment, he extended the tag to Chester, saying:

"Yous kin write better'n I kin, write: Buck Finerty, — Fortiet' Street."

Grasping the situation, Chester wrote the name and address on the face of the shipping tag, and started to turn away, as he placed it in his pocket.

Buck had plucked another tag and stood holding it in his hand, hesitatingly; finally he plucked up the courage, and extending the tag towards Chester, said:

"Don't you tink tit fur tat a good game, Mr. Brown?" and he laughed knowingly, as he emphasized the name Brown.

"I'll give you something better by which to remember me, the next time I see you, Buck," he said, and they parted.

"A wise boy, this," thought Chester, as he looked over his shoulder and saw the sturdy little pigmy trudging up the street with nothing in sight but his bobbing head and his shuffling feet.

The next morning upon making his usual call at the sky apartment of Miss Malcomb he found her quite uneasy and embarrassed.

"Brave woman," he said, "you are a jewel of consistency and stubbornness."

"How much did Buck tell you?" was her anxious question.

"All," replied Chester impressively.

"The disloyal little rogue," she exclaimed, and she hung her head in confusion.

"On the contrary, he is the most loyal friend

you ever had or ever will have, but one," he said softly. "You need not feel embarrassed, my dear Miss Malcomb, no matter how humble it may be, no labor you may perform will ever lessen Buck's or my esteem for you. Were you not such a prude we would both work our finger-nails off, that your dainty hands might play or wear jewels."

With flushed cheeks and tear-filled eyes, she replied: "I believe you, but I hate idleness and jewels, and I love to work; therefore, there is no hope; so do I like both you and Buck. We are all good friends. I am much happier than I was, thanks to both of you."

"And you will be much happier, too, when you make up your mind to get out of this," he exclaimed hotly. "Why will you not be good, and listen to some plan to better your condition?"

"We will come to that. Too rapid a change might prove harmful to me. Am I not warm? Have I not an abundance of good food? Doubtless Buck told you that I have an independent income. I have no one to call on me here, but you, and I cannot conceal from you my poverty by attempting some move which would throw me upon charity, and that would be much more degrading to me. You seem happy here, why should not I? Wait, Mr. Von Comp, till I feel the inspiration to do something startling. As long as you and Buck stand by me I am both happy and contented. Am I not selfish?"

She had very materially changed since Chester first began to pay his visits to the attic room.

Always sweet and tidy, she had enhanced her at-

tractiveness by better clothes—very much too smart for her surroundings. Chester quickly surmised that she was drawing upon the remains of better days, and refrained from making any comments beyond his usual compliments regarding her good looks.

He had faithfully kept his promise, and his treatment of her was most courteous and considerate. He had no particular fear of calling there. It was out of the way of anyone who would recognize him, and even though seen entering or leaving the place, the chances were few that anything serious would be thought of it. New York people care little for what others do. He had not missed one day since the day he discovered her.

With delicate discernment he chose each day the things which he could send to her without appearing too generous, or arousing comment on the part of the janitor.

On her part, she felt secure in the confidence she had in his honor. He respected her, and undoubtedly felt a real pleasure in alleviating her discomforts, without morbid thoughts or ulterior purposes. There was no attempt to conceal from herself that this fine fellow was deeply interested in her for her personal beauty and charms. That she was a most beautiful and refined woman, her humble surroundings could not conceal.

Accidental poverty, thrust quickly upon her in a strange land, where employment is difficult to obtain when one has had no experience in self-support, was her only crime.

She dared not seek employment through public

agencies, for most urgent reasons. Her straitened condition must be temporary in any event, so she thought, but time had proved otherwise, until she had found herself wholly destitute. It became necessary for her to pawn everything of value. As her stock diminished she moved from time to time into more humble quarters until overtaken by sickness, which at last reduced her to this attic and dire hunger.

One day, by accident, a fiery-haired dwarf delivered a basket of tags to the attic room. This was Buck, whose native wit far exceeded his beauty.

Buck took an interest in the "poor lady with the angel hair," as he spoke of her to the janitor. He left the basket there and showed her what was expected of her.

As Buck had said to Chester:

"Ye o't 've seen her den. She couldn't lift a bucket o' soap, an' the first day she only strung two hundr'd tags, an' two dollars per wus big money, till a week ago."

In Chester Von Comp she knew she had at least comfort in any degree she might choose to accept at his hands. She also knew what he could only guess—that she was worthy to be anything to him he might ask her to be. Death would be preferable to continued degradation or to a surrender of her self-respect. All else, the whole world, might abandon her, but she would be true and loyal to conscience to the end, because she believed this would bring sure reward.

It was only a matter of time when she would take Chester into her confidence, and then he would

know. She was determined he should know nothing of her past until he had been well tested and tried. It would not be long, for she herself longed for affection and protection. She knew she could be a good wife to a good man, and she was woman enough to know that, should he be sincere in his purposes he, too, would test her by this same process. Therefore she must discriminate between a temptation to win her to indiscretion and an effort to test her.

Chester doubtless thought he was taking long chances, based upon his own judgment and worldly experience, of proving her to be a worthy woman of beauty and refinement in misfortune, and was making due mental reservation of sentiments until such time as he might be able to know positively who and what she was. A good woman, tried by the fire of adversity and found untarnished, is as a golden shield to be buckled on as a protecting armor in life's battles. Such a woman, and none other, could attract Chester Von Comp. Moreover, he was fond of adventure and loved the romantic.

Had there been dragons to destroy, brigands to fight, or great dangers to overcome, he would have liked it better. He was above the prudish notions of society, and was capable of some serious breach of social custom if it suited his fancy. There was sufficient romance in his experience with Miss Malcomb to add spice to his experiment, and should he find her a woman who he believed would make a worthy and good wife he would offer himself to her as promptly as though she were a shining society light.

They each had legitimate designs upon the other, and neither would be deceived in the end. They were conscientiously working toward the same end. Armed with the information which Buck had so readily given up, he was prepared for a final attack upon his stubborn protégée, and fully expected a surrender.

Drawing from his inner pocket the shipping tag, he held it dangling on its cord.

"I prize this more than gold or gems because it will remove from between us a false pride which stands as a barrier between you and comfort, which means my happiness.

"Miss Malcomb, if you believe that I will think less of you because of this humble method of making your own daily bread, you are much mistaken. You know without my telling you that I am an experienced man of the world, and I know that you, with your beauty, refinement and intelligence, need not perform such drudgery, were you willing to pay the wage demanded of beauty by a bad, vicious world as the price for the luxuries of sin.

"This tag, with its simple hempen cord, is a badge of honor to your virtue and your pure womanhood, compared to which all the crown jewels of the world are but dross.

"Your rags and tatters laugh to scorn the richest velvets, satins and silks in the court of real worth and merit. Shining forth from them, in all its gleaming purity, is your beautiful character, yourself in disguise.

"You shall not mock me when I tell you these things. I am old enough to know my own mind.

I know you for what you are. I respect you for a very simple reason. May I tell you what that reason is? Do not think me foolish because I speak to you so seriously when I have only known you for so brief a time. I am willing to abide by my judgment.

"Miss Malcomb, I will tell you why you may feel doubly assured of my respect for you, and that I will not persuade you to do anything which will compromise your conscience or cause you embarrassment in the future. When I know that you are free to permit it, and that I am acceptable as a candidate, I shall beg of you to allow me to prove my worthiness to try for your hand and your heart. With this understanding you will have more confidence in me, and will not suspect my motives."

She had arisen and was now standing before him with white, cold face and clenched hands.

"Stop, Mr. Von Comp," she demanded. Her voice was firm and positive. "You surely do not know what you are saying. I cannot permit you to further commit yourself. The circumstances make your proposition absurd. Even though I were perfectly free to accept any offer you might make to me, which I am not, I could not allow you to thus act upon impulse. You do not know me. I may, for all you know, be the vilest creature on earth in a plausible disguise. You display a fatal weakness in jumping at conclusions. I will not listen further to you. Be my brother, as you promised, and I will trust and esteem you, but please do not commit an error which you might long regret. As my protecting brother, I will, as soon

as I can muster the courage, tell you all; then you will know why I now dare not permit you to say more on this subject to me."

Chester was leaning upon the back of a chair, listening with eager attention to what she said. When she turned her head away, evidently unable to longer control her overwrought feelings, he took her hand, and standing close to her said:

"My sister, forgive me. I am too impatient, but do not dash my eager hopes in this cruel manner. I believed your forlorn condition intimated you had no one to whom you could turn even for affection, therefore you would be free of hand and heart. I wanted to tell you now, that you might always remember that your intrinsic personality had, without the aid of embellishment, made me your everlasting slave. I will bore you no more. It will make no difference in my treatment of you. But I beg of you to answer me one question, that I may be able to fully understand what the future holds for me. Do you love another, or are you bound in any way to another man so as to make it wholly impossible for you to accept an offer of marriage from me, were you inclined to listen to such avowal?"

He had not released her hand, and she did not withdraw it. Turning to him, with her eyes brimming with tears, she said:

"I am wholly free. That must suffice," and she would say no more.

"That is sufficient, Miss Malcomb, but you cannot compel me to give up hope while you are free, and I shall give no one else a chance," and they both laughed.

Continuing, Chester said:

"Now, if I am only to act the part of a brother, I shall assume a more arbitrary attitude, because good brothers are notoriously abused by their exacting sisters. Tell me all about this tag business."

"Yes, I will tell you everything. I felt that you should no longer be kept in ignorance about these things, therefore I did not oppose your talking with Buck; but I fear he told you too much."

"He told me sufficient to make me swear. A woman might weep, but men swear at pathetic stories. He told me of your extreme hardships. That boy is a jewel in the rough," and he recounted his experience with Buck, and finally they both laughed heartily.

"I will tell you the balance," she said. "I really was in a very bad way when this dear boy one day stumbled up that little stair and into this room. I was so weak I could scarcely get out of my room. The janitor proved himself to be a man at that time, too. He was always extremely respectful, and did everything possible to alleviate my distress. While I could never prove it, I shall always believe that he and Buck fixed up a scheme for getting me employment which would not tax my strength. Anyhow, Buck came in and looked about. Then, with a grunt of disapproval, he said:

"'Scuse me, mum, but I guess I got in the wrong pew. T'ot Mrs. Smith lived here. Du ye know Mrs. Smith?'

"Upon my saying I did not know the lady, he asked:

"'Dus ye happen to want work?'

"I quickly informed him that I had been quite ill and was very weak, but I should like to secure some light work which I could do in my room. At which he exclaimed:

"'Gee, all mighty! Don't make no diffrence no-how; yous needs de work an yous gits it. I'll show ye how.' And he opened his basket and took out a lot of tags and balls of twine and gave me my first lesson in 'stringing tags.' My first day's work netted me ten cents.

"Now, I will let you into a secret. About two weeks ago, while stringing tags, I thought of a simple little device by which I could string thousands where I had at first strung hundreds. I strung so many the first week that the price was reduced, so I practically lost the value of my invention. But each day I grew more proficient, and am compensated for the cut in price by the greater number I am able to string as an expert."

Here Chester interrupted her with a question.

"Did Buck tell you that he was returning the tags strung by you in two packages, as the work of two different persons, in order to prevent Dengle & Co. from again cutting the price on you?"

"Why no!" exclaimed Miss Malcomb in surprise. And they laughed heartily when Chester explained the matter to her.

"Could I see this device? I will not take undue advantage of your invention," laughingly said Chester.

"Certainly," replied Miss Malcomb. Then catching herself she flushed and hesitated, then looked appealingly at him.

"Well?" queried Chester.

"It is fastened to the wall," she said bashfully.

"Why may I not see the wall also?" he asked.

"Wait a moment," and she disappeared behind the curtain.

In a few moments she emerged and pushed the curtain partially back. "If you will promise to look at only the device, you may see," she said, with charming diffidence.

Laughing, he stepped forward and stood in the opening, while she explained the working of her tag-stringing invention.

He also saw that the green upholstered lounge was evidently her bed. The wall was her wardrobe, and a tall shoe box with a shelf inside and a piece of broken mirror was her dressing case. He was careful not to allow her to catch his eyes roving, however.

When she had finished the demonstration he announced that he thought her invention not only ingenious, but of real commercial value, and it should be patented.

"I will think it over," he said, "and the next time I come I will tell you what I think of it," and he took his departure.

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CHAPTER X

RANK IN RAGS

WHEN Chester left the sky-apartment that day he was much disturbed. He had allowed his impatience to get the better of his calmer judgment. He had not intended to hurry matters till he had heard Buck's story. This aroused in him such a volume of sympathy he could not restrain himself longer. He realized that Miss Malcomb had greater self-control than he. She had given him a lesson in diplomacy. Of course, she was in no position to listen to his wooing. He had no right to thrust himself upon her; yet his impetuosity had brought them closer together. He did not doubt her liking him, or her confidence in his honesty of purpose. He was more than ever convinced that he was doing nothing extremely foolish or risky in interesting himself in her. He felt certain that his was an adventure which would prove profitable in the end. She was a jewel, not in the rough, but a beautifully cut and polished jewel, which he had found in the gutter. Lost? By whom? It was of so rare a luster he would take all chances and keep it, concealed if needs be, until he could proudly wear it upon his own bosom.

He had kept his intrigue a profound secret from his friend, Paul McKim, for two very essential rea-

sons. She had requested it of him, and he felt a hesitancy in confiding his infatuation even to his bosom friend. Many times he felt heartily ashamed of himself for thus concealing from Dr. McKim that which he had a right to know. But as he felt himself being gradually enthralled by a personality which swung itself wholly free from the most degrading surroundings, he also grew suspicious and jealous.

Dr. McKim himself was a most fascinating man, and as a professional man, would have peculiar advantages over him should he, too, be cast under the spell of such a fascinating woman.

He had forced his generosity upon her, and he had no claim which could be offered in his own defense should she choose to accept the attentions of another. Therefore, at the end, pure selfishness took the place of other and more cogent reasons for his keeping Dr. McKim from knowing he had again found the mysterious patient in whom he, too, was naturally interested.

On the day that Eudora visited Dr. McKim's office this jealous feeling culminated in a partial breach of their friendship.

It was just preceding this breach that Chester had declared himself to Miss Malcomb. At this time, and following the departure of Dr. McKim for England, occurred the interesting events chronicled in this chapter.

On the Saturday following his examination of the tag-stringing invention of Miss Malcomb, instead of going directly to the attic room, he remained below in the janitor's room to waylay Buck

in order to have a private talk with him before going up.

Buck soon entered the hall noisily; he was so full of energy he had to work it off in noise. Loudly whistling a medley of popular airs, he slammed the door and came shuffling down the hall.

"Ring off that buzzer, do you want to get the house down on ye?" yelled the janitor.

"My! but you's grumpy dis mornin', pop," and Buck dropped his basket with a thud.

"Say, jan, I's got a new 'un. Why does a bull-frog jump?"

"Oh, to catch bugs, I suppose," said the janitor.

"Naw, ye's dead wrong. 'Cause he can't fly, see? Ha, ha," and he stooped to get his basket preparatory to climbing the long stairs.

"Hold on, Buck, I want to see you," called Chester from the janitor's room.

With a look of surprised embarrassment the lad brought his basket and deposited it by the janitor's door, and stood waiting for Chester to call him.

The janitor posted in a conspicuous place a card: "Janitor gone out; back in an hour." Then saying, "Close the door when you come out," left them there alone.

"Come in here, Buck, I have something bully good to tell you. It makes me chuckle to think about it." He was assuming something of Buck's vernacular, in order to get in touch with him.

"By Jove, we've got the scheme by which we will lift the lady in the sky-parlor out of all her troubles, and at the same time fix you up all right. You've been casting your loaves upon the waters,

and now they have come back a whole bakery. Sit down there and tell me what you think about it."

Taken by surprise, Buck dropped upon the soap box which Chester pushed toward him and sat staring with eyes and mouth wide open.

"Now, my boy, listen carefully. I am going to tell you some things in strict confidence. They shall be our secrets.

"You know, Buck, that Miss Malcomb, as good looking as she is, is a corking good woman, or she wouldn't stay up there in that dingy hall, would she? Do you know what I mean?"

Buck nodded wisely.

"Well, she is that proud and self-dependent, that she will not allow anyone to help her. That I consider wrong; therefore, we must beat her at her own game of stubbornness, and we can do it nicely and neatly, too. You remember you told me she had a secret by which she strung more tags than the others? Well, she showed me that device yesterday. Buck, there's a fortune in that thing, and you are the chap to pull it out."

Buck sat up straight and turned red at this.

"The whole thing depends upon how you take my proposition. How much do you earn a week, Buck?"

"I gits seven a week," he replied.

"We can make that look like thirty cents," said Chester.

Buck's chest began to heave, until it looked like he would burst the buttons off his waistcoat.

"Let's go into figures," continued Chester.

"What do Dengle & Co. pay a thousand for stringing tags?"

"Dey only pays toity cents a tousan' now. Dey used to pay more," replied Buck, now beginning to see daylight.

"How many tags do they string a day, do you know?"

"Two hundred tousan' a day," said Buck, with an air of grave importance at even mentioning the large output of the firm for which he worked. True to his class, he was an extremist. He would be loyal to the death to a cause in which he had enlisted his sympathies, yet he would be equally uncompromising towards any person gaining his enmity. He was dwarfed in body and stunted in mind like the gorilla, but he also had that ancestor's courage.

As he carefully watched him, Chester dwelt upon these truths, so manifest in an imperfect human being.

"How many persons are engaged in stringing this number of tags?" was the next question.

"About a hunderd. Ye see, most of 'em is young goils, an' dey kin only turn out a tousan' a day, but de grown uns, dey kin put up two or tree tousan'."

"Then Dengle & Co. pay out sixty dollars a day to one hundred persons for stringing two hundred thousand tags. That is an average of sixty cents a day earned by tag-stringers. Now, Buck, in your opinion, how many tags could an expert turn out a day on Miss Malcomb's device?"

Leaning confidentially towards Chester, with his eyes gleaming and his face flushed, Buck glanced

to the right and to the left, looking for all the world like a cautious rat, and said in a stage whisper, "She kin ruin de business. She kin string ten tousand' tags in eight hours."

"Why, you surprise me," exclaimed Chester. "Where others would be drawing sixty cents for a hard day's work, an expert, by the use of this machine, could make three dollars."

"Dat's de point," exclaimed Buck. "Where a hundred people is makin' a livin' outin it now, twenty people 'ud take all de stuff, and eighty uv 'em ud have to husk onions or starve."

At this startling statement Chester himself sat up and began to think. He had demonstrated the most poignant lesson in economics he had ever seen. Even this half-developed lad saw the danger to the wage earners resulting from the invention of labor-saving devices. He was much disappointed, too, to recognize that now to advance his plans along the lines which he had thought out would be to bribe this loyal soul to abandon humanity for personal gain. This was contrary to his own theories and beliefs, therefore, wholly impossible.

He must think of some other plan. It would be manifestly unfair for him to arouse in this innocent mind an avaricious tendency, by pointing out to him the gain to himself by a sacrifice of his sense of justice towards his fellow beings. Yet he would try him further, and at the same time encourage in him the generous spirit, a glimpse of which he had seen.

Suddenly Buck came to his relief in an unexpected manner.

"I'd hate tu take de bread out'n de mouf uv poor workin' people, but dis is comin', it's boun' to come. Only yisteday I hearn Mr. Walter Dengle say da wuz workin' on a machine what ud stop all dis outside peddlin' bisnes. I's already to't o' axen Miss Malcomb to git a lawyer to see if dis ant a patent. It's bully, an' all her'n."

Eloquence, backed by reasonable argument, can sway the world. Chester felt his opinion swayed violently the other way, by this counter argument, and his mind began to work vigorously. After all, perhaps it were better to have Miss Malcomb and Buck benefit by this invention, which was theirs, than to have Dengle & Co. get the idea and discharge all of these outside tag-stringers. They could at least minimize the harmful effects of its introduction by having its control in their own hands. He quickly made up his mind.

"You have said some wise things, Buck. I have more confidence in your judgment. It would be a serious thing to introduce this mechanical device to take away the employment of many people, and if we could let these people continue in the enjoyment of this labor by withholding this invention it would be manifestly wrong for us to introduce it, but just as you say, it must come sooner or later, and I believe we could cause the blow to fall more lightly than to permit Dengle & Co. to think out the same device and obtain a patent upon it."

"Dat's 'zackly what I'm t'inkin' meself," encouragingly put in Buck.

Continuing, Chester said: "How would it do, Buck, to start a tag business ourselves?"

"Wid dis machine all our own, we could put 'em out'n de game," was the emphatic reply.

"Very well, I shall take the matter of organizing a company in hand at once. I shall also have a patent lawyer apply for a patent on this device immediately. We need not wait for a patent to issue, but we can go right to work, as soon as we can organize, and right here is where you and I must get busy.

"You see, Miss Malcomb is a lady who has accidentally bumped into hard lines. She will get out pretty soon, and then she will not need our help, and it might be embarrassing for her to be mixed up in business, see? Therefore we will act for her. I shall apply for a patent in your name, and that will give you the benefit of the invention if her luck turns and she does not need the money."

"Huh! dat means yous wants to marry her," grunted Buck.

"Why, what caused you to draw that conclusion?" asked Chester in surprise.

"Well, she cud borry money, ef a fortune was a-comin' tu her," he replied.

"Well?" insisted Chester.

"Yous rich, an' ef yous marries her she wouldn't need de tainted dough. Dat's all de reason yous can see, ain't it?" and Buck looked him boldly in the face.

Chester studied for a moment, then said:

"Buck, suppose you were right in your surmise, then what?"

"Why, dat's all right; I tinks yous all right, and

I don't believe she cud do better. Now yous has my candied opinion. Let's go on a-crackin' rocks."

Chester laughed heartily, but Buck looked serious. He failed to see a joke in such earnest business.

"How long have you been in this tag business, Buck?" asked Chester.

"T'ree years," was the laconic answer.

"Then you must know something about the mechanical end of it."

"Yep, I kno's all about it. De second foreman is a good frien' o' mine."

"Do you think he would like to get into business for himself?"

"Yep, he'd like to git into business," replied Buck, apparently grasping the meaning of the questions.

"Very well, we shall get together at once.

"I will furnish the capital, and you and your friend, the foreman, may run the business. I will loan the money to the firm and put a man in charge of the accounts. The stringing machines will be installed and Miss Malcomb shall draw fifty dollars per week royalty. You shall have a salary of sixty dollars a month to begin with, and the foreman also a sufficient salary. The company must pay me four per cent. interest on the borrowed capital, and all profits over and above all the expenses shall either be applied toward improving the plant, to increase and develop the business, or divided equally between Buck, the foreman, and Miss Malcomb. Now, how does that strike you?" and Chester paused.

Buck had sagged considerably, and sat staring. Suddenly he sat up and asked:

"Is yous a-jokin'?"

"Not at all. To-morrow I will see you and the foreman, and we will see how he feels about it. I have a building over on Seventh Avenue, with power, which would be just suited to the business."

"That's bully!" exclaimed Buck, all afire.

"You mustn't get rattled now, Buck. Keep perfectly cool and say not a word about this to anyone. You must not breathe to your foreman friend that you know anything about a stringing machine until our patent application is filed. That would spoil all.

"One other thing, Buck. You must be deaf and dumb about this to Miss Malcomb. I must work that end of the game. Should she ask you questions you must say you are sworn to secrecy and refer her to me. Is that agreed upon?"

"Sure, Mike," said Buck stoutly.

And it was settled. Buck was to be a principal in the tag business, and the basis of the new business was to be the invention of Miss Malcomb.

When she was informed of this she was delighted. She was also quite satisfied with the stipulation regarding her royalties, which income was to begin the following Monday.

The business was so quickly put in operation that Denge & Co. knew nothing of it till a cut in the price of tags, which they could not meet, took away from that company a very large slice of its business, making the new company profitable from the very start.

Miss Malcomb had taken a modest little furnished apartment in a better location, and was extremely happy over the turn in her fortune.

"Nothing succeeds like success." Chester was getting his share of the benefits, for she could not ignore the fact that it was due to him alone that these rapid changes had taken place. She owed her comforts to him. Her self-respect had returned, and with it a strong feeling of gratitude for the author of her good fortune.

Chester had not again intruded his chief topic upon her, but he had dropped into confidential little ways which smacked strongly of a lover. She did not resent them, excepting when they became too marked, then she would by a simple look bring him up with a short turn. He only smiled and was happy.

She looked much better in her new surroundings. She was a splendid manager and kept herself beautifully but simply dressed, the simplicity of her outfits giving a severe charm to her elegant person, which needed little adornment to make her attractive.

The happiest day of Chester's life was the first Sunday on which he induced her to go driving with him through the parks. Although in the latter part of January, it was a beautiful spring-like day. His only fear was that he might meet his aunt and cousin, for he was not fully prepared for them to know Miss Malcomb. His fears were groundless, however, and the drive was most enjoyable. She was snugly wrapped up, and looked the distinguished lady that she was.

This occasion was memorable, however, for another reason. That evening Chester partook of a simple little dinner with Miss Malcomb in her own home. She and her one good servant prepared it. It was three weeks after Dr. McKim had sailed for England.

She was a lovely woman that evening. The keen air had tinted her cheeks like rose leaves, and she was vivacious, sparkling, witty, and so charming as to arouse Chester to an almost ungovernable pitch.

"To-night you are the most beautiful woman I ever saw," he said as they entered the reception-room. "I wish you would unbend, Miss Malcomb, and give me some freedom of speech. I am hungry to say something to you. You have long promised to tell me all about yourself. Please do so now, at this happy moment."

"And make myself most unhappy after this day of sweet delights?" she asked, looking at him with her great calm eyes.

"I never want you to be unhappy, I assure you," he declared.

"There, I believe you; I feel happy in the confidence which I have in you to-night. I am going to tell you the truth, and perhaps sacrifice myself and lose forever your friendship. I do not deny having for you an esteem which I am fearful to analyze, yet I dare not encourage you to foster other than a brotherly feeling for me. The day I lose that will be sad indeed. I daily accuse myself for having permitted you to so enmesh both yourself and me, yet you were a free agent and I—it

is too dreadful to picture it all over again. Is it wrong for one to slip into heaven through gates ajar with the tortures of hell about them? Well, I did that." She paused.

"Cease accusing yourself then, my sister; I will not desert you in any event," said Chester, lifting her hand to his lips and leading her to a seat. "Now, let's have it over with. Tell me the story." And he drew another chair near hers, and attempted to hold her hand in his own. She withdrew it, saying:

"Do not think me a prude, Mr. Von Comp, but I cannot talk with the freedom I shall struggle hard to summon while feeling your friendly warmth. I want to experience only the raw contact of my subject. I shall endeavor to put it into as few words as possible.

"I cannot tell you who or what I am, because I do not know myself."

Thus she electrified her listener by her first sentence.

Continuing she said: "The earliest recollection I have of myself was as a small girl in a private school, a sort of exclusive home for children, just outside of London. I remember it was a most beautiful place and a delightful life. Everything I needed I had. I was lovingly cared for by a kind, motherly woman, who seemed devoted to me and who evidently had exclusive charge of me. She was a refined and educated woman, and thoroughly versed in the care of children, as was often shown by her advice to other governesses.

"She carefully taught me the rudiments of edu-

cation, and with the assistance of some of the teachers connected with the institution I was prepared for the higher grades. Although there were classes there, I was never required to take part in them. I distinctly remember that I was examined in my primary studies by an elderly woman, who seemed to be at the head of the institution, and she warmly congratulated my directress upon my proficiency, declaring I was much in advance of those in the classes.

"I loved to study and was very happy. I especially loved and excelled in music, being passionately fond of the harp, which I mastered.

"I remained at this place until I was fourteen years of age, and I do not recall ever having gone outside its extensive grounds. It was not permitted for me to freely associate with the other inmates, although I did have a limited few delightful playmates. We were allowed to mingle only when our governesses were with us. Knowing no other life but this, and having every loving kindness and luxury, I could not be otherwise than good and happy. Looking back to it now, it was the most blissful and peaceful existence one could imagine. I am sure I could have spent my whole life there perfectly contented.

"When I was old enough for consecutive thought I noticed, and finally looked forward to, the visits of a distinguished-looking gentleman, who came as regular as the new moon each month, apparently to inquire about me. He petted me and made much over me, calling me his little Betty—you know my name is Elizabeth Malcomb. My

directress called this visitor 'Professor,' but would never tell me his name.

"At last a sad day came. It was the middle of the month. One day the professor came most unexpectedly. A conference between the principal, the professor, and my governess was held behind locked doors, and they were all weeping when they came out of the room. The professor put his arms about me and kissed and embraced me passionately as he said good-by. The principal stood by the window quietly weeping, while my governess bustled about in a most excited manner. I was the calmest one in the room. It all seemed so strange to me I forgot to do more than look on in amazement, wondering what would happen next.

"Late that night and till noon next day my governess packed trunks and boxes. Then the principal wept some more, embraced me and bid me farewell. Then I knew I was to leave my delightful surroundings.

"A dark, grizzled, ugly man, with a black, glossy beard came. The trunks and boxes were loaded on the top of a large stage-coach. The strange man, the governess and myself entered the coach, and we passed forever out of my paradise.

"For many days we drove through the country, passing through quaint country villages and stopping nights at the most curious inns. The stranger accompanied us all the while. I was told by my governess we were passing through England and into Wales. The journey was by no means unpleasant; I saw so many things to which I was unaccustomed; I was constantly being surprised.

"At last we arrived at a great arched gateway with a decaying keeper's lodge at the entrance. Here we stopped for a while, until a cart came to meet us, in which were an old gray-haired man and a middle-aged woman.

"They greeted us cordially, and after a parley with our strange companion they preceded us, and we were driven to a great pile of ruins half as large as a town, and to one special building, which seemed to be the only one inhabited.

"Our trunks, our boxes, and ourselves were unloaded. The man with the black beard did not even go inside the house, but again entered the coach, waved us adieu, and was driven away.

"This proved to be a secluded school where were only about a score of advanced pupils. While I soon found I was to have greater liberty here, my governess was ever on the alert and constantly warned me against being questioned by any of the others.

"There was not so much comfort here, but there was a romantic air about the place quite pleasing.

"I continued certain branches of my studies, making a specialty of music and literature.

"We had been here perhaps two years when one day two men came in a large coach. One presented a letter to the principal, and there was quite a wrangle over something. My governess was standing on a stairway listening. She suddenly rushed up the stair, threw a scarf about my shoulders and head and hurried me down a back stair, across a large court, and into a deserted portion of the old castle.

"Of course I was greatly alarmed. My governess said that these men wanted to serve some kind of legal papers upon her, and that she would explain the matter so I would fully understand it later. We were in a position where we could look out through an embrasure and get a full view of the front of the house, also of the stables.

"We saw a man on horseback leap out of the stable and gallop away down the great avenue. The stage-driver jumped down and ran into the house, and soon reappeared, and the men with him. They excitedly viewed the disappearing horseman, then re-entered the house, and great commotion followed. Owing to the vastness of the ruins it was next to impossible for them to search out anyone hiding therein. They again returned to the coach, consulted a while, then entered it and drove away at a gallop, doubtless guessing the horseman to be a messenger and deciding to overtake him.

"The governess hurried me back to our rooms and we were joined there by the principal. Again I was kept in ignorance of what was said. But that night all of our belongings were packed, and the next morning, at break of day, we entered a stage-coach and were driven away. It was apparent from the nature of the farewells that it was a permanent leaving.

"We were driven to a railway station, where we took a train the first time I had ever seen a railway train, and we went to London. There we were joined by the man with the glossy black beard, and the next day we left London for Paris, where he again left us.

"From Paris we fled to Vienna, then to Berlin, St. Peterburg, and Stockholm, finally arriving at Dresden, beautiful Dresden.

"According to my knowledge of my age, I was now seventeen. In Dresden I resumed my studies, taking up, also, German and French.

"We remained in Dresden for eight years, during which time the man with the black beard visited us several times, and once, at the end of this period, the professor came. He was very feeble and seemed most glad to see us. My governess begged him to give up his profession, which I learned was chemistry—he was associated with some great London institution—and come to Dresden and remain permanently. Although he was most happy while with us, he declared he could not surrender his life's labors, but must remain in London.

"On the occasion of this visit it became apparent that a crisis was approaching. I heard the professor say his brother had just died in London, and in the talks between him and my governess I caught snatches of the conversation which led me to conclude that they were about to reveal to me some great secret regarding myself.

"Only once did I ever urgently ask my faithful governess for an explanation, when, taking me in her arms, she said:

"'My dear child, it is not my secret to give. I am sworn to keep you in ignorance until those who care for you, and for me, will release me from my oath. Will you be patient till I may tell you?'"

"I loved her dearly. She had been the only mother I had ever known, and most faithful to her

charge. I could not remember her ever having spoken an ill word to me. Therefore I never again broached the subject.

"Naturally at the age of twenty-five, at the time when the professor visited us at Dresden, I had begun to do some independent thinking, and I often found myself pondering over the past mysteries of my life, and wondering when the end would come. In fact, I was growing restless to know something of myself.

"My guardian had studiously prevented my coming in contact with men, and I had scarcely spoken a dozen sentences to a man in my life, other than the professor and the man with the black beard. I felt quite an affection for the former, while the latter inspired me with horror and constant distrust.

"We seemed always to be provided with ample means, and while in Dresden both my governess and myself were fashionably dressed, as I recall it now, quite expensively so. We had a beautiful little villa of our own, with servants and a pony and jaunting cart, which gave us great pleasure. I had my own little flower garden, in which was a pretty fountain filled with goldfish. We attended the opera, listened to the grand concerts, and each Sunday partook of the delicious *table d'hôte* dinner at one or the other of the many delightful public places in Dresden. It was indeed an ideal life we were living when the professor came. While I was delighted to see him, I felt instinctively that it had much to do with me. A fear seized me that we must again flee from some unknown enemy. I

dreaded to have to surrender my lovely garden, my pretty fishes, my dear little canaries, and my beloved pony.

"They both saw my troubled condition, and doubtless talked long and earnestly about it. At last, just before leaving us, my dear old professor took us into my sweet little garden, and said:

"My dear child, you have grown to be a woman, and it is not fair to you for us to keep you longer in ignorance regarding your parentage and the true history of yourself. We know you have been troubled, as you have grown out of your childhood. Yet there were, and still are, most important reasons which prevent our enlightening you. It vitally concerned my brother, who has just died in London. The man who has occasionally come to you, and helped you, was my brother. While his death partially releases your secret, it does not wholly do so; but I hope ere long to lay before you all.

"In order that you may keep your head high and feel the dignity of your true self until the whole truth may be told you, I will inform you now that you are of noble and legitimate birth, and will, God sparing me for the task, come into your own again. I feel that I have borne my burden long enough and may now lay it down without fear. I have not known one happy or peaceful moment for thirty years. I hope and pray I may be spared to see the day when a great wrong is righted which involved both my brother and myself. When that correction is made, you will be restored to your rightful station.

“ ‘I shall start back to London to-morrow and begin the preparation of the way, and when you again hear from me you will be a free and happy woman, who may hold her head up with any woman in all England.’

“I was greatly surprised by this brief story, and I could not sleep that night for thinking.

“The next day the professor bade us a sad farewell. Somehow his actions implied a thought or feeling on his part that he would never see us again.

“A fortnight passed and no word came from the professor. I was seated at my harp, playing, when I heard a low, gurgling scream in the adjoining room, where my faithful guardian was reading a morning paper. Rushing into the room I found her in a dead faint, with her arms and face resting upon the table in front of her, and her finger upon the headlines of a sensational telegram from London. After partially reviving her and turning her over to the servant's care, until I could learn what had caused her to thus collapse, I examined the newspaper item, which read as follows:

“SENSATIONAL SUICIDE OF PROFESSOR EMANUEL
M'KIM IN LONDON.

“Report comes from London that the sudden death yesterday of Dr. Emanuel McKim, for thirty years first professor in chemistry in the Barkelmores Medical Institution, West End, London, was a suicide by poison, a note being found which made it clear that he took his own life.

“The afternoon papers of the previous day had

published a sensational story, without using names, of the death, a few weeks ago, of a man who formerly resided in London, and whose brother was a professor of chemistry in one of the largest medical institutions in London, alleging that the two brothers had been suspected of the murder of one of the richest men in England, some years previously, but for lack of evidence they were never openly charged with the crime.

Having a grievance against the brothers, the Duke of ——— had gone to London and to the office of the elder brother, the present suicide, and in a quarrel the chemist stabbed an instrument, saturated with prussic acid, into his body. He was found dead in the carriage, and for some reason no investigation of the matter was ever made. The younger brother had his own death in India announced in the London papers, and then returned to London, where he has since resided under an assumed name, after having deserted a wife and child in India.

“It would seem Prof. McKim could not again face the world with this disgrace hanging over him, and ended his long and honored career by self-destruction. It is also intimated that he and his brother, none other than George Bernard McKim, are also deeply involved financially.”

“Here the article ended, but it was a great shock to me. My guardian’s name was Martha Bernard, and why I could not say, but it came to me like an electric shock, that she was the sister of the McKim brothers, which proved later to be true.

“The shock of this terrible tragedy was very great to her, but she suddenly rallied, and in a hysterical manner began to pack trunks and boxes,

urging me to help. We must go at once, she insisted. We must take the first steamer for the United States. Late that afternoon she engaged passage upon the next steamer leaving Hamburg for America, to sail three days thereafter.

"In the meantime we packed and stored our furniture and gave up our sweet little home, only taking with us our personal effects.

"On the day we were to leave Dresden—in fact, on the very moment of our starting, an express package was delivered to my guardian, which we carried along with us, not having the opportunity to examine it until we were aboard ship.

"We found the package contained a letter written by Professor McKim, explaining a number of other papers, which were carefully done up in a lead-foil covering."

Here Miss Malcomb asked to be excused for a moment, and she passed into her boudoir, returning in a moment with a package of papers in her hand. Then continuing her story, she said:

"Before showing you these papers I will tell you of our subsequent vicissitudes.

"The shock my beloved companion had received was too much for her at her age. She became very ill, and on the fourth day out she died, and I, not knowing what to do to prevent it, saw her buried at sea.

"Before her death she told me much, and doubtless would have told me all had she not died suddenly of heart failure.

"Her story was to make me understand the papers which she had handed to me in anticipation

of accident to herself. She also entrusted to me her money and simple jewels, saying they belonged to me anyway. Among these was this silver locket which I have since worn about my neck." Here she drew forth a small, very old-fashioned, hand-wrought silver locket and opened it, revealing the portraits of a young woman and a sweet-faced baby.

Beneath the one was carved on the silver case, "Duchess Betty," and beneath the other "Baby Betty," and the date, "May 12, 1864." There was a marvelous resemblance between Duchess Betty and Miss Malcomb.

"She told me that she was Martha Bernard McKim, sister of Dr. George Bernard McKim, who had recently died in London, and Dr. Emanuel McKim, who had committed suicide only a few days previously, and that the former was the man with the glossy beard, and the latter our beloved professor.

"They had, several years previously, committed a crime for which they could have been imprisoned for life, or perhaps hanged, had they been apprehended. It involved the abduction of myself and two brothers, whose names I do not know, because, as you will find when we look at the papers, although the essential facts are given, Professor McKim purposely concealed the names in order to protect them against accident or loss. It had been understood between them, that the key should be revealed to me verbally by my guardian at such time as the secret of my life was explained. It seemed also that the younger brother was master of the situation, for the professor had, upon the death of

the former, come to us, doubtless to prepare the way for a confession.

“Had the exposure in the newspaper not been made, it is very certain the professor would not have committed his rash deed. But in spite of the blot upon his past he was a man of high standing in the scientific world. Evidently he could not face the disgrace. Moreover, as he states in his confession, it was the dread and fear of exposure and prosecution that had prevented his making restitution and proper amends to those whom they had most injured.

“The younger brother was the real criminal, while the elder was only implicated by accident, but in a manner to make him in the eyes of the law a principal. However, he had, it seems, control over one of my stolen brothers and myself, and with the view of making final restitution, he had raised us in comparative luxury and given us such an education as we might have had under our natural circumstances, and thus he compromised with and quieted his conscience, until the time might come when he could restore us, clean and whole, to our parents. The sudden culmination of events shattered his plans and left me in a worse plight than ever, with an authentic notion that I am rich, yet in fact poverty poor.

“When I arrived in New York I was amazed at the magnitude of things, so much so I was dazed and bewildered. I succeeded, though, in getting to one of the leading hotels, where I shut myself in my room for three days, to think and gather my scattered senses. At the end of this time I found

myself heartbroken and extremely lonely and depressed. I dared not attempt to go into the streets. The hurly-burly and noise made me positively crazy.

"Having absolutely no business experience, I did not know how to foster my little money, therefore, when at the end of my first week in the hotel I received a bill for fifty-six dollars, I gasped. I did have sense enough to count my money and estimate that at that rate I could remain there only eight weeks, only having about five hundred dollars. My directress had told me with tearful eyes as she gave it into my keeping that her brothers had died greatly involved, and that she was now penniless. She had fled for two reasons—to get as far away from the law as possible, fearing that exposure might also involve her, and believing that America would offer us the best opportunity to support ourselves until I could be put in proper relations with my native estate. Her flight, in fact, was a panic, the sudden death of her two brothers, who had hitherto supported and protected her, having greatly frightened and excited her. I had always acted upon her merest suggestion, without asking questions or giving thought to consequences. I had absolute trust in her. She was a dear, good mother to me. I never ceased calling her governess. She would not permit me to call her mother.

"Well, the rest is short. I went as my money went until I landed in dire poverty, where you found me. As we examine these papers I will tell you the only aims or purposes I have had in my mind. I should have carried out my last plan had you not found me."

CHAPTER XI

CONFESSION OF PROFESSOR EMANUEL M'KIM

CHESTER VON COMP listened eagerly to the story of Miss Malcomb, and when she had finished he took her hand in both his own and pressed it, reassuringly. This time it was not withdrawn.

"Now," she resumed with assumed haste, "let's look at the papers. You see, here is the professor's letter which accompanied the package. In view of the subsequent events, I think this letter intimates his intention of taking his own life. It was put into the express office in London probably the day he committed the deed, being sent with the parcel instead of by separate mail. She read the letter aloud to Chester:

"MY DEAR AND LOYAL SISTER:

"Feeling a premonition of evil, I have decided to send to you the papers of which we talked while I was visiting you. I am all upset by George's death. He was extremely strong and healthy up to within a week of his demise. Even on the day of his death there were no serious symptoms. But he had lived a sort of hunted life for many years, always fearful of apprehension, making both his own and my life miserable.

"Of late he has been a severe drain upon me, entangling me in disastrous financial ventures which

have involved me beyond recovery. I have thus been reduced to my meager salary as a professor of chemistry. Therefore, my beloved sister, after all these years of comfort I am fearful you may soon find yourself reduced to a condition of self-support.

"Hoping to save you this humiliation and hardship so late in life, I have carefully prepared the papers which I send to you herewith, with the view of your throwing yourself upon the mercy of our dear ward, and opening negotiations with her people. Her father and mother both being now deceased, it would devolve upon the trustees of the estate, one of which is her grandfather, to rehabilitate her in her rights.

"I know your great love for this dear girl. I, myself, have a father's affection for her. May God give us credit for our treatment of her as a partial atonement of our sins against her. Her sweet nature will protect you, my sister, if you will try and forgive me for having so embittered your own life by causing you to help carry our self-imposed burden, in order to shield us from dire responsibility.

"Of course you know my sins were committed in moments of excitement and at times when I was trying so hard to protect our good name from being smirched by our brother's evil conduct.

"Had I not committed the one great fault some years after George had compromised himself, I could have carried out my original plan of compelling him to restore the legitimate children to their parents. But that fateful night when, in a moment of frenzy, I struck down their father, has haunted my every waking moment since, destroying my life and embittering your own. I am most grateful to you, my sister, for having martyred yourself in my cause by becoming a principal in my misdeeds. Had I not believed that your life would have been rendered more miserable by

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such a self-sacrifice, I would have confessed my part and surrendered to the authorities. But I was younger then, and life was sweet to me; moreover, I did not have the heart to sacrifice my brother and endanger your own safety for the sake of justice, which is so often an instrument of needless torture. I was justified in my deed, but it would have been difficult to prove it.

"It is useless now to attempt to undo the work of years. I think I have a better light.

"I know absolutely nothing of the whereabouts of the two boys at this time. Betty is grown to womanhood, therefore the time and conditions seem propitious for me to bring matters to a crisis. You will better understand me when you read the enclosed newspaper article.

"Use your best judgment in dealing with the matter. I am unable to help you more. You can fill in the names.

"Forgive me, and God bless and prosper you and our dear Betty.

"Your loving brother

"EMANUEL."

A clipping from a London newspaper, giving practically the same story as that which had appeared in the Dresden papers, was attached to the letter.

- They now took up the more elaborate statement of Professor McKim:

Feeling that my end is near at hand, I make this statement, and, before my God, attest its truth, asking His forgiveness.

The purpose of this statement is to give the data

and facts to enable the trustees to identify the lost heirs of the late Duke of ———, who were abducted in their infancy, and restore these unfortunate and much deceived persons to their rightful positions with regard to society and their fortune.

In the spring of 1851, my brother, G. B. Mc——, and myself were professional chemists at ———, West End, London. About that time George became engaged to an estimable young lady, the daughter of one of our neighbors, a widowed lady. They were to have been married in the fall of the same year. In September this young woman suddenly disappeared from home, and for several months could not be found.

My brother was prostrated with grief, for he loved her with a wild passion which he could not control. I knew the young lady well, and I was pleased to have my brother form an alliance with her.

Despairing of again finding his fiancée, he fell ill, and his life was in danger for several weeks. At last word came that a young woman answering the description of the missing girl, was singing and dancing in one of the music halls at Wicks' Bridge.

One ugly night my brother and I went to Wicks' Bridge, and sure enough we found his fiancée, a dancing girl on the stage of a notorious music hall. We could not get her attention, for we found that a careful system of protection was given the girls which prevented strangers from meeting them. However, we waited until long after the music hall was closed, hoping to intercept her on her departure, but we did not see her leave the place. It was after midnight when by chance we stumbled into a drinking den, and were horrified to find there some dozen young men and women in a state of intoxication, singing and carousing, and among them the girl for whom we

were looking. Her immediate companion was a dissipated lad of twenty or twenty-one years.

Accosting her and calling her by name, my brother asked if she would not come home. At this interruption to their revelries her companion leaped to his feet and declared her name to be Pretty Laffelle, that we were interlopers, and it was his intention to eject us from the place, and he assaulted my brother, giving him a terrible beating, from which he did not fully recover for many months.

We ascertained that this young man was the son of the Duke of ———.

The next we heard of Pretty Laffelle was in 1854, the rumor being that the old Duke had died and the young reprobate was now the Duke of ———. Pretty Laffelle was in trouble, and he had taken her under his protection.

Naturally all these things engendered in my brother an uncompromising hatred for this fiendish person, who had, so it was said, ruined the young woman he was to marry. I must confess that I shared, though in a less violent degree, my brother's antipathy for the young Duke, believing him to be a man of vile habits, and most dangerous to society.

Fortunately, his estate was at a considerable distance from London, else this hatred might then have developed into something more serious.

Soon after this word came that Pretty Laffelle had become a mother, causing an estrangement between the Duke and his duchess.

From that time my brother was a changed man, filled with a vicious desire to avenge himself upon the Duke.

In 1855 the Duke of ——— turned Pretty Laffelle out into the world with her child. She came to London, and my brother, contrary to my wishes, made

up with her, but he did not marry her. They then formed a desperate alliance, and swore to wreak dire vengeance upon the author of their wrecked lives.

In the summer of 1856 my brother came and informed me that he had abducted the heir of ———, and that all England would be in an uproar. He told me where he had placed the boy, and asked me to look after him until the excitement died out. In the meantime he and Pretty Laffelle would take her own child and flee to India.

I had no other alternative but to comply, for I knew my brother and Pretty Laffelle were both liable to serve long terms in prison should they be proven guilty. Moreover, I had a feeling of satisfaction myself in knowing that the Duke was in anguish, otherwise I doubt if I should have placed myself in the position of a principal in this crime.

Almost before I knew it I was so deeply involved that I myself was dreading the sound of every foot-step, believing it meant my apprehension.

I was much puzzled over my charge, but to my surprise, I found I had practically adopted this baby boy, and a fine fellow he was, too, and I was extremely anxious regarding his welfare. I saw that he was well cared for until he was six years of age. I named him Paul McKim, and kept him so thoroughly secluded that no one could possibly find him. I then placed him in a splendid boys' school at Edinburgh, Scotland, with instructions to train him as a thorough chemist.

At this point Chester leaped to his feet and exclaimed aloud: "Paul McKim!" Then by a great effort controlled himself and continued to read:

Another abduction of a child of prominent parent-

age occurred about this time, the guilty persons being apprehended and seriously punished.

This was a warning to me of what I might expect should I be found out, my brother George having by his flight thrown the whole burden of responsibility upon me.

The most dangerous element in the case was the fact that a very heavy reward—five thousand pounds sterling—was offered for the return of the lost heir of ———.

Whether purposely omitted or not I never knew, but it was a curious fact that in the description of the child no mention was made of the most distinguishing mark, a red birth-mark in the form of a heart upon the right temple, and a white scar in the form of a cross directly beneath it. Had these marks been mentioned the child would undoubtedly have been discovered, and I would have been accused as his abductor.

About the year 1865 my brother George secretly returned to London. Without notice or warning he walked into my office and announced that he had just successfully abducted the second child of the Duke of ———, a daughter one year old, named Elizabeth Malcomb ———, and that he expected me to assume charge of her, as I had done in the case of the boy.

I upbraided him and told him I would not again assume responsibility for his criminal acts. I had established a good reputation, and I could not take the further risk. Moreover I could not assume the expense involved in the proper support of a second child. I did not have the conscience to abandon the children to fate.

He said no more, but left my office, and to my amazement that night our sister called upon me and

stated that George had left at the children's institute, where she was a matron, a girl baby, and fearing that it might involve us all in great peril she had kept the child until she could consult with me.

Up to this time I had not confided in our sister regarding the abducted son; she knew nothing of that case, but feeling the need of someone's confidence I now told her the story.

While greatly dismayed and distressed, like the loyal good sister she was, she assumed a part of my burden.

It seemed impossible to restore the second child without even greater risk to ourselves, therefore my sister assumed the responsibility of her care, finally becoming so attached to her that all the money in England would not have tempted her to surrender her willingly. Fortunately, at this time some of my investments prospered immensely, giving me ample means for the support in luxury of my sister and the two children.

The next word I had from George was from India, where he had again fled, and to my surprise, he informed me that he had removed the boy, now nine years of age, from the school in Edinburgh, and had taken him to India with him.

While I felt very bitter towards him for his conduct towards me, still there was a certain responsibility lifted from me by the boy's removal. I have never seen him since, but I learned indirectly that he had been precocious in his studies, and even at that age had shown indications of becoming a great scholar.

In 1867 my brother George again returned to London, this time under an assumed name, which it is unnecessary to mention. He informed me that he and Pretty Laffelle had been separated since his first

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visit. She had taken her child with her and gone to Australia.

The other boy, he had left in school, in Calcutta; this boy was now thirteen years of age. He was still known as Paul McKim. He was under the guardianship of a prominent English army surgeon, who had taken a great liking for him and who believed him to be an orphan.

Pretty Laffelle had kept the name of Mrs. George Bernard McKim. She had ample means for the support of herself and boy.

Desiring, as he said, "to shake the whole bunch," he had announced in the Calcutta and Delhi papers his own death from the plague, which was at that time prevalent there, and under an assumed name he sailed for England, since which time he has been a burden upon me.

I attempted to prevent his learning the whereabouts of the abducted girl; but it was impossible without causing a serious rupture.

From time to time my brother would do things which made me believe he was losing his mind. He would involve me in financial matters without my consent or knowledge, often giving me the gravest concern and embarrassment. In the end he wholly bankrupted me.

I was always fearful that he might attempt to restore the abducted children for a consideration, consequently my life became a torture from the time of his second return to England, and it was for his sake that I committed the gravest crime which a man can commit, notwithstanding its provocation.

On the evening of the fourth day of September, 1870, I was alone in my office, and in a state of deep melancholy. Recent events had convinced me that

my brother was suffering from a species of dementia which might at any time develop into a murderous madness. I was much concerned about the matter, and it was natural for my mind to revert back over his life in a review of the medical aspect of the case. Drawing from my desk some old diaries, I picked up one, and almost the first thing to meet my gaze was a note made twenty years previously. This was the anniversary of the night on which the now Duke of ——— assaulted my brother at Wicks' Bridge. At that time he struck George over the left ear with an ale mug, causing temporary aphasia. It now occurred to me that this could in after life develop brain pressure, which would inevitably result in mental derangement.

In fact, now that I had in review his whole subsequent life, it seemed apparent that with his general physical recovery, there had remained a mental irritation which always culminated or vented itself upon the one object of his hatred—the man who had ruined his life, now the Duke of ———.

Yes, I had to admit it; my brother was not accountable for all of his actions, especially those directed against the Duke. This, though, was not the chief cause of my uneasiness. The recent signs of aggravated dementia were too apparent to be ignored. Should he suddenly develop acute insanity his first and most persistent theme would be matters which were first in his mind in his sane condition. This would inevitably mean my undoing, unless I could in the meantime get him into a private sanitarium.

The knowledge that this was the anniversary of the occasion which implanted the seeds of insanity in his brain depressed me greatly.

Early in life my brother and I had loved each other

dearly, thoroughly confiding in each other and freely exchanging our thoughts.

It was near midnight when a gruff knock upon my door aroused me fully from my reveries. Upon opening the door a splendid-looking man of middle age confronted me.

"Are you Dr. McKim?" he asked. His voice was rough and his manner imperious.

"I am Dr. Emanuel McKim. Step inside," I said.

Stepping inside the room he looked about, with a sort of disdain, then suddenly turning upon me, he asked:

"Do you know me?"

"I have not that pleasure," I replied, my own voice betraying my irritation at his impertinent actions.

"Be good enough to name the object of your visit. Do you wish to consult me professionally?"

"No, this is a personal matter," he retorted, with the evident purpose of intimating an unfriendly visit.

"Then be brief and to the point," I demanded.

"Ha, ha, then you do not remember me, eh? Well, perhaps these gray hairs and this beard do disguise me, but I should think you and your lovesick brother would remember till the end of your days the beating I gave you at Wicks' Bridge, some twenty years ago. I am the Duke of ———."

"Although at this time I was fifty-five years of age, I could not with any degree of self-respect permit this blatant bully to thus insult me in my own office.

"No matter who you are, your ungentlemanly conduct does not entitle you to consideration or respect at my hands, therefore, quickly make known your business or leave my office," I said in as menacing tones as I could command.

He looked at me with his dead, sodden eyes in un-

disguised contempt, while I returned his impudent gaze with interest.

Suddenly he burst into a fury, and poured out a volume of profane epithets.

"You double-dyed scoundrel! You hypocrite! You and that infernal hellhound, your brother, despoiled me of my children! I will have every ounce of your poisonous blood unless you return to me, whole and sound, my two children.

"I have come here prepared to get either some positive knowledge of my children or take your accursed life. Tell me where they are, you knave," and he started to come around the large table which stood between us.

Behind me upon the wall were crossed two heavy, ancient cutlasses. In an instant I had one of these off the wall, and as he lunged towards me I gave him a smack across the side of the head and face with the flat of it. While it was a stunning blow it was not intended to draw blood. It seemed to knock some sense into him, for he backed away, and I continued to crowd him until I had backed him into a corner of the room. I myself was now enraged.

"Now, you seducer," I said, "my time is come. You seduced a young, innocent girl, and robbed my brother of a wife. You beat my brother so unmercifully he has never recovered. He may spend the balance of his days in a madhouse."

Here he almost screamed an interruption.

"What! your brother is living? Now I will have my revenge. It was he who took away my boy. It was he who took away my infant daughter," and with a terrific roar he sprang at me with such force as to knock me over before I could defend myself with the sword. Snatching it from my hand he raised it and gave me one fearful blow upon the head, but my fall

had carried me partially under the table, and the point of the sword slashed itself deep into the table while the edge of the heavy hilt struck me a stunning blow upon the side of the head, bruising, but not cutting the scalp.

In my fall I grasped at the edge of the table, and my hand fell directly upon an instrument. I did not know at the time just what it was, but as he raised the heavy sword for a second blow I made a quick turn of my body and jabbed the instrument into his thigh. Instantly his nerveless hands dropped to his sides.

Quickly arising, I looked at the instrument and knew I had committed murder; it had been used that afternoon in an experiment, and was saturated with prussic acid.

Why he did not instantly drop dead I did not know. Instead he seemed in a stupor. That he would collapse and die any moment was as sure as fate. I did not want this to occur in my rooms. Taking advantage of the remarkable laxity of the dose, I quickly shoved him out of the office, led him around the square, and placed him in a passing cab, telling the driver to take him to a distant part of the city.

He was found dead in the cab on reaching his destination.

Had it not been for the wound in the leg and the copious bleeding, it would have been most difficult to determine the cause of his death. The wound itself was not fatal, neither was the bruise on the side of his head, and in the superficial investigation which followed, only an intimation of prussic acid poisoning was casually mentioned.

One single newspaper reference pointed towards my brother as the murderer, mentioning the fact that he had formerly been suspected of the abductions. It also intimated that he was living and in London.

My brother immediately accused me, and in a fit of anger I admitted the deed, claiming I had done it in self-defense.

From that day my brother was changed towards me. He frequently upbraided me for robbing him of the pleasure of killing the man who had so deeply wronged him. I at once became fearful that he would attempt to destroy the innocent children; therefore, I immediately removed the little girl from the institution in which she then was and sent her, under the protection and guardianship of my sister to another and a more exclusive educational institution. Ere long, however, my brother George found this place also. By exacting a promise from him that he would never molest the child or interfere with my care of her, I agreed to assume all the expenses of providing for my sister and her.

He kept the promise and even became most useful later, in helping them to flee from their places of refuge when it seemed that search was being made for them. On two occasions it seemed quite certain that unknown persons, perhaps detectives, interested only in the reward, were close upon a discovery of them.

The boy I knew nothing of after he went to India. My brother assured me that the real heir to H—— did not see Pretty Laffelle or her son, who was named Peter McKim. This boy was also well advanced in chemistry, this being practically his whole course of study.

He also confessed that his reason for deserting Pretty Laffelle was because she allowed the attentions of other men. She would not surrender the boy. It was at the instance of an Australian sheep raiser and miner, named Kelly, that they went to Australia. He had promised to give the boy employment in the

laboratory of his large mines. My brother knew nothing more of them.

Pretty Laffelle's boy bears upon his right temple marks identically like those upon the forehead of Paul McKim, who is the legitimate son of the Duke of _____.

On the right shoulder of Elizabeth Malcomb _____ will be found a small red heart birthmark. She was born May 12, 1864.

There is little more for me to add to this dreadful story of crime.

My brother George's death seems to open up to me a way by which innocent persons may be restored to their just rights.

I am only able to do justice by the daughter of the house of H———. If the son be among the living it should not be a difficult matter to find him, with these facts known. I hope and pray they may both soon enjoy their rightful estate.

Those whom I most wronged, the Duke and Duchess of _____, cannot forgive me, but I pray God to put it in the hearts of these children to partially pardon my great offense against them. To appease my guilty conscience, I did my best to make them comfortable, and to educate them while under my care.

"And, now that my end is near, I make my prayer to my own beloved sister for forgiveness. Surely a just God cannot hold her responsible for an offense thrust upon her by the affection which has always existed between us. It was not her crime. It was our crime. Her loyalty protected us at the risk of her own safety. She will bring about the restoration, therefore, I feel assured she will be forgiven by those whom we have so egregiously wronged.

My dear little Betty, I am sure, will pardon me.

Here the document abruptly ended, with the signature of "Emanuel McKim."

Miss Malcomb sat silently gazing into space, as though thinking of a time afar off.

Chester, too, seemed in a reverie, the hand grasping the paper dropping listlessly over the arm of the chair, and the other clasping the girl's hand. For some seconds they sat thus.

Then Chester arose, placed the papers upon a table, and coming close to the drooping figure he placed his hand upon her brown tresses, saying:

"And now, my dear Betty, you can no longer deny me. You are an orphan; your beloved guardian is gone; your brother is lost, and you are alone and helpless. I demand my position by the rights of discovery, but I beg your confidence because of my respectful love for you. You now more than ever need the aid of someone stronger than yourself. Will you permit me to assume the sweet burden of your care, which others have so reluctantly laid down by the fatality of accident and circumstances. You permitted them to love you, and I, too, must exact this fee.

"Tell me, Elizabeth, may I come to your relief now? Will you trust me for more than a brother? Will you not trust me for life? If you will, we may go about re-establishing your rights more leisurely. I can and will restore to you your brother, and together we shall correct all of the fatalities which have hitherto beset your lives."

"You can restore to me my brother?" she exclaimed, ignoring in her eager excitement the main question. She had arisen, and with flushed cheeks

and eager eyes she unconsciously extended to him both her hands which he grasped, drawing them close to his bosom.

"Yes, I will restore your own brother to you. He is my beloved friend, Dr. Paul McKim. It was he who brought you back to life the first time I saw you. I knew then you were no ordinary person. I have loved you from that hour. I partially declared my love while you were yet in the garret, and I now again ask you to make my delightful duty of protecting you permanent. Will you be my wife?"

Her face was radiant with joy as she stood facing him, while he still clasped her beautiful hands.

"Restore me to my position; make me your equal and you may love me always, and I will be most delighted to become your wife. I shall then know that my having slipped into heaven through the gates ajar was not an offense, and that with you and your loving care I may always remain there. What free woman under the same conditions would not love you? I would be uttering an untruth did I not confess it."

Chester drew the stately head over upon his shoulder, and they were happy.

Plans were carefully laid to restore Miss Malcomb to her legal rights in the estate of H——; they felt no fear of not being able to discover just who her parents were, and what this estate consisted of, though it mattered little to Chester.

Dr. Paul McKim would doubtless be able to assist largely in establishing their true identities.

Her own life, and her knowledge of many of the

facts related, gave to the statement of Professor Emanuel McKim an authenticity not to be seriously doubted. It was agreed that Chester should go about bringing the brother and sister together in his own way, and he was determined to make this a means of regaining the confidence of his friend.

CHAPTER XII

JAMES MALCOMB HERCROFT, THIRD DUKE OF HURLSTONE

UPON his arrival in England Dr. McKim at once obtained all of the information obtainable regarding the Hurlstone estate, and this information materially corroborated what he already knew.

He learned that, of the original three trustees, the old Hurlstone lawyer had died, and Beaufort March, his uncle, also a lawyer, had been appointed in his stead. Grandfather March, now more than four score, was still hale and hearty, and had complete control of the immense properties.

Armed with all he had learned both in the United States and in England, Paul McKim was ready to move upon the enemy if he must encounter such.

It was early in January when, accompanied by his ever faithful servant Plimpton, he stepped off a train at a small English way station. This branch of the railroad had been constructed in recent years, and the station was a courtesy to Hurlstone, the surrounding country being undeveloped and sparsely populated. There were a few scattered houses, but nothing that indicated a place where a conveyance might be had. It was four miles to Hurlstone House, and the ground was covered with a slushy snow.

There seemed little likelihood of any conveyance

happening that way which could set them down near Hurlstone House, and it was out of the question for them to attempt to walk the distance, especially as they would have to take their heavy traveling bags with them, there being no station agent at this point in whose care they could leave their luggage.

They had begun to despair of reaching Hurlstone when they saw in the distance a vehicle approaching at a rapid gait. A hundred yards away was a fork in the road. "Run, Plimpton," said Dr. McKim, "they may decide to take the other road. Stop them and ask if I may consult with them about reaching Hurlstone."

Plimpton barely reached the fork in time to stop the vehicle; for its course did lay in the other direction. Turning the smart team half about and driving toward the low station platform, where Dr. McKim was standing, a good-looking man of perhaps fifty alighted, and with a polite bow, said:

"You wish to reach Hurlstone? I am from there. I am Mr. March."

"Thank you," replied Dr. McKim. "I do wish to go to Hurlstone House on most urgent business. I am Dr. Paul McKim," and he extended his hand to the stranger, who took it with a strong, honest grasp. Nevertheless he looked keenly at Dr. McKim at the mention of his name. It was evident this name was familiar to him.

"I am a trustee of the estate. If you don't mind riding up the road a mile first, I shall be glad to set you down at Hurlstone House. We can talk as we ride."

"I consider your coming a piece of good fortune. I don't mind at all the drive, if you will permit me and my man to encumber you with ourselves and our luggage," said Dr. McKim, gratefully.

The vehicle was a two-seated wagonette. Plimpton threw in the bags and climbed up by the driver, while Dr. McKim was seated by Mr. March, and the spirited team sprang away as if they enjoyed the romp.

Mr. March was exceedingly polite and not inquisitive, but Dr. McKim, feeling it proper to make some explanation, volunteered that his business was of a personal nature with his father, the elder March. This seemed to set matters at ease, and they conversed interestingly during the hour required to make the short trip and the drive to Hurlstone.

The approach to Hurlstone, after reaching the great arched entrance, was between two rows of enormous oaks, their branches interlacing to form a continuous arch, extending for a mile. Everything about the place was on an enormous scale, indicating great wealth and excellent care.

Hurlstone House was an imposing pile, not particularly beautiful, but most picturesque in its rambling, vine-clad state. From the great number and size of the buildings of every kind, many of which seemed to be of recent construction, the estate seemed extensive and prosperous.

Dr. McKim could not help wondering if those in charge could ever be made to believe that a legal heir to these vast acres lived, and what would they do when he declared himself to be that legal heir?

It was most difficult for him to formulate a plan of action, but he had determined upon one thing; he would first have a private talk with the elder March and base his future actions upon the result of that interview.

Upon arriving at the house, Mr. March at once saw to it that the visitors were made welcome, and assigned to proper rooms, bidding Dr. McKim meet them at their midday meal, at which time he would present him to his father.

Exactly at the hour of twelve o'clock an immense bell tolled the hour with deep and monotonous strokes, and all Hurlstone rested from labor and partook of ample food.

Dr. McKim was surprised to find himself seated with only the two Marches. There were no women to be seen.

The white-haired old gentleman greeted Dr. McKim most cordially, and during the meal no mention of the nature of his business was broached. At the end of the repast the younger man excused himself while the elder bade Dr. McKim accompany him into the library. This was a magnificent room filled with a wealth of ancient things too numerous to mention. Upon the walls were life-size portraits of the full line of Hercrofts, five in number, and portraits of three duchesses.

As they entered the room Dr. McKim could not help pausing to look at a portrait directly in front of him. Surely, it could be none other than his own father; the resemblance was marvelous.

The old man was doubtless impressed with the same thought, for he became much agitated and

stood for some moments staring alternately at Dr. McKim and at the portrait.

Suddenly an inspiration seized Dr. McKim. Turning a smiling face towards the white-haired old man, he pointed at the picture and said: "My father, doubtless."

Then pushing the hair back from his brow he revealed the marks of the heart and the cross.

Mr. March's jaw had dropped, and he stood staring at the man before him, utterly without the power of speech.

"And you are my grandfather," continued Dr. McKim, pushing a chair forward for him.

The old gentleman quickly recovered from his surprise, and at once proceeded to show his visitor that whatever his claim he would have a fair hearing. His kindly gray eyes looked searchingly over Dr. McKim, and his gaze was friendly.

"If I am your grandfather, how comes it you are named McKim?" he asked with no special emotion. In fact, he had fully recovered from the sudden shock of being confronted by a strange man calling himself his grandson, and he was now alert and ready for action.

Dr. McKim had taken a seat near him, and his own pleasing countenance was calm and thoughtful. Replying to the question, he said:

"Sir, I have come here from the United States in the belief that I have by the merest accident discovered myself to be the legitimate son and heir of James Malcomb Hercroft, second Duke of Hurlstone. What I know I have not breathed to a soul, not even to my confidential lawyers, because my

limited knowledge of the case convinces me that there is one man who will see that justice is done by me should I prove to be the legitimate heir. If, upon full investigation, I should prove not to be the heir, I should not desire to embarrass those who have so faithfully cared for the estate, and I would aid in every possible way to discover the true heir."

"Who is that one man in whom you place your sole trust?" asked Mr. March.

"Henry March, the safeguard of Hurlstone, and the father of 'Duchess Betty,' who would be my mother, did I prove to be the heir to Hurlstone," was the answer.

The old man's head drooped at the mention of "Duchess Betty."

Continuing, Dr. McKim said:

"I give you my word that a month ago I did not know there existed such a place as Hurlstone. I supposed my true name was McKim. As I said, by accident a history of the Hercroft case fell into my hands, and not a living soul but myself knows that I possess the facts. I need not tell you how surprised I was.

"Of course the peculiar mark upon my forehead seemed to establish my identity beyond doubt, for being a physician and a surgeon, I am aware that the birthmark could not be artificially produced, and it is but one probability in a million that such mark would be found in that identical spot on another person. I am aware another man, the son of the same father, bears this same mark from birth, if not dead."

"Why do you consider yourself to be the legitimate son?" was the pointed question asked by Mr. March.

"Only by circumstantial evidence and my own knowledge of my early life. This is not sufficient. I am aware that you alone can fully establish the identity of the true heir," was Dr. McKim's frank reply.

The old man arose and walked slowly back and forth and across the room, apparently thinking deeply. Finally, stopping in front of Dr. McKim, who had also arisen, in deference to him, he placed his hand upon his shoulder and said:

"In view of this distinguishing mark upon your brow, your claim is worthy of consideration. But as between the two sons of James Malcomb Hercroft you bear a sign more eloquent than this grievous scar: you show the frank, honest temperament of my beloved daughter; while I am aware that the other man who bears this natural mark upon the brow is supposed to be a vicious, bad man. But I will tell you of this later. It is sufficient for me to say that without having gone fully into your case I believe you will be able to prove yourself to be the legitimate son of the late Duke of Hurlstone and the heir to this vast estate. I now greet you as the prospective heir and welcome you to your own. We shall at once take up the legal aspects of the case, and you will find me as eager to establish you in your rights as you are to be so established. I can be proud of a grandson like you," and the kindly gray eyes rested upon Dr. McKim's face in a most friendly manner.

"I am deeply grateful for this reception," said Dr. McKim. "In any event, I will prove to you that I am an honorable man. I am not an adventurer, I assure you. Should you find me to be not the legal heir of this estate you will have from me the same high regard as now, when I believe the prospect of proving my legitimacy is good."

The old man's hand trembled as he placed it upon that of Dr. McKim and said:

"I can at least assure you that the only other man known to bear this birthmark is not the legitimate son, and within a few hours I will be able to tell you positively whether or not your claim is just. If you will grant me the favor, I ask that we—you and I and my son—make the necessary investigation and conduct the legal proceedings essential to establish you in your position as the third duke of Hurlstone, and that during these proceedings we shall keep the matter a profound secret. I will inform you later of the necessity for this."

"Certainly," exclaimed Dr. McKim, "your wishes in these matters must govern me."

They spent several hours in consultation, at the conclusion of which Mr. March was in excellent humor, declaring that he believed he could welcome Dr. McKim as his grandson. The son was then called into the case, and presently was as enthusiastic as his father in the belief that at last the great estate of Hurlstone would again have a duke.

Dr. McKim, while politely deferential, at the same time conducted himself in a manner to impress them with the belief that he possessed the personality to occupy this new position with proper

dignity and strength. They at once showed a desire to please him, which convinced him that there were strong reasons for their believing him to be the true heir.

That same evening an important message went to London, and on the following day a little, wrinkled old man with a high-keyed voice came to Hurlstone.

The elder March took him into the library and spent a couple of hours with him. Then Dr. McKim and the younger Mr. March were summoned.

"Are you prepared to submit to a physical examination which is essential for your identification?" asked the elder Mr. March.

"Certainly," replied Dr. McKim.

He was stripped to the waist, and was bidden to raise his right arm.

Smack! and the little old man's hand came down upon Dr. McKim's uncovered shoulder with a resounding whack that made him jump.

"Your grace, Duke of Hurlstone, I am heartily glad to know you," he said, and he extended his hand to Dr. McKim, giving him a hearty greeting.

Again pushing the doctor's arm above his head he enthusiastically pointed out to both the Marches a tiny white scar, in the form of a cross, visible only by the aid of a strong magnifying glass. It could never have been discovered with the naked eye.

"I would have staked my professional reputation upon this scar remaining there during life. You see, it is practically invisible in the cuticle, while, as seen through the glass, the red scar be-

neath in the epidermis widens out and makes a thoroughly defined mark. A professional dermatologist could not have done better," and the little old man chuckled gleefully.

Taking a small hand-mirror and placing over it the magnifying glass after many trials he succeeded in enabling Dr. McKim to see the tiny scar which meant so much to him.

His clothing being rearranged, the elder Mr. March, with tears in his eyes, led Dr. McKim to a life-size and very lifelike portrait of "Duchess Betty."

"This is a good picture of your mother, James," said he. "She was a good woman, and as you will see by a careful study, you greatly resemble her."

But Dr. McKim was moved by other emotions. Where had he seen this face to so surely recognize it? It seemed but yesterday that the same large, calm eyes had looked into his own. The poise of the proud head was most familiar. Could it be possible that he could carry in his brain all these years this vivid memory of his mother, received as an infant two years old? No, that could not be possible; it was a remarkable resemblance to someone he had seen recently. He dropped the thought for the time being.

"This," continued Mr. March, "was your father. You recognized his features yesterday because of your marked resemblance to him. You will observe, however, that your resemblance to your mother is in the large eyes, wide apart, while in their color you resemble your father.

"And now, my beloved grandson, behold in me

the frail body of your remaining relative, excepting my own son, so far as I know, for we have despaired of ever finding little Betty, your sister," and the aged man looked appealingly at the fine, strong young man whom he had just acknowledged as his grandson.

Taking both the hands of his grandfather in his own, Dr. McKim held them in his warm grasp, while he exclaimed:

"Well, my dear grandfather! If you are as well pleased with your relative as I am with mine I can foresee a jolly good time for both of us; and you also, my uncle, I cordially congratulate myself upon finding you my close relative. I assure you both that you will find me ever ready to add to your comfort, peace, and happiness. Should you find me legally entitled to this estate you shall remain the guardians of both my property and my person. You are too well tried for anyone else to be given that position. Moreover, no matter what my legal rights may be, you both have a far stronger moral right to the enjoyment of these properties than I have, and for that reason my attitude toward you shall always be that of one partner toward another, in respect to property, and as a dutiful grandson and nephew in all other respects."

"None but Betty March's son could utter those words," exclaimed the little old man. "By gad! that brat of his would have turned you out of house and home."

It was indeed a most happy reunion. The little old man was the surgeon who originally placed upon Duchess Betty's boy the secret mark, and at

this late day the wisdom of that measure was about to manifest itself. This loyal surgeon was witness to a most important document left by both the Duke and the Duchess, which practically left to the discretion of the grandfather as to which of the two male children might be declared the heir to Hurlstone should the evidences presented make it uncertain as to which was the legitimate son. The evidence of the secret mark depended upon the honor and integrity of this surgeon. He had not betrayed the trust.

Dr. McKim was not aware of it, but both the Marches knew that the illegitimate son was living, and they knew him to be somewhere in the United States. He had a semi-criminal record with which they were only partially familiar. It was in Australia that he had been accused of a crime which caused him to be measured and recorded under the Bertillon system. His picture and description had come into the possession of the Scotland Yard detectives, and they, recognizing the peculiar marks upon the forehead, at once communicated with the trustees of the Hurlstone estate.

This same surgeon, accompanied by a Scotland Yard secret agent, made the long and arduous trip to Australia in order that he might remain loyal to his trust, rather than entrust the knowledge of the secret mark to others. The examination proved him to be the illegitimate son. Fortunately he was declared innocent of the serious crime of which he was accused.

He then went by the name of Peter Kelly. He had formerly been known as Peter McKim. Pretty

Laffelle was even now said to be somewhere in London, but nothing of her condition or mode of life was known.

Peter Kelly was an expert chemist, capable of earning much money, did he apply himself to his profession. He fled to America, immediately upon being released by the authorities in Australia, but the indictment was still held over him, because of his sudden flight.

The surgeon declared there was a marvelous resemblance between the two men.

Dr. McKim's story was brief and easily told. Some kind fate had followed him around the world. He never really knew anything of his parentage. He barely remembered two Dr. McKims, one of whom was supposed to be his father. It was supposed to have been his uncle, George B. McKim, who took him from the school at Edinburgh, Scotland. He was informed that his father had died and it was necessary for him to accompany his uncle to India, where he resided. In Calcutta he was turned over to an English army surgeon and became proficient in chemistry, later being graduated in medicine and surgery, and practicing at several places in India.

Upon the death of his guardian he received thirty thousand pounds. He then joined a party of young professional men and went on an exploring trip through Asia Minor in search of ancient ruins, spending two years there. At the end of this trip the party dispersed, and Dr. Paul McKim went to America, where he abandoned medical practice for quiet scientific research and speculative chemistry.

He never knew that such a man as Peter McKim or Peter Kelly existed, nor did he know that he, at one time at least, had had a sister. His total ignorance regarding his origin caused him to be exclusive, and a deep student, his only close friend being Chester Von Comp.

In telling his story he held in reserve only such matters as he thought might reflect to his discredit. For instance, he did not confess the manner by which he came in possession of the papers which had given him a clue to his identity. He stated that he thought he had a clue to the whereabouts of Peter Kelly and would take that up at once upon his return to New York.

The two Marches being wholly in charge of the estate, the third trustee was not called into the case at this time. Several days were spent going carefully over the legal aspect of the case. The curious will of the Duke was examined. Its provisions were wholly in keeping with his eccentric nature. It set aside a large fund to be applied to the expenses of a search for the two lost children. Should the heir be found, upon proper and legal identification he was to come into full possession of the estate and the title. Should the daughter be found, she was to have an income of twenty thousand pounds a year; and if married, she should receive an additional annuity of five thousand pounds for each child born to her, and the right wing of the Manor House was to be forever hers and her children's in which to reside. This should be maintained at the expense of the estate, and in the same luxury as that of the Duke's.

The most curious clause referred to his illegitimate son by Pretty Laffelle. Three thousand pounds a year should be paid to him, "in jail or out of jail," beginning at the time of the new Duke's taking possession of the estate, and continuing for the balance of his life, but to cease at his death. In the event that the legitimate male heir was not discovered this bequest was to be void, an annuity of forty thousand pounds a year was to go to the daughter, or her children, and the balance of the income of the estate should go to the tenantry, excepting liberal bequests to the trustees.

In the clause referring to the illegitimate son, the will read: "It was no fault of his that this unfortunate boy was brought into the world, and I feel it my duty to provide for his welfare. Inasmuch as he is the offspring of lust, idleness, dissipation, and depravity, he will doubtless manifest these traits in the worst phase, therefore will be incapable of self-support. As a partial reparation of my sins toward him, I make this bequest. Should, however, my legitimate son not be found, this bequest shall be void. He must suffer alike, with the others, deprivation of the privileges under this will, because it was his kind that bereft me of my legitimate children when they might have become anchors to steady my wayward existence. Moreover, should this illegitimate child lay claim to being the true heir, this clause shall become void."

No mention of Pretty Laffelle was made.

Splendid life annuities were given to Duchess Betty's father and brother, and it was recommended that they continue to administer the estate.

For twenty years the already vast wealth had continued to accumulate, until it now was worth so many millions that none could even approximate its worth.

The tenantry had also increased enormously, until every available foot of land was under high cultivation. Fortunately the will gave wide discretionary powers to the trustees, enabling them to utilize vast acres of the great forest, yet still maintain an ample game preserve. Only the most desirable tenants were now retained, the yeomanry of Hurlstone numbering two thousand souls.

All legal documents were drawn and acknowledged by the trustees, making James Malcomb Hercroft Duke of Hurlstone; these papers were made in duplicate, the trustees retaining one set and the new Duke the other.

It was then agreed to keep the matter an absolute secret until all concerned were willing to announce to the world that the lost heir of Hurlstone was found and had been restored to his rightful position.

At the new Duke's suggestion all offers of rewards were officially withdrawn, and he assumed the task of searching out Peter Kelly. He would also renew the search, in his own way, for his lost sister. He was in hopes that Peter Kelly, if found, might give him a clue of her whereabouts.

Three weeks had quickly fled, and Dr. McKim, by which name he must still be known to us, sailed for the United States, a much more important man than when he left New York.

CHAPTER XIII

PETER AND PAUL

ON the day that Paul McKim arrived in New York from England a strange thing happened, which came near involving him in serious trouble.

Edgerton, true to Dr. McKim's belief, had promptly disappeared upon the receipt of the letter warning him, and Mrs. Von Comp had found it necessary to secure a new man in his stead.

Mrs. Von Comp and her daughter were shopping during the afternoon.

The carriage was standing in front of a prominent store on upper Fifth Avenue waiting for the ladies, when a rather well-dressed man, who had been watching the outfit, stepped to the carriage door and picked up a lace handkerchief, undoubtedly dropped by one of the ladies. The new footman on the box observing the act, jumped down, confronted the man, and demanded the return of the bit of lace. The latter only laughed, thrust the handkerchief into his pocket, roughly shoved him to one side and walked away. There was no police officer in sight to call upon and the thief went his way unmolested. Before he had gone many steps the ladies came out of the store and the footman, pointing to the man who had taken the handkerchief, excitedly told of the matter.

The thief turned, at this moment, and with a gasp of surprise Eudora hurried her mother into the carriage and gave orders to drive in the opposite direction to that taken by the supposed marauder.

"It is of too trifling consequence, mother, for us to raise a scene," she said.

Lower down the street the carriage was again standing at the curb, when Dr. McKim, who had only that morning arrived home and was taking his first walk down Fifth Avenue, passed. Suddenly, as he was opposite the carriage, the footman leaped to the pavement, caught him by the throat, and called to a policeman standing near.

The officer hurried to the spot. Dr. McKim, who had shaken himself free, angrily demanded the meaning of the man's conduct.

"He swiped Mrs. Von Comp's lace handkerchief and will not give it up," said the footman.

"What about this?" asked the officer, who seemed a sensible fellow.

"Why, the man must be crazy," exclaimed Dr. McKim. "I know Mrs. Von Comp very well, and I have not seen her for a month. I do not know what this fellow means."

The footman was surprised at this answer.

Fortunately at this moment Mrs. Von Comp and Eudora came out of the store. Seeing a crowd gathering, they were about to return into the store, when Mrs. Von Comp, recognizing Dr. McKim, exclaimed:

"Why, that is Dr. McKim!" Then approaching, she said: "What is the matter, doctor?"

Before he could reply the footman exclaimed:

"This is the chap w'at took the lace, mum."

"Nonsense. What are you talking about? Step into my carriage, doctor, and escape from this mob."

"I must know something more about this, ma'am," said the police officer, with some degree of politeness.

"My man mistook my friend for another person. He is mistaken. This is one of our dearest friends," and Mrs. Von Comp and Eudora entered the carriage. Dr. McKim looked at the officer hesitatingly. The latter nodded, then he entered the carriage and it was driven up Fifth Avenue.

"Go home with us, doctor, and have a cup of tea to compensate you for the discourtesy of my footman, whom I shall at once discharge."

"Thank you, Mrs. Von Comp. I am pleased to accept, that I may have this little visit with you. I have been away these several weeks, and it seems an age since your delightful reception."

Upon entering the carriage Dr. McKim was much grieved to see that Miss Von Comp appeared most depressed and unhappy.

Arriving at the home of Mrs. Von Comp they alighted, and the footman was questioned as to his treatment of Dr. McKim. The latter was not inclined to protest against this questioning, for the overzealous fellow had offered him a great indignity for which he could not guess a cause.

"I was positive, mum, this man took the handkerchief. Jones, the coachman, will bear me out."

The coachman nodded approval.

Eudora had fled to the steps and stood sadly listening.

"Such absurd nonsense. What on earth would this gentleman want with my lace handkerchief? He is one of my dearest friends. I will take care of this later. Come, doctor," and she led the way into the house.

Over a cup of tea Mrs. Von Comp explained what had happened, and they laughed heartily. Eudora, however, did not join in the mirth, but sat pensive and thoughtful.

"I must have a double," said Dr. McKim, at which Eudora looked at him curiously. Something mysterious was passing in her mind, and he well knew it concerned him.

"Where have you been hiding these several weeks, doctor?" asked Mrs. Von Comp.

Eudora's cheeks flushed.

"I was suddenly called abroad. I may have to go there permanently," he said, now watching the play on the young lady's face.

Eudora's face paled.

She was plainly but unconsciously signaling to him a heart's story. The flush, at Mrs. Von Comp's suggestion that he had been in hiding, was due to the impression she formerly had that he was a criminal, and the fear she still harbored in her mind—a painful doubt, which had been strengthened by to-day's incident; not that she believed he would steal so trivial a thing as a handkerchief, but that it aroused again in her mind the sickening thought that he was possibly some mysterious, finished crim-

inal—a “gentleman burglar.” It brought to her cheeks the blush of possible shame.

She paled when he said he might go away forever, because she thought she might possibly have done him great injustice. Perhaps, after all, these curious coincidences were none of his making; and besides, she liked him in spite of it all. She did not want him to go. She was most unhappy. Had she not compromised herself with him? She dare not look him directly in the face. Yet she had promised she would trust him. Why she had done all this she could not tell.

A half hour quickly passed and Dr. McKim arose to take his departure.

“Come again very soon, doctor; come in the evening, that we may have a longer visit,” was Mrs. Von Comp’s cordial invitation.

“Indeed I shall,” replied Dr. McKim. “I have some very interesting things to tell Miss Von Comp about my travels,” and he pressed that young lady’s hand as he uttered this, plainly intimating that he meant something special, which again brought the flush to her cheeks—a flush of hopeful expectancy.

He was much puzzled about the incident which had come so near causing him to be arrested. It would be a most humiliating thing now for him to get tangled up in some notoriety. It was of the utmost importance that he get on the trail of this Peter Kelly; doubtless, this was his double, and it was he whom the footman had seen pick up the handkerchief.

There was a way to bring the thing to a crisis and protect himself against further accident. In

fact, there were more reasons than this just now for him to take into his confidence Chester Von Comp.

It was five o'clock when he arrived at home. Passing to the telephone, he called up his friend at the club, and was delighted to hear his friendly voice at the other end of the wire.

"Well, old man, I'm here, and pining to see you. Will you come and dine with me at my home? I have much to tell you of the gravest importance."

Evidently the answer was in the affirmative, for he gave elaborate instructions regarding dinner.

Chester Von Comp did come, and was most demonstrative in his excessive joy at again being with his friend.

During the good, selfish little dinner they indulged in good-natured chaffing, each believing that he alone possessed a great secret which it would please the other to know.

After dinner they made themselves comfortable in the library.

Poor Monk, a shadow of his former self, was so overcome at having his beloved master back home again, he was satisfied to rest quietly upon his lap, purring contentedly. Cassello stated, as a lamentable fact, that the cat had refused to eat nearly all the time the master was away.

"I wonder how many friends would display such grief at my going?" remarked Dr. McKim.

Chester's only reply was a reproachful look, which hurt the cynical doctor more than a verbal protest.

Pushing his pipe-tray toward Chester, he said:

"Light up, my dear friend. While you might be too sensible to pine, I believe you would miss me for a while should I go away permanently."

"Do you think of going away permanently?" inquired Chester earnestly.

"Before answering that question I wish to take you into my confidence and tell you a most interesting story. Interesting indeed, notwithstanding it concerns myself most.

"Chester, you are the only man I call my friend. Every human being must have one living friend. None can live peacefully without some living creature in which to confide. See Monk.

"True friendship is reciprocal. Mutuality is as essential to friendships as to nations. No matter how independent the units may be, sooner or later reciprocity is vindicated. Here is an example. This dumb animal, naturally strong and self-reliant, pines away because he believes himself wholly deserted by me, his acknowledged best friend. I am essential to his very life.

"Were human friends so loyal life would be worth living."

The speaker paused to caress his love-hungry pet. Monk stood erect and looked long and searchingly into his master's face for some seconds, then pressing his velvety paws against him he gave a plaintive "Meow," so full of meaning that it seemed almost human.

"No, my faithful Monk, I shall not leave you behind the next time," responded the kind master, as though he had fully understood the plaint.

Chester smoked his pipe moodily, and watched

the display of sentiment between master and pet with a feeling of half-jealous resentment.

Now placing the cat upon the wide arm of the chair, and stroking his back as he talked, he turned to Chester.

"You are doubtless wondering which of us is to be the recipient of benefits resulting from our professed friendship. Perhaps, also, our heart-strings are not so hopelessly involved as those of this cat; one or both of us may have stronger ties elsewhere."

Chester winced at this and looked askance at the speaker.

"Still, I protest, you are the only man I call my friend," continued the doctor, "because it is when we need the help of those whom we call friends we are loudest in our protestations of friendship, whether it be true or not. In our case, however, my heart goes with the saying."

Straightening up, he knocked the ashes from his pipe and placed it upon the tray, which, to Chester, intimated that Dr. McKim was in an unusual mood and was about to say something serious. The act was contagious. He also laid aside his pipe.

"In the first place, Chester," began the doctor, "I call your attention to the fact that our first meeting was of a casual nature; you have no credentials as to my true identity or worth, beyond our most pleasant subsequent relations. You, in your generous nature, have introduced me to your estimable aunt and your delightful young cousin, standing sponsor for my respectability; and yet I shall, ere I reach the end, ask for greater favors from you."

"I am satisfied. I do not feel that you have done or will do anything to make me regret having accepted you as my friend. I will grant you any favor within my power to give upon the same terms," was Chester's generous reply.

Dr. McKim smiled, and continued: "My name is not McKim."

Chester stared.

"I was not aware of this, however, until very recently. I had, without knowing the facts, assumed since infancy the name of my guardian instead of that of my parents."

Chester, realizing that he was about to hear the key to Miss Malcomb's story, became deeply interested. He was almost as familiar with his friend's life as he himself was, and with eager anticipation he waited to hear the full story.

We know the story which Dr. McKim had to tell. He told it frankly, but with certain reservations.

He purposely withheld the name of Hurlstone and the facts relating to its great wealth. He did not go into the details of the will for obvious reasons. These were the secrets of the estate. He did though, with much feeling, make known the fact that he had a lost sister, declaring he could never enjoy the properties which would become his until he had either found her or established the fact of her death. "I want you to help me find her, Chester," he said.

It was now Chester's time to smile.

Continuing, Dr. McKim said:

"My story is not ended. I have yet to tell you

the most serious portion. This Peter McKim, or Peter Kelly, is right here in New York, and is a most dangerous element. He has once been apprehended by your aunt, and this very day he came within an ace of getting me into jail." Then he informed Chester of the episode of the lace handkerchief.

"It is essential for me to find this man before he does some disgraceful thing to involve my name in a scandal before I can take the proper steps to change my identity, because it is a part of my plan to wholly disappear as Dr. McKim, there being facts connected with the name making this essential. I am going to ask you to handle this delicate matter for me. I said in the beginning I would ask of you a great favor; I have now come to it.

"Your cousin, Miss Von Comp, I have accidentally learned, believes me to be Peter Kelly. It is said there is a marvelous resemblance between us. He bears upon his forehead these same peculiar marks.

"It was in connection with the case of this double of mine that your cousin became aware that I resembled him so closely. It is evidently her own secret, for Mrs. Von Comp has never intimated she suspected me. They of course have no means of knowing there are two of us. Peter Kelly is Peter McKim, or rather, was the latter in Australia. He is a fugitive from justice from that country."

Rising from his seat and placing his hand upon Chester's shoulder he said, in a voice filled with emotion:

"Chester, I was a recluse, satisfied with you for my sole friend and companion. You insisted upon

my meeting your aunt and your cousin. Since that first meeting on Fifth Avenue I have been a discontented and unhappy man. I became deeply interested in your beautiful young cousin Eudora, yet I fully comprehended the impossibility of my paying court to her, because of the mystery which I knew surrounded my life. I have purposely avoided coming in contact with her, hoping I might forget. I flattered myself perhaps in believing that she displayed a reasonable liking for me the few times I have been in her company, until she became imbued with the notion that I am the vagabond apprehended in the park by her mother. I cannot tell you now how I ascertained this fact.

"But now things are changed. I may, with the consent of her mother and yourself, offer her a noble name and ample fortune. It is first essential, however, to disabuse her mind of the belief that I am Peter Kelly, a vagabond, and perhaps a criminal. I ask you now, as man to man, will you, speaking for yourself alone—for I shall ask the same of Mrs. Von Comp—consent to my paying my respects to your cousin, with the view of winning her hand in marriage?"

Chester had also risen. Taking the doctor's hand, he said:

"Paul, no matter who or what you are, you will always be Paul to me. Were Eudora my own sister I should be proud to know that you sought her hand in marriage. She is a lovely girl and worthy of the best, and I consider you as belonging in that class."

"Spoken like my friend, Chester; I am deeply

grateful to you, and still I have another favor to ask."

"Ask it. I grant it now," replied Chester.

"I wish to keep your aunt and your cousin in ignorance of my true identity and position until I know whether she will look favorably upon my suit," was Dr. McKim's request.

"I withdraw a hasty consent to this request until you have made some concessions yourself. I will agree to this, and will add my best offices to influence my fair cousin in your favor, if you promise me that, should I find your sister a woman to whom I may pay court, you will allow me that privilege," was Chester's startling reply.

Dr. McKim looked at him in astonishment, then stammered:

"Why—why, yes, of course—but man alive, I do not even know that I have a sister living."

"Oh, I take chances upon that," said Chester. "Now let it go at that, and we will take up the hunt for Peter Kelly to-morrow."

They were both peculiarly satisfied, and each believed he had in store for the other a great surprise to be sprung at the right time, and each was correct.

On the following day they were to meet at luncheon at the club, to devise some plan of action with regard to Peter Kelly.

At ten o'clock the next morning Chester called to see Miss Malcomb. She was now "Betty" to him, the formality of "Miss Malcomb" having been dropped.

"Well, my pretty lady, I am afraid to tell you

who you are. You may decide that I am not up in your class and send me on my way," was Chester's greeting, as he took her hands and held them as he looked into her bright, happy face.

"Then don't tell me, for it would make me most unhappy to lose you, my best friend," she said, with a smile which told him there was no fear of losing her just yet.

"You said I might love you and you would become my beloved wife did I restore you to your position. I now claim the reward. You are Lady Elizabeth Malcomb Hercroft, only daughter of one of the oldest families in England. I will guarantee that you will soon take your place in your own world again. Moreover, I have the consent of your brother to make you my wife."

"Why, you alarm me," she exclaimed. "When, pray, has this all taken place?"

Then he told her all about it, occasionally punctuating his story with a kiss on the willing cheek.

"And now," he said, "we are to play a dirty, mean trick on the best brother you will ever have. He is totally in the dark about you, and we must fix up a real surprise. He is much wrought up over the fact that he may have living somewhere in the world a sister, and he swears he will not rest until he has searched the world to its uttermost corners. Ha, ha! It is cruel to let him remain in ignorance, but we shall, for a while; and now, my sweet Lady Betty, as cruel to myself as it is, I must leave you. I have strenuous duties to perform, but I am much in need of encouragement. Therefore, Betty dear, tell me, will you marry me?"

"Yes, dear, whenever you think it proper," she said sweetly, and hid her face in his bosom.

They were a fine pair of lovers, these sensible two. There were no frills or foolishness in their courtship. It had been along too serious lines to leave room for any doubt on the part of either. And now it was very evident that an immense loving cup of joy was being prepared as their portion for the balance of their lives.

At last Chester literally tore himself away from his sweet Betty to meet Paul at the club.

After luncheon Chester remarked that they could talk and at the same time walk over to the Waldorf, where he had promised to meet his aunt and his cousin for a few minutes.

Entering the Thirty-third Street entrance they stopped for a moment at the news stand in the corridor, where Chester began negotiating for some theatre tickets, which he had promised to the ladies.

Dr. McKim had picked up a book from the counter and was turning over its leaves, when the familiar voice of Mrs. Von Comp was heard to say:

"Oh, doctor, come here; we are waiting for Chester. Come in here and visit till he comes."

Both men turned to look at the speaker, and were astonished to see her motioning to an entirely different person, who stood hesitating as to what to do.

Chester stared at Dr. McKim as though he were seeing double. The two men were identical. Had he not been positive that Dr. McKim had not left his side he would have been puzzled to choose between the two.

The man removed his hat and walked into the Turkish room with Mrs. Von Comp. Chester and Dr. McKim quietly took a vantage point and awaited developments.

"Who do you think I am, madam?" asked the double.

"Why, Dr. Paul McKim, of course. You act so strangely, doctor," replied Mrs. Von Comp, in great confusion.

"No, I am not Paul; I am Peter," he said, with a curious laugh. "I am Peter Kelly, Mrs. Von Comp."

Both Mrs. Von Comp and Eudora stood staring at the man until it looked as though a sensation might develop, when Chester and Dr. McKim thought it best to take part in the comedy of errors, and they walked into the room and confronted the stranger. Eudora at the sight of Dr. McKim pressed both her hands to her bosom and gave a half-smothered little scream.

The strange man seemed puzzled as to what he should do, but he did not hesitate long in escaping from the room.

They had heard him say he was Peter Kelly, therefore Chester and Dr. McKim were at his heels in a moment.

"Mr. Kelly," called Chester, and the man stopped and faced them. At the sight of Dr. McKim it was Peter's turn to feel queer. He looked as if he wanted someone to stick a pin in him to see if he were awake.

"I am Mrs. Von Comp's nephew," said Chester. "I wish to speak with you."

"Very well, sir," replied the man, and the three drew aside from the shuffling crowd in the corridor.

"If you will grant us the time, I think we may be more comfortable in the smoking-room; our conversation will be of vital importance to you, I assure you," said Chester.

The man eyed them sharply for a moment, then apparently made up his mind to have it out.

"As you please," was his reply.

They walked back past the news stand, where Chester secured the tickets awaiting him, handed them in to Mrs. Von Comp, and whispered: "Will report this evening at nine o'clock. Will bring Paul with me." Eudora eagerly listened.

Then the three men went into a secluded corner of the "Red Room," were served drinks, and the mystery of Peter and Paul was soon explained.

CHAPTER XIV

ARREST OF PETER KELLY, ALIAS DR. PAUL M'KIM

HAD Chester Von Comp and Dr. McKim not been amateurs and wholly absorbed by their interest in Peter Kelly, they would have observed the frantic actions of a scrubby little man, with hair like porcupine quills, and a stubby gray mustache, as he fluttered about the three men in the Waldorf corridors. They would have seen him look, first at Peter Kelly, then at Dr. McKim, raise both his hands to give a hitch to his sagging body, turn half around, gaze about him, then walk close up to them and look them over from head to foot, while trying to hear their conversation. He was more than puzzled.

Suddenly he backed off, drew a well-worn memorandum book from his pocket and hastily ran over its pages. Slapping it shut, he thrust it into his pocket and very materially expanded himself as he followed the men into the smoking-room, and taking the only nearby available seat, unfolded a newspaper and began reading.

As Chester gave his order, the same waiter took the stranger's order for a pint bottle of lithia water—evidently he desired to keep a clear head.

Peter Kelly was by no means worried, nor was he overly pleased with his awkward position.

"How shall I address you: as Mr. Kelly or as Mr. McKim?" was Chester's opening question.

Peter's face betrayed no unusual emotion, but looking Chester squarely in the eyes, he replied:

"Whichever you please; I go by both names."

Here was a stubborn mind to deal with, and a cool-headed, experienced individual. It would require tact and diplomacy to handle him. It would have been wholly impossible to bring him to a friendly or reasonable mood had they not been familiar with vital facts concerning him. This was of great advantage to them.

Chester proved himself a master diplomat and started out so well that Dr. McKim felt quite satisfied to remain silent. He had very minutely explained to Chester practically all he knew about the man, therefore should it become necessary they could talk quite freely to him, and in a manner to cause him to listen respectfully.

"I do not wish to appear rude," continued Chester, "for my talk with you is intended to be friendly to your interests; but your manner intimates that you are suspicious that it may be otherwise to you; therefore I will inform you that I am an officer of the Saving Society and am aware of your unfortunate record there. I am also aware of your record in Australia as Peter McKim."

Even this did not seem to startle him. He sat, sullen and defiant, and coolly drumming with his fingers upon the table. There was a half sneer upon his good-looking face, which betokened an independent contempt which was not favorable.

Before Chester could proceed and finish what he

had started to say, Peter Kelly aroused himself and asked :

“Do I owe the Saving Society anything?” still drumming upon the table.

“No,” answered Chester.

“Then how does all this concern you?” was the hard, bold question he asked, with his flashing eyes keenly bent upon Chester.

This determined resistance to his friendly advances aroused Chester’s ire, and his own eyes were brighter as he responded :

“It does not concern me personally in the least. I am in a position to do you a service, and I felt it my duty to approach you, as you could not possibly learn of this matter otherwise. I am not only familiar with your life from your cradle to the present time, but know many things which you yourself cannot know. Now, if it is distasteful for you to unbend and talk to me, as man to man, we may consider the matter closed, and we will bid you good day,” and Chester arose, and picked up his gloves as though ready to depart.

The little man with the quill-like hair stirred uneasily. He saw his hopes of hearing more dashed.

“Stop!” suddenly exclaimed Dr. McKim, as he motioned Chester to again be seated. “I have something to say to Mr. Kelly.” Then turning his strong, fine face toward Kelly, he said, in a voice which was as hard and resonant as his own :

“These matters may not concern Mr. Von Comp, but they do materially concern me. I am James Malcomb Hercroft, and I know that my father was your father. I know that you stand indicted in

Australia for a crime which you never committed, and yet it is only by legal methods and not by flight that you may be vindicated. You know this as well as I, therefore it is a personal right for me to ask if you prefer to remain a fugitive from justice in the eyes of the law. From your appearance I judge you to be a man of self-respect, as well as discretion. I am frank to say, that in the absence of any knowledge of your personal characteristics or habits, I am acting in my own interests; but should I be able to do you a favor at the same time, you will find me willing."

Peter Kelly's sublime self-control was most provoking. While he did start slightly at some of the statements Dr. McKim had made, he remained perfectly calm, never ceasing the annoying drumming with his fingers upon the table. Looking Dr. McKim in the eye with the same imperturbable stare he said:

"And you are James Malcomb Hercroft? Have you been legally declared so?"

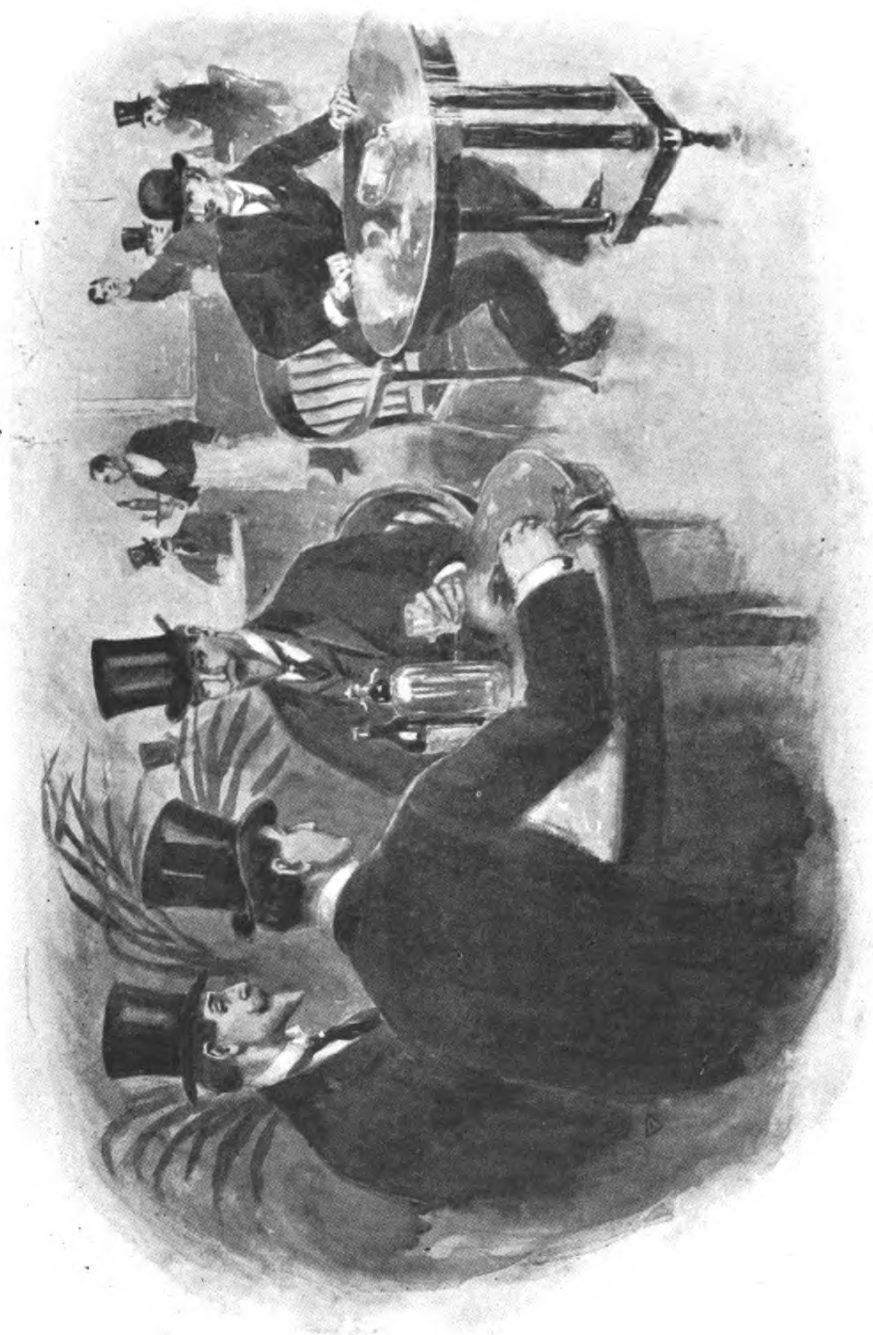
"I have," replied Dr. McKim.

Both Peter Kelly and the man at the next table visibly started at this statement.

"Then you are the Duke of Hurlstone also," was Peter Kelly's next shot.

"I am," replied the doctor.

"How long have you been in legal possession of the estate?" asked Kelly. It was quite evident this fellow was more familiar with Hurlstone than one might surmise. Dr. McKim was quick to understand this, and he had it in mind as he firmly answered this pointed question, saying:



“Who is James McBirney?”

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"I prefer not to answer further questions on this subject until I know you better."

He had purposely withheld from Chester that the name of Hercroft also carried with it the title of "Duke of Hurlstone." While he regretted to thus have to spoil his pretty plans, nevertheless it seemed essential to make this acknowledgment now.

While Chester was pleasantly surprised, he did not betray that he was practically aware of this. But the man at the next table was so overcome that he tipped over his bottle of lithia and manifested the utmost consternation.

This momentary interruption caused Chester to look sharply at their neighbor, then lean over and whisper:

"Don't intimate that I am calling attention to the matter, but I have just recognized the chap at the next table as Detective James McBirney. Doubtless he has been listening to our conversation."

In spite of the warning, both men suddenly turned to look at the man at the adjoining table. Without knowing it, Chester had sprung a new surprise upon both of them.

"Who is James McBirney?" asked Peter Kelly.

"Well, all I know is he is James McBirney, detective on the regular force, and the brother to Mary McBirney, Mrs. Von Comp's late secretary," replied Chester.

"Is this a family reunion?" asked Kelly, looking at Dr. McKim, at which the latter smiled.

The scrubby man who had been listening now became uneasy, and shuffled about as though his

feet wanted to go but his mind would not furnish the steam. The three men, knowing his embarrassment, increased his discomfiture by deliberately concentrating their gaze upon him.

This seemed to arouse him to anger, and looking at them from beneath his shaggy eyebrows, with some deliberation he drew from his pocket some papers. Selecting one, he strode over to the table, and standing impudently before them, placing his hand upon Kelly's shoulder, said:

"You are Peter Kelly. I have a warrant here for your arrest," and he handed the paper to him.

Kelly looked coolly at the document, evidently trying to avoid a scene, and remarked to McBirney:

"This warrant says Peter Kelly, alias Dr. Paul McKim. There is Dr. Paul McKim—which of us do you want?"

Dr. McKim and Chester were much annoyed and surprised at this turn of affairs.

"I shall have to take you both," coolly remarked McBirney, "for demned if I can tell you apart."

"Well, you will take neither of them on this defective warrant. I myself am a sworn officer of the law, and should you insist upon serving this warrant I shall make it my personal duty to arrest you on the spot, and no power on earth shall prevent you and your sister from serving a long term in Sing Sing. Now say quickly what you want to do about it. I will have no scene kicked up here," and Chester looked big enough and strong enough to carry out any threat he made. Reaching over, he took the warrant out of Peter Kelly's hand and

tore it into small bits; then turning to McBirney, he said: "Now, if you do not get out of here at once I will call the house officer and have you kicked out. Such dirty sneaks are not permitted to mingle with decent people in this house."

There was an ugly, dangerous snarl upon McBirney's face, and his hand seemed to be gliding beneath his coat, when Peter Kelly grasped it strongly by the wrist and jerked it upward and toward the table. Then reaching beneath McBirney's coat he confiscated a department revolver, which he slipped into his own pocket.

Knowing he had the worst of it, and seeing the bald head of the house officer coming through the door, McBirney decided he had business elsewhere.

It was fortunate that he knew it was in the power of Chester Von Comp to carry out his threat, for James McBirney was the kind of man, and was just then in the humor, to do some desperate deed. He had been associated with police affairs so long he had forgotten that he himself was amenable to the law, a common fault among police officials.—"The king can do no wrong."

Upon seeing Peter Kelly and Dr. McKim together he at once grasped the situation, realizing that he had stumbled upon the heir of Hurlstone; but which was he? No matter; he would apprehend both on some trumped-up charge in order to hold them until he could lay claim to having found the lost heir, with the view of securing the great reward.

Dr. McKim's declaration that he was James Malcomb Hercroft and Duke of Hurlstone knocked all

of his calculations into a cocked hat, and he was accordingly angry.

It was apparent to him that if Dr. McKim should learn of the Hurlstone mystery he would at least attempt to secure possession of his rights, and now that, according to his own statement, he had done so, there could no longer be a reward offered for his discovery. There never had been a reward offered for Peter Kelly.

He bitterly cursed his luck that he had not long ago discovered that Peter Kelly and Dr. McKim were two separate individuals and both in New York. He had had a fortune in his grasp and did not know it. He roundly abused his sister and said hard things about Edgerton.

Could he do so without running the risk of getting into prison himself, he would make it mighty embarrassing for all of them; but he was an experienced man and well knew it was dangerous to trifle with men like these. His hands were thoroughly tied.

The incident of the warrant had considerably changed Peter Kelly. He was much more tractable. He seemed convinced that his interests lay with these men who had volunteered to help him.

After the departure of McBirney the three men adjourned to a corner of the restaurant and continued their conversation.

"Gentlemen," said Peter Kelly, when they had settled in their seats, "I perhaps should apologize for my stubborn suspicion of you when you first announced yourselves to me, but I am of that nature. All my life I have been suspicious of

other people. It has prevented my making friends. I doubtless would have continued to oppose your advances had not this McBirney turned up.

"If, as you say—and I do not doubt your word—you have established yourself as the legal heir to Hurlstone, I am not the man to question the legality of your position, although you say you know that your father was also my father. Neither of us was to blame for that, and should you be right, I could have no legal claim against you or the estate. It has never occurred to me to trace my rights, as I have a very limited knowledge of my early life.

"While I am a rover, eccentric, and a mystery to myself and to others, I have not committed actual crime. Your statement that I stand indicted in Australia for a crime I never committed did more to establish my confidence in you than anything else you have said to me.

"I am amply provided with means, having always been able to earn excellent wages as a chemist, besides earning considerable money in other honorable ways. Nevertheless, at times I am most disreputable and poor. But that is neither here nor there. It is my affair. I harm no one but myself."

"Would this be true were you settled with an assured income rendering it unnecessary for you to earn your living?" asked Dr. McKim.

"It would be true were I a billionaire," responded he, with a strain of sadness in his voice. Then, with a deep sigh, he shook himself together and said:

"I think my best course is to meet you half-way in what you have to propose. I know if you are as familiar with my life and my traits as I believe you to be that you must think I am a constant menace to your peace and welfare, but you are quite mistaken. You would probably never hear from me again should we part now with no future meeting in view. At least, that is my present feeling."

Dr. McKim took a card from his cardcase and handing it to Peter Kelly said:

"You see, I am still known here as Dr. Paul McKim, because I have only recently been established in my rights, and I have some matters which I desire to straighten out before a public announcement is made. You have been the one source of solicitude which has worried me most, for reasons which I will later make known to you. I will also make known to you the facts and the evidence of my having come legally in possession of Hurlstone at our next meeting. Will you meet me at my house to-morrow at twelve o'clock? Mr. Von Comp, who is my closest friend, will be there. We three will lunch there and take this matter up in full."

"I have no card, but I reside at ——— Madison Avenue," said Peter Kelly, as he took Dr. McKim's card. They had arisen.

"You bear me no ill-will, I hope, Mr. Von Comp," he said, and extended his hand to Chester.

"On the contrary, I shall be most glad of an opportunity to prove otherwise," was Chester's hearty response.

"You will not find me as bad as I am painted," he said, as he also shook Dr. McKim's hand, and they parted with his promise to come the next day.

That evening Chester dined with Paul, and together they went to see Mrs. Von Comp at nine o'clock. That usually self-contained lady and her nervous daughter were so excited they had wholly forgotten to attend the *matinée* for which Chester had provided tickets. They were wrought up to a high pitch. Mrs. Von Comp had never once heard of the curious "double" and was shocked to learn there was some mystery about these two men.

Eudora was so glad, and so mortified, she hardly knew whether to cry or laugh. The conspirator did not much regret that she had a secret in common with Dr. McKim. This confidence was a sort of tie between them.

Chester graphically told the story that he and Dr. McKim had agreed upon, while the ladies listened intently. They were really parties to the comedy or tragedy, whichever it might turn out to be. Mrs. Von Comp was especially pleased to know that her late protégé was not so bad as he had appeared. She told them that someone had been good enough to return to her the letter in which Peter Kelly had remitted the loan, this letter having been stolen by Mary McBirney, and that she had put his record right.

Thinking it very possible that they might have some trouble with James McBirney, she gave them all the facts regarding the peculations of his sister, also telling the story of Edgerton.

Eudora acted like a child who had recovered

from the shock of a recent chastisement. She was eager to make amends for previous bad behavior. Poor little maid! she had suffered more than anyone knew.

Dr. McKim was careful not to intimate that he himself had ever been treated otherwise by her, for which she was most grateful.

Chester made some plausible excuse for calling his cousin out of the room, and Dr. McKim at once took advantage of this opportunity to speak to Mrs. Von Comp about her daughter Eudora. He began the assault by saying:

"Mrs. Von Comp, perhaps I have chosen an inopportune time to broach a subject so vital to you, but I desire to speak to you regarding your very charming daughter. I shall deem it a great honor to be permitted to try for her favorable consideration of a proposal of marriage from me. I can offer her a good name, a social position in England, and an ample fortune, with the facts of which I shall of course satisfy you at once. But should you consider my petition favorably, I would deem it no unfair advantage to your daughter to win her as Dr. Paul McKim, chemist. At the proper time I will be delighted to share the secret with you. I assure you I shall take no unfair advantage in not fully relating to your daughter a romantic little matter which I should like to hold in reserve as a pleasant surprise for her should she look favorably upon my wooing."

Mrs. Von Comp had listened patiently to him without betraying surprise or emotion. As he paused, apparently for some reply, she said:

"Doctor, I am rapidly nearing the end of my journey. I have but one really urgent reason for remaining active, for I believe that at my age I could better foster my remaining energies by retiring to a more restful and quiet life. My daughter has been most dutiful and loving to me, being one of the best companions I have ever known, and I feel it a binding duty to keep going until she is well settled in life. A foreknowledge of her permanent happiness will be my promise of heaven, therefore I must consider carefully so important a matter as you propose. I will give you this encouragement, however, doctor: you are the first man in whom I myself have felt sufficient confidence to even listen to such a proposition.

"I will mention to you some very essential facts for your consideration. My family and fortune together are considered one of the old social landmarks of New York. I am aware that the old corners and old buildings and antique institutions of every kind are giving way to modern rush; therefore when I am gone, Eudora will naturally associate with a younger generation and absorb the new ideas of society. I do not mind telling you, doctor, that I do not approve of the new era of social life in the United States. It smells too strongly of well-fingered money. It has an atmosphere about it which too often suggests the need of disinfectants. I have long had in mind a desire to establish my daughter in new surroundings, and this has always suggested a foreign alliance. Yet the very thought of the many mesalliances of American girls with the impecunious riffraff of Europe is so repugnant

to me I shudder to think of encouraging the attentions of any foreigner.

"Eudora is a girl who must be loved. She is a most lovable person herself, and would pine away and die quickly under bad treatment, and knowing as I do the usual characteristics of men and their tendency to domineer over gentle-spirited wives, I often think I would rather Eudora should not marry at all than have her contract an unhappy alliance. Should she marry before I leave her and the man of her choice prove in the slightest degree displeasing to her, she should not live with him one hour after I found it out.

"You say you can offer her a good name. That implies a good, well-known family name. I have only known you through the friendship existing between you and my nephew, and as Dr. Paul McKim. I know of some good people in this country by that name, but not in my social set.

"You say you can offer her a good social position in England. That necessarily implies your family position, for I am aware you have resided for several years in this country.

"You say you can offer her ample fortune. Chester has never spoken of you as a rich man. My fortune is very large, and Eudora has never been denied anything money could buy." She had talked hurriedly, and now seemed to be prepared to listen to Dr. McKim.

"Mrs. Von Comp, all of what you have said is most sensible and reasonable. I am pleased to feel myself thoroughly in sympathy with your views. I shall have one broad foundation stone for my pro-

posal to the woman I desire to marry—a carefully weighed and tried love. With that as a beginning, few need fear the consequences of marriage. Keep this burning in both hearts and all other things seem insignificant. I speak from the experience of one who by my profession has seen both the bright and steady light of constant sympathy and affection, and the intermittent flutter of so-called love, which is too often quenched by drenching tears of anger, remorse, and regret.

“My own heart is sound and true. I believe that of your daughter is pristine and pure, therefore, should we join our hearts, our future happiness would depend wholly upon our loyalty to our first love, because on both sides other conditions will be well-balanced. Inasmuch as money can be no motive for marriage on her part, my offering to make a settlement of one million dollars upon her by our marriage contract will be in the nature of a guarantee of my affection and honor.”

Mrs. Von Comp looked much surprised at the last statement, but before she could interrupt he continued:

“There is another essential point for you to consider, Mrs. Von Comp: the disparity in our ages. I am thirty-six, and I judge your daughter’s age to be twenty.”

“I do not consider that such a serious matter as to prevent a desirable match. In fact, I should prefer my daughter to marry a man thoroughly settled in his habits. The greatest social tragedies grow out of marrying young girls to boys too young to fully realize the responsibilities of marriage. To

be sure, were I not so well advanced in age and Eudora so dependent upon me, I should prefer to have her wait till she is twenty-four. I deem that the proper age for young women to wed. I want my daughter to marry as soon as she can make a suitable choice, for the very good reason that I want the pleasure of seeing her happy and contented as a wife."

She said this with much feeling, and the sympathy in her voice betrayed to Dr. McKim that she was favorable to his proposition, all things being satisfactory.

"Let your mind be at ease, doctor; I will take this all-important matter under immediate consideration. I have never talked with my daughter on this subject, and I should like to sound her and get her notions of these things. Personally I like you, and what you have said is quite reassuring and satisfactory; therefore, unless some unforeseen event presents itself, I believe I may be able to tell you shortly that you may try to win my baby away from me. I must express to you my sincere thanks that you thus honor me. I have the utmost confidence in you."

Dr. McKim bowed deeply and said:

"I thank you more than I am able to express, Mrs. Von Comp, and I feel constrained to say should you generously favor my suit there are some matters about which we must have an understanding; they deeply concern myself, but will be highly favorable to your daughter, should she become my bride. Knowing your deep love for her, it is but fair I should take you wholly into my confidence in

all things pertaining to the matter. I especially desire to win her affection by my own personality. I prefer that she believe me what I now seem to be, a poor chemist; therefore let one of our secrets be that I will make an ample settlement on her. Moreover, I should prefer to remain Dr. Paul McKim to her. I will give you plausible reasons for this at a suitable time. My true name is James Malcomb Hercroft, of England. I will ask that you deputize your nephew to take up a careful examination of my personal, financial and social standing, with the aid of your legal counsellor, if you must, but I should prefer not."

They were now standing, and Chester and his pretty cousin returned to the room.

"I think it beautiful, and you do not think so, do you?" Miss Von Comp was saying as they came in. "Dr. McKim would agree with me, I am quite sure. He has an artistic eye."

"If it were an Easter bonnet he would: I know he has a taste for gewgaws," sarcastically replied Chester.

"Why, Chester!" exclaimed Mrs. Von Comp, "you are really insulting in your language towards Dr. McKim. What is this dispute about, pray?"

"Why, he says the Japanese screen I bought last week is inlaid with chicken bones, instead of real ivory," declared Miss Eudora, her lips pouting, and her eyes screwed up in pretended anger.

"That is easy to settle," said Mrs. Von Comp. "Chester never saw an animal larger than a chicken in its native state, in his life, while Dr. McKim is

an authority on tigers and elephants. He can tell you whether it is ivory or not. Show it to him."

"Come to the library, please, doctor. If I have been swindled, I want to know it," and the charming girl whom he had just asked the privilege of wooing fired the first dart. It struck home, too. They passed into the library, leaving the mother and the cousin in the drawing-room.

They stood by the screen in question, but before a word was spoken about it she clasped her hands and looking imploringly up into his face she said:

"Please forgive me, won't you?"

"Forgive you for what?" asked the doctor, looking amusedly at her troubled face.

"For thinking—thinking you were Peter Kelly," and she flushed deeply and hung her head.

"Had you thought me Satan I could not be offended with you; there, we are friends," and their two warm hands met again in confidence.

"This is real ivory," he said, examining the screen. As they re-entered the drawing-room, as a measure of retaliation he said, "Your cousin may not always be right, but he thinks he is, and that goes a long way toward condoning his errors of judgment."

"You are too generous, doctor; Chester always was a boastful fellow, pretending to know more than he really does," said Mrs. Von Comp.

And thus the good-natured chaffing bridged over an embarrassing period from which all but Eudora were pleased to escape.

It had been a pleasing evening to Dr. McKim.

He felt quite certain Mrs. Von Comp would bid him woo her sweet daughter.

Chester was well aware of what had taken place, and he gave his friend a hearty slap upon the shoulder upon reaching the street, and said:

"You are it, old man. That aunt of mine would marry you herself were she a young woman and was asked. She wants to have a big pow-wow with me to-morrow, and that's where I may get even with you for all the sorrow you have caused me during the past several weeks."

"Did all my cause for worry lie with you my slumbers would remain unbroken, and my appetite unimpaired," replied his friend.

Soon they parted with mutual reminders of the important engagement of the next day.

CHAPTER XV

M'BIRNEY UPSETS THINGS

At the hour appointed on the following day, Peter Kelly mounted the eroded red sandstone steps of Dr. McKim's house.

He was a cool-headed chap, this man of mystery. Unabashed, he looked over the front of the building before ringing the doorbell, as though calculating the mode of life of the dweller within.

One knowing Dr. McKim, and seeing this man standing there slowly drawing off his gloves, would have reasonably mistaken him for the doctor himself.

Plimpton was a very discreet servant, else he would surely have betrayed emotion upon finding his master's double when opening the door in response to his ring.

The visitor announced himself as Mr. Kelly and was ushered directly into the doctor's cozy library, where Dr. McKim and Chester awaited him.

"Good day, Mr. Kelly, you are a very prompt man," was Dr. McKim's greeting.

"Life is too short to be wasted waiting," was Mr. Kelly's almost gruff rejoinder; then he politely acknowledged Chester's greeting.

"Be seated," said the doctor, waving him to an easy chair. "I have taken the liberty of ordering

luncheon at the early hour of twelve, not knowing what your afternoon engagements might be." In a few minutes Plimpton announced that the luncheon was served.

Peter Kelly was by no means bashful, but he did betray an uneasiness throughout the whole repast. He partook sparingly of the light wine, and sat most of the time in a thoughtful and preoccupied mood, making it quite embarrassing to the others.

The conversation was of a desultory nature, and apparently not to his liking, for he took no part in it, but seemed impatient to begin the discussion of the main subject.

His satisfaction was quite manifest when the doctor suggested an adjournment to the library, where they could choose between briar-roots and cigars.

When seated, and their pipes aglow, Dr. McKim abruptly began:

"Well, Mr. Kelly, I presume you are anxious to begin our important talk. I think, though, before we finish you will congratulate yourself that some kind fate has so quickly brought us together since my return from England.

"It occurs to me you might have in your mind some vexatious question which you would like to ask me before we systematically go into the matter."

In reply to this Kelly quickly said:

"Yes, there are several questions which I should like to ask you," his voice betraying suppressed emotion. "How were you identified as the legitimate heir to Hurlstone?"

This startling question, so abruptly put, was a great surprise to Dr. McKim, who for a brief mo-

ment hesitated to answer. But quickly recovering himself, he replied:

"That was a matter for the trustees to determine."

"Did they base their decision upon evidence produced by you at the time you represented yourself to be the heir?" was Kelly's next question.

"I did not represent myself as the legitimate heir. The infallible test was their secret, not mine. At the time I was subjected to it I knew no more about it than you now know," was the doctor's frank response.

"Do these trustees know that I am living?" he asked.

"They do," replied the doctor.

"Then, how do you or they know the same test will not apply to me?" was his almost defiant question, and he pushed the hair back from his brow, revealing the marks upon the right temple, evidently believing this to be the secret.

"We are both marked alike in that respect; that is not the test," calmly replied Dr. McKim, who now saw a contest shaping itself in the mind of Peter Kelly. Continuing, he said:

"I only have their word for it that the same identical test was applied to you, and you failed to meet the requirements."

"When was such a test applied to me? I know of no such examination or investigation. I cannot see why I, myself, may not possibly prove to be the legitimate heir under fair competition. Who represented to you that I had been tried?"

"The trustees themselves," said the doctor.

"Where and when, pray?" he asked bitterly.

"Mr. Kelly, I cannot answer this question; in fact, I will not, because it would be most offensive to you; but I will assure you of this fact: I know that I am the true and legitimate heir to Hurlstone, and that you are not; that is all I care to say on that point."

"Very well," responded Kelly hotly. "I consider it my duty to notify you now that I shall employ counsel to look after my interests. I have just come in possession of facts which I have not heretofore known; therefore I do not feel bound by any talk we may have on the subject," and he looked the doctor boldly in the face.

He forgot the doctor came of the same indomitable stock.

Realizing that he might have trouble with the fellow, the latter dryly responded:

"Certainly not, and to make doubly sure that your case is not prejudiced by any conversation between us, we would better consider the matter closed now, but I wish to say one thing in your behalf, in order that you may not accuse me later of having purposely withheld it from you. May I proceed?"

Kelly flushed and nodded assent.

"Very well," continued the doctor. "I know beyond doubt that you are not the legitimate heir to Hurlstone. I am aware what your true relation to the late duke, my father, was. He acknowledged in his will this relationship, and by the terms of this will he bequeathes to you a large annuity. The validity of this clause rests upon two absolutely arbitrary conditions. The one being that the true heir

must first be found and identified 'to the satisfaction of the trustees,' and the other, that the son of Pretty Laffelle shall not, 'by word of mouth or in writing,' lay claim to being the legitimate heir, nor in any manner attempt to contest the will or embarrass or annoy the true heir or the trustees.

"The first of these conditions has been satisfied. There is no doubt of your identity, therefore the annuity is assured to you, provided you do not annul the provision of your own accord.

"Now, Mr. Kelly, I think I have done my full duty towards you. It would be manifestly unfair to myself to enter into a further discussion of the case with you, in view of your saying that you will probably enter a protest. To do that would simply assist you to turn against me and cause me perhaps much unnecessary annoyance. You, as a man of experience, can appreciate my position. We have absolutely nothing in common. Therefore I am in nowise duty bound to give you further information. It is not my place to argue with you in your own interest, notwithstanding I did feel a friendly interest in your case. I am not, by nature, mean nor sordid."

Peter Kelly doubtless realized he had been too hasty and impatient, and had thereby put Dr. McKim on his guard before he had obtained from him facts which he no doubt would have given freely under a more diplomatic course. These facts, too, were indispensable, should he decide to make a fight against him.

He sat moodily thinking for a few moments, then said doggedly:

"I am an independent man. I could not, with self-respect, become a pensioner upon your charity should you prove to be the legal heir."

"If you view it in that light, it is a matter which wholly concerns you. The conditions and terms are not of my making," replied the doctor.

Peter Kelly came of a father who loved to fight; contest was born in his blood and bones. Subsequent to his first talk with Dr. McKim he had been aroused by things which had been told him for the sole purpose of making him angry, therefore he had kept this appointment with a conflict uppermost in his mind, but the announcement by the doctor that he was a beneficiary under the will of the Duke of Hurlstone added a new phase to the matter which upset his first determination.

After having so forcefully expressed himself he hesitated to lower the dignity of his assumed position by inquiring the nature and amount of the bequest. That would, to a man like Dr. McKim, smack too strongly of sordid motives on his part. In the absence of knowledge on this particular point it behooved him to go cautiously in whatever he decided to do. He fully realized that in Dr. McKim he was not dealing with a tyro. The latter betrayed the confidence he felt in the strength of his own position by his perfect ease and self-control, and the readiness with which he had answered every question put to him.

By his puzzled and worried countenance, Peter Kelly, who had so bravely entered the house, now betrayed the deeply perturbed state of his mind.

Chester Von Comp had listened earnestly to this

conversation between these two strong characters, and could not help marveling at the clearness with which the natures of the two were revealed.

The discussion was as a mirror in which a word picture of the men was reflected. Peter Kelly, bold, passionate, reckless, uncertain of his position, yet willing to take long chances. Dr. Paul McKim, calm, dignified, sure of his position, and strongly fortified in his self-control.

The whole nature of each man was simmered down to an essence in this brief encounter, therefore the aspect of the coming contest between them was foreshadowed plainly.

Chester realized that a clash was inevitable, and acted upon impulse as he excused himself, stepped into the hall, and without halting his steps to betray his motive, snatched from the rack his own fur-lined coat, and a tall hat belonging to Dr. McKim, and passed on up the stairway to the second floor where the ever alert Plimpton met him.

"Here, Plimpton, be quick, get some oil into your stiff old joints, for you must play detective. Disguise yourself in these," and Chester helped him into the great coat and placed the tall hat upon his head.

"There, now you look like a cocky old roué in that outfit!" he exclaimed, as he stepped off and surveyed the butler.

"Go out through the basement door; take a position where you can safely see this man leave the house, then follow him until you locate him permanently, then seek the nearest telephone and report to me here. Now, do you understand? Wait,

use this for a 'flash,' if you need it," and he handed him a silver Saving Society badge.

Plimpton nodded and Chester coolly returned to the library below, hearing, as he entered, Peter Kelly say as he stepped out into the hall:

"I'll think the matter over and you will hear from me again," and Dr. McKim, himself missing Plimpton and surmising that his absence was significant, helped Mr. Kelly on with his topcoat and passed him out at the street door.

Going quickly to the reception room window they saw their late visitor cross to the opposite side of the street, cast sidelong glances back at the house as though he expected someone to follow him, and pass hurriedly down Fifth Avenue. They laughed heartily to observe, lumbering along in his wake, a ruddy-faced old roué, wearing a big beaver-lined coat with the collar turned up to his ears, and the most fetching French, chimney-pot hat, while swinging gracefully in his hand was a stiff buck-thorn stick. It was Plimpton, now Detective Plimpton, of the "Saving Society staff."

"You are an astute fellow, Chester," said Dr. McKim, as they turned away from the window. "You anticipated my chief desire in sending Plimpton after him. What do you think of the radical change in his attitude since we last conversed with him?"

"It looks simple enough to me," said Chester. "After leaving us yesterday he was waylaid by James McBirney and pumped full of poison. I'll wager a pretty bunch of money we have a report from Plimpton informing us that Kelly goes di-

rectly to some prearranged rendezvous to meet the worthy McBirney and tell him all that has just transpired here. Wait and see if I am not correct in this view."

"I don't doubt it; I don't doubt it," responded Dr. McKim.

This surmise proved wholly true. In about thirty minutes the telephone rang, and it was Plimpton at the other end of the wire. Chester took the message and Dr. McKim wrote it on a pad as Chester repeated it:

"Hi! hello! Hit is me. The chap went to the Gilsey House and met a short man with stiff gray hair and a stubby gray mustache. They are now seated at a table back in the bar with their heads close together."

"That will do," replied Chester; "keep watch of them till I come. I will start at once and meet you at the cigar store on Broadway opposite the Gilsey. Should they leave before I can get there you follow the small man in preference to the other. Report to the doctor here from time to time by 'phone as you can." Then he rang off, jumped into one of the doctor's topcoats and was off like a shot.

Dr. McKim took up a position near the telephone for a siege of impatient waiting.

Chester hurried to the rendezvous to meet Plimpton, who was relieved to see his distinguished looking co-operator enter the door.

"They have just paid the tab, sir. I will step to the corner, maybe one or both may leave by the Twenty-ninth street door. I will follow the scrub and you the man," Plimpton had hurriedly said to

Chester. Then he gave the stick a correct hitch and walked to the corner, only to make an undignified break for a hansom cab standing at the Broadway entrance of the Gilsey House, at the same time frantically beckoning to Chester. They piled into the cab, Plimpton at the same time saying to cabby:

"Double fare to trail the red-wheeler going east on Twenty-ninth. Careful now," and he flashed his silver badge, which might have been a beer check for all the cabby knew.

Off they went with a dash, bumping into a coal wagon as they turned the corner, barely grazing the hubs of a private carriage, and scaring other cabmen who were moving through the busy street.

"'E's all right, sir, 'e knows 'is business," volunteered Plimpton, as Chester glanced up towards the little window in the top of the cab.

For a brief moment they were delayed at Fifth Avenue, but they saw ahead of them and continuing on Twenty-ninth Street the red-wheeled hansom cab, which, as Plimpton had explained to Chester, contained both the men.

It was going at a furious pace. Reaching Madison Avenue it turned up that street to Thirty-sixth, then east two squares, and to a clean, three-story red brick residence, where it stopped. Both men alighted and passed hurriedly into this house.

The following cab adroitly turned the corner to avoid coming in too close contact with the driver of the red-wheeler, who, from his actions, intended to wait for his men.

Further up the street Chester's cab took a position where they could have a long-distance view of

the front of the building. Plimpton stepped out and stood with one foot upon the stirrup, remaining in that position as though in conversation with someone within, as a plausible reason for the cab standing there while they awaited results.

They did not have to wait long before McBirney came out, looked furtively up and down the street and motioned to his cabman. While the latter was driving back to the house McBirney walked back into the lobby, where he was joined by Kelly and a tall, raw-boned woman, whom Chester at once recognized as Mary McBirney. Evidently the men had gone there to consult with her.

The two men again entered their cab, drove to Madison Avenue, and went furiously downtown, never stopping until they reached one of the prominent steamship offices, where, to the confusion of the eager people in their wake, McBirney jumped off the step of the red-wheeler without its making a stop. Evidently they had previously instructed their man just what to do, for without even turning his head he drove on while McBirney bounded up the steps and entered the building.

It was difficult to guess what his intentions were or where he would go, but he had behind him some very astute gentlemen to do the guessing.

As Chester's cabman hesitated for a moment Plimpton stepped out and said: "Follow the red-wheeler." He then sauntered up the steps and into the building, where he was pleased to see McBirney awaiting his turn at the counter.

Walking unconcernedly to a revolving case which was upon the counter directly at McBirney's elbow,

this distinguished-looking old man began to examine the printed time-tables and reading matter it contained.

Only once did McBirney look his way, then not in a manner to indicate suspicion.

At last a clerk stepped forward and asked McBirney what he could do for him. The latter made inquiry regarding the steamships sailing the second day thereafter, especially desiring to know what day and hour it was due at Liverpool.

Being satisfied, he engaged and paid for passage for two.

"What are the names?" asked the clerk.

"Lord James Malcomb Hercroft and secretary," was the astonishing answer.

At this moment another clerk asked Plimpton if he were waited upon.

Plimpton made minute inquiry of ships sailing the next day, and secured all the information essential to know, should it be needed for quick action on the part of Dr. McKim.

He and McBirney left the place practically together, he even having to apologize for accidentally poking his buckthorn stick into the ribs of the latter.

They both took the Sixth Avenue Elevated, and he trailed McBirney back to the red brick house on Thirty-sixth Street. Then feeling certain he had secured practically all to be had by watching him, he walked quickly to Dr. McKim's house.

Chester Von Comp had not returned. Neither had he reported by telephone. An hour later he came in and they at once compared notes.

Dr. McKim said: "A short time after you left I was called to the telephone, and I recognized Peter Kelly's voice. He asked me if I would be in my office for an hour. Suspecting a trick, I answered him by saying I was about to walk over to the club with Mr. Von Comp, but if he so desired, I would gladly remain here to hear from him. He replied that I was very kind, and if I did not hear from him in an hour not to wait longer; then he rang off."

"Very cute!" exclaimed Chester. "After having his talk with McBirney and 'Old Sec.' they concluded to see if you were safely off their trail. That was the sole object of the telephone call. He has not called you since, has he?"

"No," said the doctor.

Plimpton had related to the doctor his adventures, and the latter had carefully taken down his statement. This he now handed to Chester, who read it eagerly, and amidst exclamations of surprise and anger, at the end of it he exclaimed:

"I shall have that scoundrel McBirney arrested at once."

"You will do nothing so rash," retorted Dr. McKim. "These fellows are arranging their own trap; leave them alone. They will sail day after tomorrow. I will sail to-morrow. Plimpton has already engaged passage for me. I will beat them to London and prepare a pleasant reception for them there. Now let me make plain to you that you can do nothing with them at this end. McBirney has committed no crime here, to our actual knowledge, although his sister has. But he is a self-confessed thief in England. Moreover, the persons most affected by his speculations are English people; there-

fore, to arrest him here would make it appear spiteful, and it would be difficult to induce the English authorities to prefer charges against him, to extradite him. He may possibly have become naturalized, in which event some very grave complications could arise, causing much notoriety, which we most want to avoid.

"On the other hand, it is a grave offense in England to steal records or documents of any kind, the punishment for which is drastic and severe. There is no statute of limitation running against a crime of this nature. This very act now shows a motive for the theft committed years ago, therefore the offense is not condoned by time. He has purposely and knowingly revived the crime, hoping thereby to profit at this late day.

"As to Peter Kelly, he has done nothing to justify placing a charge against him. His scheme, though, will have a serious culmination in England, and the chances are very much in favor of his bumping into the law. You can do nothing here.

"Now, what did you do after leaving Plimpton and McBirney at the steamship office?"

"Ha, yes; I had a very interesting chase after Mr. Kelly. After McBirney left his cab he was driven to a small three-story building on Nassau Street. It is on my aunt's rent rolls. I know all about it. On the ground floor is a brokerage office; on the top floor is a gold beater's shop; but, between these two, well, it was easy enough for me to guess his destination, although I did know positively that he did not stop on the first floor. Then to make doubly certain, I went up to see my old friend, the gold beater. Mr. Kelly was not there.

"On the second floor are three lawyers, about the worst pack of sharks that ever infested New York. We have not been able to oust them from their lease, which they surreptitiously obtained.

"It was to this den that Peter Kelly went. I waited for some while, and he did not reappear, therefore I concluded it would serve no purpose to follow him further.

"I had put together the two facts, his having come here to consult with these shark lawyers and McBirney's having gone to the steamship office, and had concluded they contemplated the very trick which it seems certain they will execute. What a fortunate thing it is we followed them."

"It seems almost unfair to take advantage of what we have learned, but the circumstances are of their own making. They must suffer the consequences," said Dr. McKim. Then instructing Plimpton to go at once and purchase a steamship ticket, he began to calculate just how many hours he could beat the conspirators to London. Twenty-four hours at least, did the vessel arrive on time at Liverpool.

A carefully worded cablegram was prepared and sent to the London office of the Hurlstone estate. It read:

Notify trustees Kelly found. Conspiring to contest will. Can apprehend him and associate on criminal charge on English soil. I sail noon Wednesday. Will arrive in London twenty hours before they land. Have Scotland Yard representatives at office.

J. M. H.

Then they prepared another cablegram to be sent at the psychological moment to James McBirney upon his arrival at Liverpool, with the view of taking some of the starch out of him. It read as follows:

Am under arrest on serious charges. MARY.

This was to go whether Mary was arrested or not. But it seemed necessary that she be not permitted to escape, because of her importance in the case.

Dr. McKim's office was to be headquarters in New York, with Chester in charge, while Plimpton was to remain as his confidential aide-de-camp.

Very late that night the doctor was smuggled out of the house and to a hotel far downtown, in order to prevent a surveillance the next morning, revealing his departure.

So far as anyone knew, he succeeded in getting aboard ship without discovery.

A remarkable combination of circumstances enabled him to reach London with ample time to provide a suitable reception for Kelly and McBirney, their ship being twenty-three hours late in arriving at Liverpool.

Upon their arrival at Liverpool, Scotland Yard men took up the trail of the bogus Lord James and his precious secretary.

In the London office of the estate of Hurlstone were Chief Counselor Beaufort March and his assistants. They had full power to act, and their first precaution was to repair to the proper recording

offices and establish James Malcomb Hercroft in legal possession of his rights and title. This had also been done in the local records of Hurlstone.

Dr. McKim no longer existed. It was now, "Your Grace, the Duke."

The Scotland Yard people were greatly surprised to learn that their sacred records had been tampered with. They remembered James McBirney very well. The documents held by the new duke were convincing, and they at once prepared warrants for the arrest of James McBirney, but at the suggestion of the Duke, Peter Kelly was not accused as an accomplice.

The fate of Peter Kelly depended upon his own actions, and in order to avoid a scandal, if possible, it was agreed to make a strong attempt to appease him. But in view of the fact that he had been informed of the legitimate heir's legal restoration, he was laying himself liable to criminal prosecution, in representing himself as James Malcomb Hercroft.

They waited impatiently for the hour to arrive when Peter would pay them a visit, knowing that his New York lawyers would send him to the London office as the law headquarters of the estate.

The new duke was kept on the alert in order that he might be at hand when needed.

Several days passed and no Peter came. One morning a conference was being held, when a card came in with the request that it be handed to the chief counselor of the Hurlstone estate. Only a thin partition separated the two private offices. The Duke, one of the lawyers, and two Scotland Yard

men, both of whom knew McBirney, were placed in the inner office.

The card bore the name "James Malcomb Hercroft." Word was sent out to show the gentleman in.

It was a very distinguished-looking man who presented himself to Beaufort March as James Malcomb Hercroft, and the bristling little runt with him was the type of the American blackleg lawyer who may always be found associated with cases which "may be settled out of court," yet this was not James McBirney's calling.

Mr. March arose as the two men entered. There was little likelihood that McBirney would know him, as the latter had left Hurlstone at the age of fourteen, at which time he himself was at school.

"I am James Malcomb Hercroft, sir, and this is my secretary, Mr. Peterson," said the distinguished-looking man.

"Be seated," said Mr. March, and he looked them over carefully.

Looking at the card, he fumbled it about, as though undecided what to say. He was, in fact, marveling at the resemblance between this man and the one in the adjoining room. Finally, he said:

"In the absence of any legal information that you are what you claim, I cannot officially recognize you by this name, therefore I shall only be able now to hear what you have to say."

"I shall be brief," returned Peter Kelly. "I have recently come into possession of facts which seem to prove clearly that I am the legitimate heir

to the estate of Hurlstone. I have come to London with the view of prosecuting my claim, and securing my just rights. I deem it but fair and proper that I show you this courtesy before instituting legal proceedings. I have no desire to embarrass the trustees; in fact, believe it quite possible they will take cognizance of the evidence I shall produce, and gladly acquiesce in my proposition to take possession of my properties and title, and save needless expensive litigation and notoriety.

"I have had my lawyers search the records and they cannot find that another claimant has presented himself, therefore my prior claim must entitle me to first consideration."

Mr. March still fumbled the card and sat as though pondering over what he had just said. Suddenly arousing himself, he abruptly asked:

"Where are you from?"

Mr. Kelly studied for a moment, then answered:

"I am from the United States at present, having come direct from New York here."

"When did you examine the records here you speak of?" asked Mr. March.

"My New York lawyers cabled their London correspondents, and they had their report ready to submit to me on my arrival," responded the bogus Lord James.

This explained why the records had failed to show a previous claimant.

"Have you put this matter in any form which I may officially call to the attention of the board of trustees? It is of too grave importance to treat it carelessly. Ordinarily important matters of this

kind are presented in legal form and by duly authorized lawyers. You are probably not aware that this is only the law office of the estate, the headquarters of the trustees being at Hurlstone Place. We have no authority to discuss with you or consider so grave a matter. It must be put in legal form and submitted to the trustees. An investigation into your claims would necessitate their coming to London, and I could not risk calling them here on a wild-goose chase.

"You may, if you will, present briefly your contention, which I will forward to them. Then while we are awaiting results your lawyers may prepare your case more fully."

"Your suggestion is very proper," replied Mr. Kelly.

"Excuse me for a moment," said Mr. March, and he arose and passed to the outer offices, leaving the two men alone.

"Didn't I tell you Dr. McKim was only bluffing. He's no more proved his case than you have. I know he has no evidence, and you ought to know by this time he has not been here. The records don't lie. Now take my word for it, you are Dr. Paul McKim and he is Peter Kelly. Don't make a mistake." This was all rattled off excitedly by McBirney.

"We'll see," was all Peter Kelly deigned to reply.

Mr. March returned to the room, accompanied by a secretary, to whom he began to dictate.

"To-day there called at this office a man calling himself Lord James Malcomb Hercroft, the legal

and legitimate heir to Hurlstone. He is accompanied by his secretary, one Mr. Peterson.

"He makes this brief statement for your consideration, while his lawyers are preparing his case in full.

"Formerly went by the name of ——"

Mr. March looked questioningly at Kelly. After a painful mental struggle the bogus applicant uttered his first deliberate falsehood, saying:

"Dr. McKim."

"The first name," said Mr. March.

Peter Kelly had a conscience. It was giving him a good warning. McBirney was frothing with suppressed rage.

"Just let it go at that," said Kelly impatiently.

"Sir, you hurt your own case by making mental reservations which may throw doubt upon your claim."

"His name was Dr. Paul McKim before he found out his true name," blurted out McBirney.

Peter Kelly made no denial, and Mr. March wrote it so.

"How long have you resided in New York?"

Again hesitating, Peter replied:

"About eight years."

"Where did you reside previous to that?"

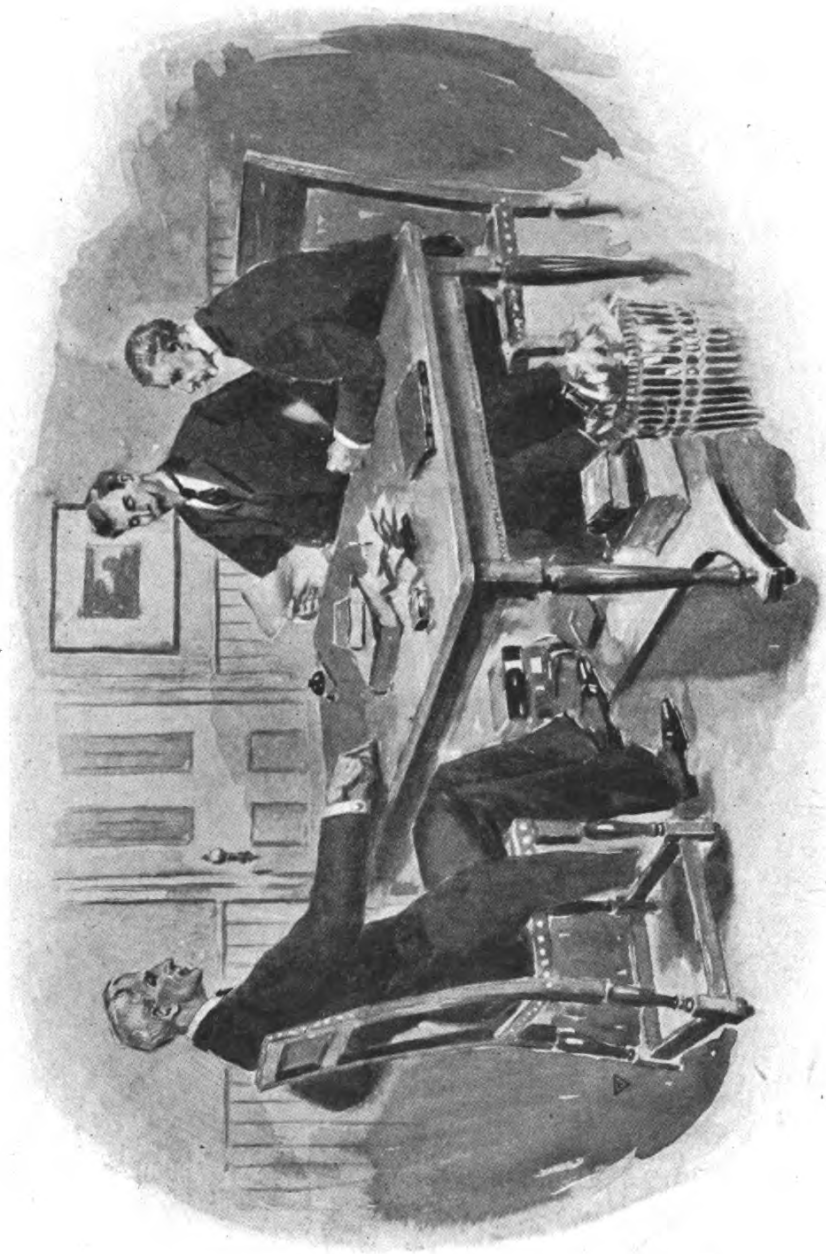
"In Calcutta," was the answer.

"When did you first become impressed with the idea that you are the true heir to Hurlstone?"

"Within the last few weeks," he replied.

"And have you since used the name James Malcomb Hercroft?"

"Yes."



"Be good enough to subscribe your name."

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"That is only during the few weeks since you learned of the facts which lead you to believe that you are the legal heir?"

"Yes."

"Have you not been informed that the true and legal heir to Hurlstone is known, and that James Malcomb Hercroft is now in legal possession of his property and title as Duke?"

"No."

"And you now present yourself to the trustees of the estate of Hurlstone, representing yourself to be the legitimate heir, James Malcomb Hercroft, and demand that you be restored to the rights and title of the true heir?"

"I do."

"Should the trustees decline to take action in your case, is it your intention to bring a suit at law to compel them to recognize your claim?"

"I have employed counsel with that object in view," was Peter Kelly's fatal answer.

Glancing over the sheet, Mr. March handed it to Kelly, saying:

"Be good enough to subscribe your name to this statement."

Kelly toyed with the paper, pretending to study it carefully, then he laid it upon the table, saying:

"I do not see the necessity for my subscribing to this. These are the simple facts and I do not want to prejudice my case by signing something without the advice of my lawyers."

"Very well, Mr. McKim, when you desire me to call the attention of the trustees to this claim of yours, come to me with a properly executed state-

ment of the case, otherwise I can take no official cognizance of the matter. It is my business to keep worry and annoyance away from the trustees, not to search out and press upon them troublesome matters.

"You must appreciate the essential fact that you have not given one single piece of evidence that you are what you claim to be."

Peter Kelly arose, ran his hand through his hair and revealed to Mr. March the marks upon his temple, saying:

"If you know all of the facts in the case, do these marks count for nothing? Were these marks not upon the brow of the legitimate son of the Duke of Hurlstone?"

Mr. March was perfectly calm as he replied:

"Yes." Then, after a pause, "They were also upon the forehead of the illegitimate son."

There was an embarrassing pause in the interview.

Suddenly, as though having reached a critical point for a final stroke, Mr. March arose to his feet, threw his head back, demanded of Peter Kelly to sit down and listen to what he had to say.

This command was rather doggedly obeyed, and Mr. March rapped the paper sharply with his fingers, and said:

"When you entered this office you knew you were an impostor. You had been informed by James Malcomb Hercroft himself that he had been declared by the trustees and instated in his rights. You were told that the test by which the trustees had identified him had also been applied to you,

and you were proven to be the illegitimate son of the late Duke."

"That is a damned lie!" exclaimed Peter Kelly, arising from his chair with livid face. "No such test or examination was ever made upon me."

Paying no attention to the insulting language, Mr. March said:

"As I was the agent who instigated the examination I know whereof I speak, and inasmuch as you seem to be offended at the suggestion, I might as well convince you now. You have brought this humiliation upon yourself. I will not embarrass you by asking questions. I will state facts:

"This examination was made in the Bertillon branch of the police department of Sidney, Australia, and by a special agent of the Scotland Yard detectives, assisted by a special medical expert sent under the authority of the Chancery Court from London.

"You have never gone by the name of Paul McKim, for Dr. Paul McKim was declared to be the Duke of Hurlstone, and now holds that high estate. It was he who tried to favor you, and told you of the bequest, and the conditions surrounding it, which assured you of a liberal annuity for the balance of your life.

"By your actions you have not only forfeited this, but you have, under the criminal code of England, placed yourself in jeopardy.

"I am a trustee of the estate, and in the presence of witnesses you have represented yourself to be the legal heir, and made demands upon me, with dire threats in the event of noncompliance.

"You have represented to me that you have, for many weeks, assumed the name of James Malcomb Hercroft, whereas, you used it for the first time on the day that your companion there, McBirney, engaged your passage. This man, James McBirney, a criminal himself, has made a fool of you. More, he has made a criminal of you also in this case."

They had both arisen and seemed ready to assault the speaker, when the door between the two offices opened, and they were confronted by Dr. Paul McKim and two Scotland Yard men.

At the sight of the Duke they both wilted. It was so unexpected they could not face him.

McBirney sulked like a whipped dog, showing his teeth, but admitting defeat. But the case was different with Peter Kelly. It was a new experience to him, a naturally strong, self-reliant man. It was most pitiful to see his humiliated attitude. There was but one savage glare in his eyes and this was directed towards James McBirney, who had drawn him into it all.

"Now, gentlemen, you have your own case with this man McBirney. He belongs to you," said Mr. March to the detectives, "but this man I shall let go for the time being. I am not ready to prosecute him. I reserve that till the time he attempts to molest James Malcomb Hercroft. He cannot escape should he so desire."

Peter Kelly was thoroughly done for. Strong man that he was, there were tears in his eyes, perhaps of vexation at his own foolhardy actions. The man who had always been so cool under heavy fire had been caught in his first really reprehensible act.

although they all, at this time, believed him to be a hardened criminal.

He had been grossly deceived, lied to and misled by the scrub McBirney, who had told him a wild story about his own mother having been his nurse, and how she had exchanged the other child for him. Peter Kelly was not wholly familiar with all the facts of his own case.

It was a plausible story which McBirney put up, and his having been recorder in Scotland Yard added strength to it.

McBirney, of course, was ignorant of Dr. Paul McKim's first secret trip to England, and he was playing for the reward. He really did not believe the doctor knew much more of the case than they themselves.

He had purposely deceived Peter Kelly in order to gain time and hurry to England, but on ship-board the fascinating scheme of playing for a dukedom seized possession of Kelly and this was the disastrous result.

Everyone there felt that it was, indeed, fortunate for James McBirney he was now under the protection of the law, otherwise Kelly would surely have killed him on the spot.

The detectives took McBirney away. They found on his person when he was searched a cablegram which read:

Am under arrest on serious charge. MARY.

Peter Kelly was put under oath and entered into a contract to remain in the United States,

under penalty of having his annuity cease. It having already been forfeited under the terms of the will it was by agreement revived by contract.

He did not seem as bitter towards the Duke as they thought he would be, but seemed most contrite and penitent.

The Duke now cleared up all of the legal matters relative to his restoration, and when he returned to America it was to prepare the way to return permanently to his vast estate.

One million dollars was made available for special purposes, should he need to draw upon it. He at once came in possession of an immense income from his estate.

Chester and Plimpton both felt much aggrieved that matters terminated in peace, they not having one opportunity to show their true metal. The only order they received by cable was a mere announcement that Paul would arrive on a certain day. Chester was for meeting him with a brass band, but Plimpton declared that his master was especially opposed to being made conspicuous, therefore they had to content themselves by waiting a weary week after receiving his cable, for his arrival.

CHAPTER XVI

PETER KELLY MAKES HIS PEACE WITH THE DUKE

It had required nearly two weeks in which to arrange all legal matters, and the Duke saw to it that his lost sister's interest were in nowise impaired.

Peter Kelly had on two occasions appeared at the office of the estate to sign legal papers. He had made no protests since the first interview with Beaufort March, being sufficiently humiliated at that time.

McBirney pleaded guilty to the theft of records from the Scotland Yard archives, and was sentenced to three years' imprisonment, which assured his being put out of the way till the new order of things could be established.

A very strange thing happened, too, at this time. Although some small publicity followed the conviction of McBirney, in which the names of Peter and Paul McKim both appeared, by the most strenuous efforts no great noise was made about the discovery of the heir to Hurlstone.

One day, while the Duke and the three trustees were gathered in Mr. March's office, a clerk came into the room and said there was a very old woman outside begging to see Mr. March. Beaufort March stepped outside and was astonished to find there

old Meg McBirney, come to plead for her son. She was taken inside, and was wholly overcome to find there those who were once her friends.

When the Duke was introduced she forgot her predicament and looked him over carefully from head to foot. "'E's that like 'is father I'd think it 'im, wor 'e not dead an' buried these many years ago."

She wept and prayed for her Jimmie, notwithstanding both he and Mary had deserted her and left her to the tender mercies of great, heartless London at an extreme old age, when she should have been cared for by her children.

In her abandonment of self in her Jimmie's interest, she confessed to having filched papers from the elder March, thus corroborating the statement made in her son's letter to his sister.

In view of her extreme age and poverty, the trustees took her statement, then informed her that while she was liable to prosecution, they would not take such extreme measures if she would quietly go to a home for indigent persons which they would select, and where they would provide for her comfort. Her children had deserted her, and it was not in her power to aid them. Thus she was finally disposed of.

Peter Kelly made no attempt to go to Hurlstone, nor did he seek any further intimacy with the Duke, who spent most of his time in the London office.

The Duke had confided to his grandfather and uncle that he sought marriage with an American heiress, and in the event of an acceptance he should, as a matter of pride, desire to make a large present

to his bride. Moreover, she only knew him as a poor man, and he greatly desired to woo and win her in this belief, reserving the wedding gift as a great surprise.

Upon making known the young lady's name, his grandfather asked if her mother was Mrs. Katherine Von Comp. Receiving an affirmative answer, he said: "My dear boy, the young lady has a fortune which will compare favorably with your own."

So it was agreed that the homecoming of the new duke, when he would meet all of his tenantry and come formally into possession of his great estate, should be at the time of his bringing his bride, should plans not miscarry. In the meantime elaborate preparations and improvements would be made.

Everything now settled, the Duke was ready to return to his wooing.

Although Dr. McKim would have preferred that Peter Kelly had chosen another steamship on which to return to the United States than that upon which he himself took passage, nevertheless he would not be boorish in his treatment of him, should they come in contact.

Almost on the gangplank of the steamer he met Peter Kelly. Both were genuinely surprised.

They pleasantly nodded and would have passed on without further recognition, but the Duke felt it his duty to make the first advances if they were not to remain as total strangers. Turning, he extended his hand, saying:

"I hope I may see much of you on the trip over."

The other took the extended hand cordially, replying: "I shall be delighted. You and I should

have some interesting reminiscences to exchange. I assure you, I bear you no ill-will."

This speech put them on excellent terms. On their way over they did enlighten each other regarding many of the mysteries which interested them in common. They did more than this, however.

Peter Kelly went to an extreme in telling the other of his adventure in Central Park, when by accident he became a "probationist" of the Saving Society.

"At times," he said, "I am seized with an uncontrollable desire to ramble and run wild. At these times, notwithstanding I may be abundantly supplied with money, as I was at the time I was captured by Mrs. Von Comp, I take on the appearance of a genuine vagabond, preferring the garb and having the habits of a tramp.

"I have read every known authority on the subject and am thoroughly convinced it is an hereditary taint. Some of my ancestors were rovers of the sea or land. I have roved over both.

"I have felt no recent disposition to exercise this peculiar trait, and I attribute this to a most singular accident, which I am not disinclined to explain to you in view of recent events which thoroughly change my whole views of the future.

"When I was 'rescued from the law' in Central Park by Mrs. Von Comp, I was shocked by the presence of an unusually sweet and beautiful young lady, who I afterwards learned was Mrs. Von Comp's daughter. I became so infatuated with this splendid young woman I forgot all else but a determination to be a man, and some day, perhaps,

know her better. I was not in love with her in the sense that I wanted to woo her. I was fully aware that that was impossible under the circumstances. But I did hope to reach a position which might make it possible for me to sometimes come near and speak with her.

"Frequently I have waylaid them and followed them on a bicycle or otherwise, in order to see her, but never permitting her to see me, if I could avoid it. It was I who stole her lace handkerchief. I was delighted to have in my possession something which she had touched."

He rose up from the deck chair in which he had been reclining, drew from an inner pocket an envelope, in which was a dainty lace handkerchief. Handing this to the Duke, he said:

"I now present this to you with my best compliments. I am convinced that you are paying court to this same young lady, and inasmuch as you have dispelled my delusions 'tis but proper I should remove myself wholly from your path as an embarrassing factor," and in spite of the Duke's protests, he insisted upon his taking the handkerchief, and making apologies to Miss Von Comp for him.

"There is one other thing which I should like to impress upon your mind," he said. "I am not a criminal. It is true, my habits have necessarily brought me often into bad repute, but the nearest approach to a crime I ever committed was my demands upon the trustees of your estate, and this was done under a most curious combination of falsehoods and facts presented to me by this James McBirney. He convinced me there was a possible

chance that I was the heir, and," he said, leaning towards the Duke and speaking most earnestly, "I was seized with a madman's notion that I might become Duke of Hurlstone. It was not my real self acting, and I have been deeply humiliated and disgraced by my own conduct.

"For this reason, sir, you need have no fears of my ever giving you annoyance of any kind. I shall endeavor to prove to you that I am a man in whose veins some of your own blood flows, notwithstanding the unfortunate taint upon my parentage. I do not doubt the correctness of the judgment of the trustees after having gone fully into the matter."

The Duke was greatly touched by the earnest manner and noble words of the man. They were of the same age and remarkably alike in many of their traits, as well as physical appearance.

Dr. McKim had always been a peaceful, gentle-spirited man, but with a reserve power equal to any demand. He was a stronger man than Peter Kelly. The latter was unstable in both mind and body. Fate had truly selected the better man to be the Duke and Master of Hurlstone. The weaker man recognized this. No matter what his regrets, his better sense controlled him, and he felt that his interests would be best served by submitting to the inevitable and being friendly to the more fortunate Duke. It was not a difficult position for him, for he was not ambitious.

Their experiences had been almost identical, therefore each understood the feelings of the other. Did Peter Kelly desire to make the Duke a lasting friend he had chosen the right method.

To his frank confession the Duke responded with equal warmth:

"My dear sir, you and I have had eventful lives. Our experience might be compared to a game of chance, and I have had the last and winning throw while you have proved yourself a game loser. It seems that you have lived practically the same life of semi-seclusion that I have preferred. Doubtless you have pondered and thought along identical lines with myself, therefore our personal tastes and ideas of comfort and happiness should be much alike.

"Speaking now, as man to man, should you prove to be the reasonable, sensible man your recent conduct indicates, I shall try to establish you as my brother, because of your being the son of my father; but you must trust me to do it in my own way. I shall trust and esteem you as a brother and always bid you hold your self-respect; your accident of birth cannot change you as a man. The mere form of marriage relates to property and social custom, not to character. No man is responsible for the shortcomings of his parents, but he inherits their traits to bless or harass the spirit and the body during his life. Even these hereditary taints may be cured or rendered inoperative by recognizing them and preventing their manifestation. With a foreknowledge of one's inherited faults they may be brought wholly under the control of the mind and the will.

"You inherited the roving disposition of your father, together with his especial indifference to his personal appearance during these debauches. Yet you confess to being temporarily cured by the

desire at some time, perhaps far in the future, to appear well in the eyes of one whose good opinion you esteem.

"The cure is wrought wholly by your own mental process, the other person knowing absolutely nothing of her hypnotic influence over you.

"Now, by cultivating the desire to appear well in the eyes of those who esteem you, as well as those whom you esteem, you will have a doubly strong restraint placed upon your objectionable habits. You may easily substitute for your desire to rove, other diverting pastimes, for self-forgetfulness is all you instinctively seek. Men's minds become morbid and reactionary, when left too much to the influence of their own thoughts. I confess to this myself. One must do something to please others as well as himself, else his selfishness turns to envy and hatred of all things about him, and in disgust he gives way to his weakest faults, utterly unmindful of the opinions of others or respect for self.

"If there are those who hopelessly condemn you for faults not your own, choose your friends from among the broader minded—there are plenty from whom to choose. You may count me as your friend and your brother with absolute certainty that I make no reservation because of your accident of birth. A human life is too sacred a thing to depend upon the cradle for its credentials."

Peter Kelly had listened to these words with a look of wonderment upon his face. Could it be possible that in the face of what he had done this newly made duke was willing to recognize him as his equal and his brother? There could be no other

construction placed upon what he had said. His eyes glistened, and his voice faltered as he tried to respond to the Duke. Finally, he simply extended his hand and bowed his head, remaining in this position for some time.

From this conversation their intercourse broadened daily until they landed in New York.

"I want you to make free to come and see me often," said Dr. McKim, as he bade him good-by.

Chester and Plimpton met the doctor at the pier. They were surprised to see him bidding Peter Kelly a cordial adieu, and wondered what it all meant.

The doctor laughed at their questioning looks, and said: "Peter and I are on most excellent terms. I will explain later."

Chester had a wonderful tale of woe to tell in reference to Mary McBirney.

"Is she in jail?" asked the doctor.

"No, she is in the hospital," was the startling reply. "The papers here had a sensational story of James McBirney's arrest in London, saying that he had made a special trip over there to rob the Scotland Yard offices of valuable records; that he had been caught in the act and would probably get a life sentence. Thinking it important, under these circumstances, to corral 'Old Sec.,' whom we had previously decided not to put under actual arrest, Sergeant Brompton and I went to the Thirty-sixth Street house, where we had located her.

"The whole place was in an uproar. It seems James and Mary McBirney were the star boarders in the house, and the story of his fate in London had been read that morning at the breakfast table.

Two hours later Mary McBirney was found unconscious in her room, with a note on her table saying she had decided to go at once by the suicide route.

"Only a half hour before our arrival the ambulance had taken her to the hospital. She was in a precarious condition for several days, but now bids fair to recover, but she constantly bemoans the fate of her brother Jimmie."

A few days after his return Dr. McKim received a call from Peter Kelly, which extended itself into a most entertaining afternoon's visit in the doctor's very comfortable chemical laboratory.

"Where did you get this work on acids?" Dr. McKim was asked.

"At a little bookshop on West Thirty-sixth Street," was the doctor's reply.

"Look on the back flyleaf and you will find there a memorandum," said Kelly.

Sure enough, there was written on the leaf these words: "July 29th—Central Park . . . 58th street, One hundred."

"It has the gravest significance," responded Peter Kelly. "At that time I occupied a small room on the second floor at this place, the entrance being through the shop. I was on excellent terms with the old man keeping the store, renting from him, and it was my habit to pick up books which interested me, carry them up to my room, read and return them at my leisure.

"On the 29th day of July I was 'rescued from the law' by Mrs. Von Comp, taken to her office, given a preliminary hearing, handed one hundred dollars and sent away rejoicing.

"I have always felt positive her man Edgerton followed me, and that I evaded him by taking refuge in my little den over the bookstore.

"I had, lying upon my table that day, this very book, and made this note on the flyleaf, as you see it. Evidently you have since gone there and purchased it."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Dr. McKim. "Fate plays many curious pranks," and going to a filing peg upon which were stabbed many memoranda, he searched diligently, finally jerking from the bunch a yellow slip, which he handed to Peter Kelly, saying: "Read that for a singular coincidence."

Kelly read aloud:

"July 29th. Chester:—Smashed test tube and cut my hand, not seriously. Do not try the experiment again till I come. Have gone to get a French work on the subject. Wait for me. PAUL."

"It is a most curious fact that on that very day I had a slight accident here in my laboratory. Here are the scars on my wrist. I bound up the wounds and went to the little bookstore, where I had remembered seeing a French work on the same subject upon which I was experimenting.

"I carried my hand in a sling made of a large black silk handkerchief, and now, here is where you laugh: Edgerton did shadow you and he did lose you in the bookstore. I must have been there at the psychological moment to help you escape, for upon leaving, Edgerton declares he mistook me for his man and followed me back here. Many of my troubles and much of my good fortune have sprung from that one mistake.

"In time you will learn that had this not occurred the present Duke of Hurlstone would have still been listed among the 'mysterious disappearances.' Isn't it all a curious combination!

"Moreover, Peter Kelly would also be recorded as a 'derelict' on the books of the Saving Society, for Mary McBirney confiscated the hundred dollars you returned. Some time I will tell you the story."

"What has been your idea of these strange coincidences generally?" asked Kelly.

"Sufficiently interesting to justify investigation along these lines," said the doctor.

"Do you know I am more and more convinced as I grow older that the whole tendency of human thought and education is toward gross superficiality. The more subtle laws in nature, and doubtless those which affect us most vitally, are being wholly submerged in more material things and thoughts.

"Nature attempts to knit her wounds by bringing together the remaining tissues. This is the underlying principle which brings together, from time to time, under the most peculiar coincidences, things of a like nature.

"The familiar saying that 'birds of a feather flock together' is one of the most profound bits of philosophy we have."

"Then you believe that the apparent accident of our having both gone into the little store at this particular time was no accident, but was preordained by some subtle law of nature," said Kelly.

"Undoubtedly; I have much data upon this subject to prove that to bring about certain conditions nature can compel the human body to act uncon-

sciously in her aid. I sometimes think that, after all, our physical being is but the vital instrument of a universal consciousness, for instance, the return of this book by you at the critical moment for me to obtain it.

"I know positively that by cultivating a certain mental condition the human organism can and will mechanically record the most abstruse things of which the objective mind is not at the time conscious.

"I give it as my candid opinion that possibly in our day many men may receive and send mental messages by the simple use of pencil and paper. I have myself done so. The human brain being both transmitter and receiver, and the mass of lymphatics at the ends of the fingers the seat of the motive power, in case of receiving, causing them to record the messages. I say men—I do not mean by this that it will be general, because few men will have the courage and perseverance to cultivate this power."

"You astonish me!" exclaimed Peter Kelly.

"Nevertheless there is much evidence existing to-day to prove its possibility," returned Dr. McKim.

"Then you believe the transmission of this independent sense is through the lymphatics?" suggested Kelly.

"Yes; and that is why it is independent of objective consciousness. The objective senses are wholly stimulated by nervous transmission. Objective consciousness is simply understanding. Nervous energy is atomic, its highest manifestation being

the process of thought. By conscious reasoning we convert thought which may not be our own into action and speech. The word, we are told, is the last manifestation. The word is God, and God manifests in the flesh.

"I am willing to go on record as believing that all thought is due to external suggestion, and that primarily we are not responsible for speech or action.

"The subjective transmission of independent sense, which manifests by automatic writing, is neither nervous nor muscular in its origin. It is molecular and manifests in physical action direct, without the process of reason. The lymphatic connections being unable to stimulate objective, conscious understanding in the brain centers, thought is unconsciously converted into action independent of will power to direct. This is why automatic writing is often eccentric and perverse. The two might be likened unto streak and sheet lightning, the automatic flash being the sheet."

"I should like to go deeper into this subject with you at some other time, doctor," said Kelly.

"I shall be delighted to do so," heartily responded the doctor.

And thus these men, with scientific bent, entertained and amused each other until quite late in the afternoon.

Peter Kelly took his departure with an assurance that he would come again soon, on Dr. McKim's cordial invitation.

While they were as friendly toward each other as of old, nevertheless the doctor and Chester

Von Comp had not renewed their laboratory acquaintance since the new aspect of things. Chester had changed so materially in his manners and actions the doctor was greatly puzzled. He could get out of him nothing which seemed to throw a light upon this change. He seemed like one preparing for some great event, always being in a state of excitement and hurry, and always having a malicious sort of grin on his face when the doctor seemed puzzled with his freaky conduct. He was a very busy man. Formerly he had been morose and gloomy at times, but now he was always in a bustling good humor.

The doctor was wise enough to know this to be a change of the heart. The young man was in love and would tell him soon or burst, for he was accumulating a fearfully high pressure. It was only a matter of time, and the doctor was a patient man.

CHAPTER XVII

DR. M'KIM HAS A SURPRISE

CHESTER VON COMP was too much in love with his fair lady to spring surprises or play tricks upon her; but it was not beneath the dignity of the pair to prepare a great surprise for Dr. McKim.

Miss Malcomb had been kept fully informed by Chester of Dr. McKim's movements, and it now seemed important that something be done to apprise him of the fact that his sister was at hand, ready also to come into her rights under the will of the late Duke. They were anxious to make this information a pleasant surprise for him, therefore they planned and schemed for several days in devising the best method of bringing about the denouement with the proper dramatic effects and side-lights.

Without her knowledge Chester had imposed upon his fiancée by directing her to numerous places where he had quietly arranged for her to obtain certain expensive things at about one-fourth their value, he surreptitiously paying the balance. She positively declined to allow him to openly buy clothing for her or lend her money.

He did not want to tell her how much worried and disturbed he was over the fact that it would soon be necessary for him to introduce her to his

aunt and his cousin. He dreaded the searching examination of his proud old aunt, and the thousand and one questions she would ask. Miss Malcomb did not need rich clothing; she was so beautiful that simplicity was most becoming to her—rich simplicity. Extremes would make her theatrical—she could have been made a famous stage beauty. Their tastes were very similar, however, and they quickly agreed upon modest, unassuming things.

Chester had succeeded in inducing her to take a more elaborate apartment with the argument that it might be humiliating to the new Duke should it be necessary for him and his attorneys, in the adjustment of her claim, to see the manner of her living. He did, in this instance, vouch for the payment of the rent, assuring her that she would have a right to ask aid of her own brother, and he felt positive that this brother would not be skeptical or stubborn in her case.

It seemed natural to suppose that the Duke, her father, would have provided for her in his will, if he had for the illegitimate son.

Everything was planned for Dr. McKim's surprise, and Chester arranged the time and programme admirably. He requested of his friend an evening to themselves, that they might have an old-time talk. The doctor suggested his dining at home with him, and Chester promptly accepted.

After dinner they repaired to the doctor's comfortable library for their customary smoke.

The inevitable Monk was in his usual place, and all made a picture of peace and happiness.

Plimpton removed the coffee cups and the small brandy glasses and placed on the table the tray of tobacco and pipes and left them alone.

Chester could not help cautiously smiling as he saw the helpless victim before him, relaxed and wholly unprepared to receive the shock of the surprise he was about to spring upon him.

"Oh, my dear Paul," he began, "you may view with complaisance the rosy future before you, but what compensation am I to have for the loss of the only friend I have on your returning to England permanently? I imagine I feel like a woman whose husband has deserted her without fault on her part."

"Why not apply to the courts for alimony?" laughingly asked the doctor.

"It isn't the maintenance I need, it's the dear companionship; and the courts are notoriously indifferent to sentiment," was Chester's plaintive response.

"It strikes me just at this moment that you have been notoriously neglectful of your duties toward that companionship during the past several weeks. You will find cobwebs woven in fantastic garlands about your apparatus up in the laboratory, while your unfinished experiments have become grotesque fungi," and the doctor looked askance at his discomfited friend. It was a hot shot, and it struck in a vital place. This delightful companionship had heretofore focused itself over the brews, the glass tubes, and the curious reactions in the chemical laboratory, and it was true these had been sadly neglected.

"I will say one more thing in my defense, and then I am done," continued Dr. McKim.

"During this abandonment of your duties to science you have shown a buoyancy of spirit and a radiant happiness which you never displayed while looking over the top of an acid-frecked apron. Therefore, I take it your emancipation is sufficient compensation in itself."

Chester was really touched by this just accusation, and had he not felt secure in the fact that what had caused him to be radiantly happy equally concerned his friend, he would have been alarmed at the severity of these reproaches.

"We are actually in a spat," exclaimed Chester. "Let's not quarrel; there are more important things to talk about. I will be truthful and say my appearance of happiness has been due to my elation at your good fortune, but now the reaction has come and I am grievously hurt over the possibility of our being permanently separated."

Dr. McKim sat drawing the amber mouthpiece of his pipe through his lips, as though caressing it, but he was thinking, while he looked at his friend with a calm and disinterested air.

He knew Chester better than he knew himself, and he was trying to guess what was back of his talk. He felt certain something unusual was in his mind.

"I wish you would tell me something of your plans, so I may decide upon my own course," said Chester. "How long will you remain in New York?"

"Until I win your fair cousin's hand," was the

cool response, and the lips were still stroked by the amber.

"Oh, that reminds me, I believe you agreed that I should woo your sister should she be found and I should find her a woman whom I should desire to make my wife."

The pipe was quickly but gently placed upon the tray, and the outlines of Dr. McKim's face were more tense as he replied:

"That is too serious a matter for jest. I fear you do not fully realize how deeply I am concerned in the matter of the loss of my sister. I should truly love to have a sister upon whom I could bestow some of my affection, and since learning that I have one, perhaps in poverty and distress somewhere in the cold, cruel world, I am more and more anxious concerning her. I have given much thought to plans of searching for her, but desiring to avoid notoriety, I have really not formulated one which I could put in operation.

"Yes, you may help me in this search; and, my dear Chester, you know I should feel honored did you at some future time find it possible to become my brother."

"I thank you, Paul. I probably have been too thoughtless of your feelings in this matter. I, too, have been thinking seriously of this phase of your strange case, and I will surprise you by telling you that I have formulated a plan of search which may be put in operation, and without publicity.

"You may put my interest down to love of the romantic, if you will, but I do want you to feel that I am not wholly indifferent to your feelings.

We will not discuss now my plans, but I want you to help me in the preliminaries to-morrow morning, when I will explain them in full."

Dr. McKim was much puzzled. He could not understand his friend's self-assurance, but knowing him to be given to the mysterious, he could only wait patiently till the following day.

The balance of the evening was taken up with general talk, and at an early hour they separated, the best of friends.

At eleven o'clock the next morning Chester called in a hansom cab at Dr. McKim's office for him. They were driven far uptown and to a beautiful little apartment house within one square of the Park. Discharging the cab, they entered and took the elevator to the fifth story. The building was new, bright, and sunny, and each floor was divided into two apartments.

A ring at the bell of one of the apartments brought to the door a neat servant, who took the gentlemen's cards and bade them enter the pretty reception room.

In a few moments the soft rustle of a woman's skirts was heard, and a stately young woman, beautifully and tastefully dressed, and having an air of refinement which bespoke gentle breeding and good training, entered the room.

The gentlemen arose, and Chester stepped quickly forward to greet her. Taking her by the hand, he turned to Dr. McKim, and bowing, said:

"Your grace, the Duke of Hurlstone, allow me to present to you my fiancée, Lady Elizabeth Malcomb Hercroft."

Dr. McKim's jaw dropped, and he stood staring with wondering eyes, speechless with surprise.

"Ha, ha!" exclaimed Chester, "this is surely one on you. Paul, salute your sister; but don't be too affectionate on short acquaintance; I shall be jealous," and he looked and acted like a joyous boy who had really done something smart.

Miss Malcomb watched Dr. McKim's painful embarrassment with becoming solicitude, waiting to see what his salute to a newly found sister would be.

The doctor knitted his brows and stared at her for several moments. It was becoming somewhat embarrassing, when he extended his hands, saying:

"Yes, I may greet you as my sister. You are the very image of our mother. It was not that which caused me to pause. My surprise rather blunted my thoughts for a few seconds. I have discovered what a double-dyed deceiver this Chester Von Comp is, the jealous, selfish villain," and he held the two hands of the blushing woman firmly in his own and surveyed her admiringly and approvingly.

"Ah, call me any old name you please, you cannot insult me," cried Chester. "I am so much happier than you that I am really sorry for you."

"And this is the Miss Malcomb, eh?" and he looked sharply at Chester. "You think the *ex post facto* permission will stand, do you? Well, it will; but you shall be punished for the surreptitious manner in which it was obtained, and to be quite sure you make my sister a good husband, she shall join me in reforming you."

"It will not be necessary to send him to a reformatory, will it?" asked the new sister.

"Hardly that; but we shall find a way," replied the brother. Then, examining the young lady's hands and fingers, he asked of Chester: "Has your fiancée any frostbitten fingers?" And they knew he had guessed her identity.

The doctor was pleasantly surprised to find a delightful luncheon prepared for three, after which the entire afternoon was spent going over details.

Chester explained minutely all the facts about his discovering her, and the trouble he had had in "bringing her to her senses," as he put it.

He bluntly informed the brother that she barely had sufficient means to maintain herself in much humbler quarters, boldly declaring that he himself had persuaded her to temporarily take this comfortable little apartment, because he wanted them to meet under the most favorable conditions.

He explained about the tag enterprise and expressed his own surprise at its unexpected success. Yet it would be some time before she could depend upon its profits to enable her to live more expensively.

Then they took up the papers bearing upon her case, and Dr. McKim read and studied them carefully.

"There will not be the slightest trouble in establishing your identity," he remarked at the conclusion. "I am surprised to find this story tallies exactly with the most recent facts they have obtained about you. Have you the birthmark, the little red heart, upon your shoulder?"

"Yes," she responded, with a blush.

"Gee!" exclaimed Chester. "I was looking at the wrong place for her heart. I didn't know she wore it on the shoulder—where the Irishman carries a chip. I might have snatched it off like catching a fly on a window-pane."

Paying no attention to Chester's would-be facetiousness, the doctor continued:

"You have nothing more to worry about. You are amply provided for under the terms of our father's will, and fortunately, in anticipation of inaugurating a search for you, I am empowered to supply you with money for your needs. Therefore I shall assume the responsibilities this over-ambitious gentleman is attempting to arrogate to himself," and they both looked at Chester, who had dropped into an attitude of mock dejection.

"I may not have both?" plaintively inquired the fortunate Miss Malcomb, and she looked at Chester with eyes which said, "Weep not." Then rising, she drew them together, placed an arm over the shoulders of each, and said:

"My dear brother, I do not anticipate such a thing; but did a fortune of untold millions await me in England, to obtain which I were required to surrender the love this gentleman has declared for me and renounce the love I bear for him, I would not accept the terms. Let me tell you why. Love may not be purchased with gold, and this man searched me out in direst poverty, and while I yet dwelt in an attic he declared his love for me and offered his hand, his fortune, and his good name;

therefore his love is intrinsic, and to be prized above rubies and diamonds."

She had risen to the dignity of a queen. The tragic manner in which she made this declaration gave to it a meaning not to be misunderstood. She was deeply enthralled and felt secure in her position. Dr. McKim relieved the situation by taking Chester's hand and saying:

"You have done your work well. Take her, my boy. You will always have my blessing, and I shall try to make you a good brother—and, I hope, cousin also," at which last remark the sister looked wisely at Chester.

"Let us now consider some of the serious phases of this matter," said Dr. McKim.

"No matter how sensible a view we may take of these things, we have the opinion of the world to consider. It seems my wise sister has been able to protect her name and identity through all her vicissitudes. I can see no reason why the whole matter may not be regarded as a family skeleton and kept a profound secret. But to do this will involve us in some arduous side play. It is evident that you, Chester, will have to satisfy your aunt that you have made a proper choice in the woman you have selected as a wife. Now I can see but one way out of it. You and I must escort my sister to Hurlstone, and you will be supposed to have met her there; then she can pay a visit to the United States, where you may openly court her as my sister. Your engagement may be properly announced and you may come to England, and Hurlstone will have a wedding.

"But I am selfish; this wedding shall not take place until I have taken unto myself a wife, in order that the Duke and Duchess of Hurlstone may properly look after the young bridal couple.

"I will now announce that I have reasons to think that I may fully declare myself before we make this trip with fair hopes of success.

"For selfish reasons of my own, but with the consent of Mrs. Von Comp, I am endeavoring to win my bride as plain Dr. Paul McKim. Immediately upon my return I shall assume my rightful name and title. Like you, my sister, I am looking for intrinsic love."

These suggestions met with their approval. It was agreed that her present quarters would suffice until a permanent change was made. Chester was to be cautious in making his visits, and Miss Malcomb was to go out as little as possible.

Chester and Paul had formed a habit of dropping in at Mrs. Von Comp's home each afternoon for a cup of tea, whether she were at home or not, this being a part of a plot to give Dr. McKim an opportunity of seeing Eudora. A significant thing soon manifested itself. Eudora began to want to remain at home, whereas she had formerly accompanied her mother.

Paul was evidently making headway rapidly.

Two weeks had passed since the first visit to the sister. It was at the beginning of May. Chester and Paul had dined with Mrs. Von Comp. After dinner Eudora invited the doctor to come into the conservatory and view some rare plants which had just been installed.

They had not been in the conservatory since that fateful night, and as they passed through the door Eudora playfully looked up into his happy face and said:

"You look just as you did that night." Then she blushed deep red.

He looked at her with his smiling eyes, but did not reply. Coming to the seat upon which they had sat that evening, they paused.

"Shall we sit here?" she asked.

"Is it an unlucky seat to-day?" he said.

"I think not," she replied hesitatingly.

"I am not superstitious, Miss Von Comp; I will always be glad to sit or stand anywhere, just so it be near you." And they took the same position they had held that night.

"This has not always been unlucky for you," she murmured. "It was here I overheard the talk of those bad men about you."

"I have never grown tired of thanking you, Miss Von Comp, for your brave act in coming to warn me. I have never quite forgiven myself for having written you that letter, yet had I not done so dire calamity might have befallen me."

"I might have warned you anyway," she said artfully.

"Why, no; you would not have done that, surely," he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, I might," she persisted.

"For what reason?" he asked.

She looked at him, her fluffy head poised like that of a playful kitten, and her beautiful, clear eyes wandering over his face; there was the ring of

genuine innocence in the childish voice as she said:

"Because I liked you and believed you innocent."

Dr. McKim had maintained a friendly, smiling face, believing it would frighten her to appear too serious, and as she made this naïve announcement he said, without undue emotion:

"And do you still like me?"

"Yes," came the prompt answer, and again the sweet face looked up into his own.

"Would you feel very angry with me should I tell you that your coming to warn me had given me cause and excuse for thinking very much of you?" His gentle, hypnotic voice was soothing.

"I don't think so," she replied, but her eyes now sought the floor.

"Miss Eudora," he continued, "if you knew that I had asked your mother's consent to try and win your love, and that she had graciously granted my request, would you then be offended very, very much with me?" His head was bent to look into her face, now all covered with blushes, while the crumpled hair almost concealed it.

"I think not," was her almost inaudible answer.

"Then if I tell you, sweet Eudora, that I do love you, fondly, passionately, and hopelessly; that I have a good name to offer you; that I have a sound heart to give you, and that I would devote my life to making you happy, will you be my little guardian angel all the time? that I may watch over you that no harm may ever befall you, and



“ Yes.”

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that I may ever feel your dear hand leading and guiding me along good paths, and hear your lovely voice encouraging me, and see your sweet, laughing face always before me to fill my heart with love and passion. Lovely little Eudora, I want you to love me. I want you to become my life companion, my sweetheart, my own beloved wife." While speaking he had taken both her hands in his own and she had made no effort to withdraw them. She made no reply at all, but dropped her fluffy head on to his bosom and was very quiet.

He placed his arms about the yielding body and held her as gently as a baby.

She remained in this position for some seconds, then, peeping with one eye cautiously out of the tangle, she whispered:

"Yes."

Dr. McKim put his cheek down upon her soft hair and said:

"You are the dearest, best girl in all the wide world, and you have made me the happiest man," and he gently raised her face and gave her a loving kiss on the lips.

She was like a big rose. Her cheeks were burning, but she laughed and held on to him, even after they arose from the seat. He put both his hands upon her head and gently brushed her hair back into position. Then they returned, like a pair of guilty children, to face Mrs. Von Comp and Chester.

"You bad children, what on earth have you been up to? Eudora, go look at your face! Doctor, you look guilty!" exclaimed Mrs. Von Comp.

Paul was equal to the emergency. Taking Eu-

dora by the hand he said: "We both plead guilty and throw ourselves upon your generous mercy."

Chester, standing behind them, uttered in a deep and tragic voice:

"Bless you, my children; bless you. We forgive you. Go, and henceforth be happy."

Eudora hid her face in Mrs. Von Comp's ample bosom, while that lady alternately laughed and cried.

"I am both glad and sorry," said the good mother. "Glad, because Eudora has found a good mate, and sorry to lose my sweet baby."

"Ha!" exclaimed Chester. "You are much off on your calculations. From what I know of this fellow, you have only adopted another baby."

"Do not take Chester seriously, Mrs. Von Comp," began Paul, when Chester broke in with:

"Say, mama——"

"He is a jester," continued Paul. "I shall not take your sweet baby wholly away from you. It is a well-grounded theory that the love for one object may be enhanced and strengthened by the love for another, especially where affection is reciprocal and harmony exists between the three objects involved. Your lovely daughter will in nowise abandon you. I must thank you with all my heart for the confidence you place in me. I assure you I shall not do aught to ever cause you to think less favorably of me or make you regret having entrusted to me for life your only daughter. I am indeed happy and proud to have both of you trust me, and now that this sweet woman has confessed this confidence in me and is willing to walk by my side for life, it

would be manifestly unfair for me to deceive her in any respect; therefore I have the honor of announcing myself as James Malcomb Hercroft, Duke of Hurlstone House, England. Will you love me less, Eudora?" and he looked earnestly at the startled young lady.

"No," responded the mother for her, "she will love you none the less. Each of you will have more confidence in the other for having made a choice uninfluenced by love-diverting conditions. I leave it to you, Paul, to explain to Eudora the circumstances which have caused you to woo her as Dr. Paul McKim."

That very evening it was arranged that Chester should accompany the Duke to England on a trip to prepare the way for his marriage; the announcement would not be made until they returned.

Before starting upon their trip the Duke sent for Peter Kelly and presented that individual with a proposition which staggered him, the details of which are interesting.

He, Chester, and Peter Kelly were again seated in the library after having partaken of a good dinner.

The Duke opened the question.

"Mr. Kelly, it is my purpose at an early date to reside permanently at Hurlstone. I hope it is not asking too much of you to congratulate me upon my engagement to Miss Eudora Von Comp. The engagement has not been announced, therefore treat with confidence my mentioning it."

Peter Kelly gave a little start, but was earnest in saying that he did most heartily congratulate him.

Continuing, the Duke said:

"I shall wholly disappear as Dr. Paul McKim, whose reputation is very good. It seems a shame to waste a reputation thus, but it cannot be taken with me under the circumstances. I should like to will it to you. You are qualified to sustain it, if you will. Is it offensive for me to suggest that the name and reputation of Dr. Paul McKim may offer a permanent refuge for Peter Kelly, and that in a short time the latter may become wholly submerged in his new identity?"

Chester had not been entrusted with this eccentric notion on the part of his friend, and both he and Peter Kelly were surprised at this generous offer.

"Let me finish," continued the Duke. "I have here a most comfortable and well-equipped establishment. I cannot keep it, neither can I take it with me. I have it under a long lease, and it would be a total loss should I abandon it. I propose that you step in here and take possession, with new servants, for I shall take both Plimpton and Cassello with me, and adopt the name of Dr. Paul McKim. My laboratory, as you know, is complete. There is every comfort in the furnishings of my house; you will have an ample income with which to maintain it, and I shall be pleased to present it to you free and unincumbered for the balance of the leased period, with my best compliments and a prayer that you will respect the good name and reputation which go with it."

"You surely cannot mean this," exclaimed Peter Kelly. "Something I may have done in my past

may rise up to haunt you later should you permit me to take this name."

"I assume all the risks and I assure you of my confidence, otherwise I would not propose it," replied the Duke.

"Your offer is certainly a generous one," said Peter thoughtfully, "and is most tempting. Believe me, I do not hesitate on my own account; that would be absurd. But I must be allowed to think the matter over."

"You will have ample time, for I shall not want to surrender the place until I return from this trip abroad. The announcement of my engagement to Miss Von Comp will be under the name of James Malcomb Hercroft."

"I thank you most heartily," said Peter. "Should I find no obstacle in the way of my doing so I shall doubtless avail myself of your most generous offer, and let the dead past bury itself in forgetfulness." He said this with a sadness most touching.

As they separated, Peter Kelly shook the Duke's hand cordially and said:

"Life looks much brighter to me, thanks to you. I shall endeavor to redeem my wasted career in order to show my deep appreciation of your just, generous, and forgiving conduct toward me."

CHAPTER XVIII

LADY BETTY COMES HOME

THE Duke, Chester, and Miss Malcomb sailed for England, leaving behind them all the dark shadows and some of the sunshine. The Duke was very proud of his little sweetheart and left her with great reluctance. But the pleasure of seeing his newly discovered sister so happy in her love for Chester was a balm for his forlorn heart. He had made a brief statement in advance of their coming, in order that someone might meet them in London.

Upon their arrival in London they went to Claridge's, where they were soon joined by their uncle, Beaufort March. Upon first seeing the new claimant he expressed surprise at her close resemblance to her mother. He admitted there was little doubt about her being the lost daughter when her brother submitted the facts, suppressing of course all reference to her recent unfortunate experiences.

After a few days in London the party journeyed to Hurlstone, where they were greeted by the grandfather in the most happy and cordial spirit.

"James can take care of himself," exclaimed the old gentleman; "give me my dear little Betty again," and to that young lady's surprise he took her in his arms and embraced her with great affection.

She beheld with wondering eyes the grandeur of Hurlstone. It was a revelation to her from the moment they passed beneath the great arched entrance till they drew up at the vine-clad porte cochère of the manor house. Chester was equally surprised.

Hurlstone was in its glory and full bloom. All the great buildings were literally smothered in clinging ivy and rose vines. A wilderness of shrubs and flowers was everywhere, while the well-trimmed and trained box-hedge gave to it the finishing touch.

The old grandfather was as happy as a lover and as spry as a boy, being the first to lift his granddaughter out of the carriage; then standing on the steps of the entrance he kissed her on the cheek, saying:

"We welcome our little Betty home," and the big tears of joy coursed down his ruddy but wrinkled cheeks. The others, too, felt the moisture in their own eyes. As for Betty, she simply broke down and allowed the dear old man to hold her and pat her head while she had a moment's cry.

After all had controlled their feelings, she looked about, and drawing a deep breath, exclaimed:

"How beautiful! How grand!"

They then passed into the house, with its vast hall and high ceilings, so high, Betty said she could not see the frescoing without making a balloon ascension.

After a brief rest the grandfather insisted upon their seeing Betty's wing of the mansion, and the whole party made an inspection of it.

There was a large parlor with Louis XVI fur-

nishings, a music-room equipped with a splendid white and gold Italian harp, a grand piano, flutes, stringed instruments, and in a remote corner an old-time harpsichord, which the old man patted affectionately as he said softly:

“Your mother used to play upon this.”

Now they entered my lady's boudoir, a large room with antique finish and furnishings, very sleepy in its appearance. Off this was the cunningest little French dressing-room, which had been recently remodeled, giving to it an air of “just having moved in”—a sort of butterfly cage. Adjoining this room was a commodious gymnasium, beautifully fitted up, while on one whole side an arrangement of glass, forming a half conservatory, half lounging place, made of this room an excellent sun parlor. In the center of it was a large, white marble Roman bath; then followed a guest's bedchamber, maids' rooms, and many convenient nooks and corners. Along the entire outer wall of the wing extended a broad gallery, splendidly draped and garlanded with ivy, rose vines, and honeysuckle, and flooded with sunshine.

With many exclamations and expressions of surprise and pleasure they viewed the perfect nest belonging to the homecoming daughter of Hurlstone.

“Now, Betty, you must return the compliment and visit that wing of the mansion which belongs to your brother James,” and they passed through a wide corridor which united the two wings of the main building. This corridor was also a sort of picture gallery and museum, its walls being literally covered with the quaintest lot of antique trappings

they had ever seen, the ancestral trophies of travel and battle.

"These things were gathered from all parts of the world by your ancestors," explained the grandfather. "Some of these Japanese and Chinese paintings are worth their weight in gold. This ancient casque is worth its weight in gold, because it is made of solid gold," and he tapped the helmet with his knuckles.

The Duke's side of the mansion was heavily and richly furnished, giving it the appearance of age and dignity; in fact, it was gloomy.

"You will doubtless wish to modernize your wing of the mansion," suggested the grandfather to the Duke.

"It shall remain exactly as it is," replied the Duke.

Thus they took a hasty glance at the great house before settling down for their temporary stay. The servants seemed much elated with the prospects of having the great house opened and the gloom dispelled therefrom.

Most of them had been there all their lives and they had never seen much life and activity about the place. A careful but diplomatic canvass revealed that both the young Duke and his sister were viewed with favor by the critical servants.

A few of the older and ruling spirits of the tenantry, together with the foremen of the estate, were called to a conference, to meet the new Duke, and it was understood that a great day of celebration should be arranged for a later period. When the Duke should return with a bride the whole tenantry

would meet both the Duke and the Duchess of Hurlstone, as well as the returned Betty, who, it was clear, would become the pet of the manor, in spite of the new Duchess. They did not know at this time that it would be a very happy family arrangement which would rule the social affairs of Hurlstone.

The stay at Hurlstone was three weeks. More than a whole month had been swallowed by this trip. Each day the Duke posted a passionate letter to his sweet Eudora, and evidently that young lady appreciated them, judging by the number of letters he received from her.

One day the Duke, Chester, and the grandfather held a strange conference. It was explained to the good old man that it was essential for Betty to return with them to America, but only for a few weeks, when she would return to him for good. It was also explained to him that Chester had met, loved, and become engaged to Betty before either of them knew who she really was, and that Betty would soon become his wife. Betty had been poor, while Chester was rich, and it was now essential to clear the way for presenting her to Mrs. Von Comp and the future Duchess, and they had considered it best to establish her as the Duke's sister before doing so, in order to leave no question to embarrass her in the future.

The old man seemed to be appeased and convinced by their arguments and finally consented. Accordingly a cablegram went to Mrs. Von Comp, saying that the Duke's sister, Lady Elizabeth Malcomb Hercroft, would accompany them on their

return and pay a brief visit to the United States. A letter followed requesting his aunt to go to the Waldorf-Astoria, select and reserve for them a suite of rooms, and a week later they sailed for New York.

Upon their arrival they were properly heralded by all the sensational newspapers. The Duke was duly hounded, insulted, and annoyed by the newspaper reporters, three pictures of him being published, none of which was made from a sketch or photograph of himself, and resembling him about as much as they did Buck Finnerty.

Betty was at once taken in hand by Mrs. Von Comp and Eudora, who fell in love with their prospective relative.

In spite of their pleadings she compelled them to refrain from arranging social functions in her honor.

"I may probably never see these New York people again," she said, "therefore let us not waste our precious time in these things. I know you do not want me to show myself to your friends simply to appease their curiosity, Mrs. Von Comp. They may see our pictures and read about us in the sensational newspapers; that will be sufficient," at all of which that fashionable dame was amazed and shocked.

However, Betty won out, and only a limited few of Mrs. Von Comp's friends were permitted to meet her, for which she was soundly scored, *sub rosa*, as a "stingy old thing."

Soon after their return to New York the engagement of Miss Eudora Von Comp to the Duke of

Hurlstone was announced, and in the same announcement it was plainly intimated that Mr. Chester Von Comp could save valuable time by telling the world that he was practically engaged to the Duke's charming sister, Lady Elizabeth Malcomb Hercroft, one of the most beautiful women in all England.

The pictures of all concerned were printed, with columns of stuff, in the Sunday issues of the leading newspapers.

The next day after the announcement, at eleven o'clock, there appeared at the Waldorf a sort of human strawberry. His head was as red as his fiery-hued tie. He wore a new brown derby and a bright new pair of tan shoes. The stripes in the bosom of his shirt looked like the slats on a Coney Island bathhouse.

Stepping boldly up to the desk, he said:

"I wishes to pay me respects to a ledly w'at is stoppin' here."

"Yes; what is her name?" asked the amused clerk.

"Lady Eliz'beth Malcum Hercoff," was his prompt reply.

"Have you a card to send up?" asked the now thoroughly interested clerk.

"Nope; jes' say Mr. Finnerty," and Buck pushed out his chest.

"Just write your name on this card," said the clerk.

Buck hesitated, fumbled about in his pocket, then shoving it back to the clerk, said:

"Say, I don't need no card, but ef yez tink's I

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“I jes’ read de flamin’ advertisement.”

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better sen' me name plate up, yous write it fur me, see? Jes' write Mr. Buck Finnerty."

The clerk wrote the name, then asked:

"Does this lady know you?"

"Do she knows me? What you t'ink I am—batty? I jes' guess she do knows me; I ain't tryin' to burg'l'rize no rooms in de Waldorf."

The astonished clerk sent the card up with a feeling that a blast of frigid coolness might put a fringe of icicles on the front of his desk in about ten minutes. But to his great surprise word came back:

"Show the gentleman up to the reception room of the Hercroft suite."

Buck gave the clerk a scornful look and followed the page, who had been instructed to go up with him.

The page reported that upon rapping at the door Lady Hercroft herself had opened it, and seeing the "bunch of firecrackers" said:

"Why, Buck, come in. I'm awfully glad to see you," and she drew him in and closed the door.

Buck's visit and what took place must be recorded.

"I jes' read de flamin' advertisement in de Sunday poipers, an' to't I'd pay my respects to yous afore yous skipped de tra-la-loo, see?" was his greeting, and he stood with folded arms, and a sorrowful look upon his comical face.

"Why, I'm glad you were so thoughtful, Buck," was Lady Hercroft's reply. "You know, I have been away to England, and have just returned."

"What! yous been away already? S'pose 'Mr.

Brown' wus wid yous—eh? Wus he in Inglin', too?"

"Yes, Mr. Von Comp, you mean, went over with brother and me."

"Brudder—whose brudder? Didn't know yous had a brudder till I reads it in de poiper, ur I heard it read," said Buck doggedly. He was boiling, because of his belief that he was about to be lost in the shuffle of rapidly shifting events. He might have the body of a Shetland pony, but within his bosom throbbed and bubbled a heart big enough for a Percheron. He could form no definite plan of action, but decided to call and shape himself according to the treatment he received. He was surprised and upset that Lady Hercroft had not changed in the slightest degree in her manners, notwithstanding the vast difference in her surroundings. She had greeted her old friend with the same sweet, gentle smile as of yore. She might have been in the old attic room so far as her actions were concerned.

This unexpected greeting threw the bristling Buck wholly out of gear, and his big eyes now roamed about the room with its rich furnishings. The great contrast must have appealed to his comical side, for after taking in everything in the room he looked at her and grinned in the most knowing manner, and paying no attention to what the lady was saying, he suddenly leaned over and said in a stage whisper:

"Say, yous mus' have mor'n one machine at work in de back room to keep dis game a-goin'."

Lady Hercroft flushed at this, and he was quick to see that his rude reference to her former mode

of life had hurt, if not offended, his one-time charge and friend.

"Yous mustn't care fur what I says, mum; yous kin tell I'd cut off bot' me two han's to please you. Don't yous know dat? Don't yous see wats makin' me daffy? T'ink about it; we wuz happy when yous wuz up dere wid jan., an' den dis rich chap 'e comes along and swipes de whole t'ing, sliden' me right out'n frum under meself. See? I wuz dat happy I wuz al'lus whistlin' an' a-singin'; den he takes yous away from me, an' now narry a pucker kin I make, an' I don't sleep, nudder. I don't keer no more w'at 'appens. I t'inks sometimes I'll jes' jump off de eart' an' end it all."

He had delivered himself of this passionate harangue in a tone of utter abandonment, and with an air of dejection really pitiful.

All human hearts are of the same tissue in matters of love. Buck's heart was breaking, notwithstanding he was shooting at the stars.

"Why, Buck, you surprise me. Here I thought you were so happy and so glad of my good fortune, and instead of that you are scolding me and making me most miserable by telling me that you are not. Aren't you pleased with being set up in business, so you may become an important man, of whom your friends may be proud?" and Lady Hercroft looked appealingly at the dejected heap of smoldering fire.

"Oh, to 'ell wid de business!" he ejaculated vehemently, as he aroused himself. "'Taint de work ye do er de money ye make; it's de one ye does it fur dat makes ye feel good." Then observing Lady

Hercroft's surprise, he stopped, stared for a moment, then exclaimed:

"'Scuse me, mum, please 'scuse me; I's shorly goin' nilly to talk like dis tu yous. Don't min' me; I's glad yous done well, 'onest to Gawd; I'd rudder die dis minet den wish yous anyt'ing but de best uf ever't'ing. Don't yous b'lieve me?"

"Why, of course I believe you, Buck; I know you would do anything in your power for me, but you must feel different about the changes in my fortune. You see, I now have new responsibilities which wholly alter my mode of life, and I must think of other people's opinions in what I do. I want you to remain one of my good friends, one on whom I know I may depend should I need your help at any time. But, you see, I will be traveling about over the world, which will prevent your seeing me often; but that need not cause us to forget our very happy, as well as sad, days in the sky parlor. Of course, you know, as well as I, that we must keep this as our secret, for I should not like to have it known to the new people whom I must meet. While you know I am not vain, I am proud. You approve of that, don't you?"

"Yep, I knows dat. I knows all about dat four hund'ed bunch. Dey will mob de place tu see a real live jook an' his lady sister. But, say, we's kin guv 'em de merry gurgle—eh? In course I knows dey mustn't fin' out dat I d'skuvered ye, busted, kerplunk, wid de fever, and bitin' at the provision advertisements in de papers on de attic wall; an' how jan. an' me fixed up de gag about lookin' fur Miss Smith ter git tu yez wid de stuff. Didn't

we do it fine? An' wouldn't dei'r eyes bug out of dey only knowed? Golly! it's like a hank o' yaller yarn, an' 'ud make de curtin chase up an' down on de stage, till yous couldn't read de advertisin' signs." And his big eyes were merry with the mental picture of Lady Hercroft's society friends staring at a story of her former poverty.

"There now, Buck; let us talk about more important things and forget as soon as possible these dreadful memories," began Lady Hercroft.

"No, yous dead wrong; yous kin furgit, I doesn't wan' to. Dem wus de happiest days o' me life. Does ye wants me to furgit dat, too?" and Buck looked keenly up into her face. His was a loyal heart. He had been satisfied to love and serve her. His ambition rose to no greater height. To him she was as a goddess, wholly beyond his reach, but in whose effulgence he could bask in ecstasy. It was the sharp realization of being wholly and forever deprived of this one bit of sunshine, which for a brief spell had been his alone, that now rent his soul and made his eyes weep bitter tears of disappointment. All human beings are alike in this respect. Buck was only human, very human.

"If the man I love proves to have as loyal a heart I may look forward to a happy life," thought Lady Hercroft.

"No, Buck," she said, "I do not want you to forget that. Let it ever remain a bright spot in your memory. But forget who Miss Malcomb was; she has gone, we shall both remember her—you with pleasure, and I with pain. She will not forget your kindness to her, and knowing you as I

do I feel certain you would bite your tongue off before you would purposely utter that which might cause her pain or embarrassment.

"I will tell you how you may make me remember you. Try to become a big, prosperous business man. I will keep watch of you when you least expect it. I shall know just what you are doing, and it may not be so very long when you may see me again, and then you will feel happier than ever, when you see how happy I am, for I am going to be very happy. While the Duke of Hurlstone is my good brother, it is my dear old grandfather I must cheer and love now. He is eighty-three years old, Buck. Just think of our talking about being hurt and unhappy at our age, with this dear old man left almost alone, all these years, with riches all around him and no one to love."

"Gee! dat is tough," was the eloquent response.

"I expect Mr. Von Comp and my brother to come here at any moment; I am glad you called, Buck, for I am anxious to have you meet my brother. You will find him a splendid gentleman, a man you will like as much as you do Mr. Von Comp."

"Dey tells me yous goin' to marry dis Mr. Von Comp; is dat so?" he asked. It was difficult to draw his mind away from the main point.

"That's a secret," responded Lady Hercroft.

"Oh, I knows all about it. He jes' as good as tol' me so," said Buck.

"Did he? Why, you surprise me. No one knows a thing about it but ourselves. I am glad to see that he, too, trusts you, Buck. You know

these things are kept very secret until a public announcement can be made. You will remember this, of course."

"Sure, Mike," he said. He had calmed down considerably and was entering into the spirit of Lady Hercroft's views and interests. He had lost sight of the rich furnishings and was again basking in the attic, and in the soft sunshine of Miss Malcomb's sweet, gentle nature.

She had brought him down out of the clouds when the Duke, accompanied by Chester, arrived. Both she and Chester had told him all about Buck, and he knew pretty well how to take him.

Lady Hercroft said: "Brother, I want to introduce to you one of my good friends, Mr. Buck Finnerty; and don't forget, he is always plain Buck to us. Buck, my brother, the Duke of Hurlstone." This rough little human nut was not made of bashful material. Sticking out his chubby fist, he cordially shook the Duke's hand and asked:

"W'at does I call 'im, 'is Grace, like we does in de play, or jes plain jook?"

They all laughed, and before Lady Hercroft could reply the Duke said:

"Buck, they have told me of the intimate relations existing between you three, and what a good fellow you have been, therefore I am not going to give you the opportunity of saying I am not an equally good chap myself, so you just call me plain Duke, and I will call you plain Buck; how does that strike you?"

"Say, shake; yous a trump all right, all right. Dey doesn't git jooks like yous over here often."

Then they all sat down to talk over important matters.

This appearance of Buck was really a serious matter. Should an inkling of Lady Hercroft's former plight become known to the public it would be ruinous, for the savage American newspapers would make it most embarrassing for all of them. They recognized this and cautiously endeavored to seal Buck's lips by first going into matters pertaining to the tag business, in order to impress him with their confidence.

Chester assured the Duke that he could, in a short time, prepare Buck for the management of the rapidly growing business. He had just been informed by his patent attorneys that patents would be granted for the stringing machinery in all the leading countries, and that branches of the business could be started elsewhere. With a trusted man like Buck to look after these matters the business could be run without their being identified with it. Then they discussed Buck's education, finally deciding that he must take up studies to prepare him for a course in a business college, the business to pay the expenses of this training. To all of this Buck acquiesced, feeling certain he was in the hands of friends.

"You see," said Chester to the Duke, "Buck and I have a secret in common which we guard jealously, that no pain or embarrassment may ever come to our Betty. Buck knew her plight while she was poor and sick and searching for you, and he stood by her like the little man he is. He knows how important it is for this to remain a secret, and

I am sure no living soul can make him give it up; therefore, my dear Duke, you may place the same confidence in him that we do. Isn't that so, Buck?"

"Yous is guessin' right; I knows who's me frien's. I 'udn't give Miss Malcomb away, not ef dey hanged me fur not doin' it," was the loyal little lad's emphatic reply.

With the assurance that he should call again before Lady Hercroft returned to England, Buck went away in quite a happy and satisfied state of mind.

The weeks passed rapidly by, and just before Lady Hercroft sailed, the announcement of her engagement to Chester Von Comp was made.

CHAPTER XIX

EUDORA BECOMES DUCHESS OF HURLSTONE

It had ceased to be "Dr. McKim," and "Paul," but the Duke declared he would not avail himself of his title until his Duchess could share it with him.

At his request he was now called James, and he was a most welcome and frequent visitor at the Von Comp home, where, with cozy evenings, drives and luncheons, the lovers found much time to plan their future.

At the urgent solicitation of the Duke the wedding was set for the first week in September, in order to make their homecoming correspond with the annual harvest feast of the Hurlstone tenantry.

The wedding of Chester and Betty was to take place at Hurlstone House on this eventful day, in order to make the three events one great annual fixture.

With her excellent and well-trained maid, Betty sailed for Liverpool, where she was met by her uncle, Beaufort March, and during the weeks of preparing for the homecoming of the Duke and his bride, which also meant the coming of her own lover, she was supremely happy. To the very old tenants and servants she was Duchess Betty returned to them.

These were sweet days amid the wild roses and the red clover blossoms of the beautiful fields. Grandfather March took up life again where he had laid down its joys many years ago. Gentle Betty was a new joy and a source of great comfort for his declining years. He wholly took possession of her, and together they searched every nook and corner of the great estate. They searched out places in the hunting forests where the rarest wild flowers bloomed, and often came back laden with sweet-william and bluebell blossoms, which grew in greatest abundance. These were happy days, because they were days of preparation for still greater happiness. After many weary, gloomy years the sun rose on Hurlstone's new morn with a promise that rippling laughter and robust living would take the place of an aimless, drifting, lifeless existence.

It was a proud day, too, for Grandfather March when he beheld two green branches spring out of the dead tree of Hurlstone to blossom and renew the stock, for it securely established his blood in the possession of the vast estate which he had so long and faithfully fostered. It was dearer to him, from his actual contact with it, than it was to anyone else. It was through his efforts and labor that the estate had attained its great prosperity and beauty.

There would be no jealousies; it was large enough for all, and social ambition would have little to do with the life there.

It was thought better to have Betty remain at Hurlstone and not attend the wedding, for which

plausible and satisfactory excuses were made. Moreover, a long and earnest conference was held between Mrs. Von Comp, the Duke, Eudora, and Chester, and it was decided to have a strictly private wedding, no matter what criticisms might follow. Mrs. Von Comp had previously been made aware of the tragic story of Hurlstone. They did not want the notoriety which would result in starting the ruthless publicity of the pink and yellow sheets. Their future happiness and welfare needed no promotion by this process. They knew that in England, where they would reside, such notoriety as is usually exploited by the sensational American newspapers was most distasteful to the best and most desirable social class, and its absence at this wedding, when both the contracting parties were immensely wealthy, would be favorably commented upon by those in England whom they would most desire to please.

The fourth of September was the wedding day. They drove to the rectory and were married. But one stranger was permitted to be present. He was a well-groomed man with smooth face and gold eyeglasses. It was Dr. Paul McKim, as unlike Peter Kelly as it was possible for another man to be. The removal of the beard and the addition of the eyeglasses made a perfect and genteel disguise. The Duke alone understood the significance of this change, and he cordially thanked Peter for his thoughtfulness when that sad-hearted man stepped forward and offered his congratulations. It was a compliment for him to be the only witness to the wedding outside of the family.

The Duke and Duchess, accompanied by Mrs. Von Comp and Chester, sailed the next morning for Liverpool. In London they were met only by Beaufort March.

Remaining in London a few days, they fully prepared for the rare treat which awaited them at Hurlstone. This included the gathering together of certain friends who would accompany them home.

On the evening of September the twentieth, at five o'clock, the Duke and Duchess of Hurlstone passed beneath the great arched entrance to their vast estate. It needed no garlanding, because it was naturally one of the most beautiful and picturesque gateways in England, being one mass of English ivy and climbing rose vines.

Gayly decorated coaches were at the small station to meet the Duke and his party, with the several invited guests from London. They drove smartly up to the gates, where they met with a surprise.

Confronting them, directly beneath the arch, were four huge horsemen, caparisoned in medieval armor and carrying great pikes having long, jagged spearheads at the end. These warlike specters, as one man, lowered and presented their pikes at a charge as the first coach arrived. The drive had been so arranged that the approaching coaches formed a crescent, fronting the gates, so that the surprise would greet the whole party.

One of the guards raised a crooked cow's horn and sounded a blast which brought an old man in a long black robe, guarded by six stalwart young men clad in bright chain armor and wearing polished

gold casques with visors raised. They carried short, heavy swords and shields of polished steel.

Approaching the leading coach, which contained the Duke and Duchess, Mrs. Von Comp, Chester, Beaufort March, and four guests, the old man said:

"Who comes there?"

Beaufort March, who had a front seat on top of the coach, stood up and responded:

"The Duke of Hurlstone comes and brings with him his Duchess and his friends. He demands a proper recognition and reception."

"There has been no Duke of Hurlstone for these twenty years past," came the ominous reply. "What credentials does he bring to prove to us that he is what he claims?"

"An unsullied name, a good spirit, and a sound heart: a just mind and a conscientious desire to be respected and loved by his people," was Mr. March's prompt response.

"If a man be found with these qualifications, and the legal evidence that he belongs here and is the Duke of these broad acres, two thousand loyal people are within these walls waiting to welcome him, his Duchess, and his friends. Let him enter and present to the stewards of Hurlstone these credentials," and the old man passed back through the gates, the horsemen divided, two taking a position on either side of the entrance, and the coaches were permitted to enter.

Between two lines of powerful men clad in medieval armor, with helmets and spears, the coaches drew up, two abreast.

Seated upon a beautifully garlanded and draped platform was a ruddy old man and a beautiful woman. They were seated in richly upholstered chairs, covered with flowing draperies of scarlet and gold velvet. The old man carried an ermine-trimmed mantle of the same color upon his arm, but was otherwise, as was also the woman, clad in white.

As the coach bearing the Duke and the Duchess approached the dais, the old man arose. The Duke was bidden to alight and approach. At the foot of the platform he and Beaufort March were stopped by two other old men, who parleyed with them for a few moments, when one of them in a loud voice exclaimed: "You must bring your rarest jewel as a deposit and guarantee of good faith." At once Beaufort March brought from the coach Eudora, and presented her.

Evidently a new line was brought into the smoothly working drama when the Duke suddenly and wholly unexpectedly exclaimed in a voice to be heard by all those gathered around:

"What! pawn my Duchess? Not to gain all the riches of England would I do this."

A loud applause went up, and the Duchess was permitted to step upon the platform, where she was greeted by the elder March and Betty with great affection.

One of the elders standing below was profusely acknowledging an introduction to Mrs. Von Comp, whom Beaufort March next brought from the coach.

He turned and announced to those on the plat-

form that as the mother of the Duchess was there, perhaps the Duke would be willing to place her in pawn.

"Not for a kingdom," defiantly shouted the Duke.

"Ha! listen, ye people of Hurlstone: a new trait is found in your Duke. He will not pawn his mother-in-law," and, like Eudora, Mrs. Von Comp was greeted profusely.

"Is there any other relative in your suite whom you might care to place in trust with us?"

"Here!" shouted Beaufort March, and he and another brought Chester Von Comp to the foot of the judgment seat.

At the sight of this the Duke laughed, and shouted:

"Ha, ha! our cousin; yes, bring forth our cousin; we will offer him as a pawn." Then amidst shouts, groans, and clapping of hands Lady Elizabeth bound him with the silken draperies.

Some minutes now followed in welcome and happy greeting; then Grandfather March commanded silence. All told, there were two thousand souls present, most of these being the strong, fine, clean-cut yeomanry of Hurlstone, a physical vindication of the Duke who established them.

In the remaining coaches were some of the smartest people in England, who had always been invited to spend the week of harvest festival, but upon this occasion to participate in triple festivities. They were enjoying this treat immensely. The mock trial of the new homecoming Duke was much to their liking, while it furnished for the glad-hearted

tenantry of Hurlstone a cause for wild enthusiasm in the greeting of their master.

As the old gray-haired grandfather now commanded silence all ears were expectantly strained to catch his words. The platform had been admirably placed to enable all to see and hear the sport. The speaker said:

"Listen, ye relatives and ye friends of the Duke, and ye tenantry of Hurlstone Manor: I present to you him who will henceforth rule this great estate. He has duly presented his credentials and we have found but one flaw in him. He has, in the most heartless manner, pawned his cousin-in-law, and I am informed on good authority that he does not intend to redeem him, therefore my Lady Elizabeth, the Duke's sister, bids me announce that she will take him to raise, and she declares she will wed him to-morrow at high noon in the great oak grove where we hold our annual harvest festival. Ye are invited and bidden to be present and witness this ceremony. On this occasion we shall combine three festivities; to honor the permanent homecoming of our beloved Duke and Duchess; to celebrate the marriage of our dear Betty to Mr. Chester Von Comp, cousin of the Duchess, and to rejoice and give thanks for the abundant crops of the season. This triple event shall become a permanent fixture as our annual festival.

"I now place upon the shoulders of the Duke the mantle of his forefathers," and he placed upon him the scarlet robe.

At the conclusion all joined in a happy chorus of applause.

After a few minutes spent in greeting the visitors, who had remained in the coaches, a procession was quickly formed, one of the most picturesque any of them had ever seen.

The four giant horsemen, with crooked cow's-horns for trumpets, headed the parade. Then followed the men in armor, and a splendid London band of music. After which came a large flower-laden float, containing twenty pink-faced young maidens in white, and literally covered with gay blossoms brought by the peasantry. These they cast in the road behind them, making a flowery way for their Duke and Duchess. Following came the coaches, two abreast, headed by a large open victoria, in which had been placed the Duke, the Duchess, and the grandfather, Betty having joined Mrs. Von Comp and Chester.

Two thousand people then fell in line and the march to Hurlstone House was begun as the sun sank to rest in a sky which promised a bright morrow.

The long mile of arched oaks had been beautifully festooned for the occasion, and this homecoming of the Duke with his lovely bride was the most impressive thing anyone there had ever seen.

At the portal of Hurlstone House some two-score white-haired men and women stood, with immense standards constructed of the agricultural products of the estate; these were to be used in the festivities of the morrow.

As the Duke and Duchess alighted these standards were arched above them, and followed by the

visiting party they entered the halls which they themselves were to make famous for hospitality in after years.

That evening was the beginning of the week's festivities, and the treasure chests were opened for the occasion. From the nature of many of the rare things displayed, it was no idle dream that the early dukes had been practically accused of piracy. They must have stolen from kings, too. Strewn about over the house was the armor worn by the ancient dukes' own followers. The armor worn by the four giant horsemen belonged to the first and second dukes and to two of the second duke's bodyguard.

It is interesting to describe Eudora's sensations at this time.

The Duke had won her love as Dr. Paul McKim. He had found a plausible reason for later telling her his true name, but by an understanding with Chester, both Mrs. Von Comp and Eudora had been kept ignorant of the magnitude of his estate. The mother, though, was sufficiently aware of his identity to avoid embarrassing situations.

The first great surprise to Eudora was an actual wedding gift of one million dollars, for it was her understanding that her husband was comparatively a poor man.

They were kept in total ignorance of what was to take place at Hurlstone. All of to-day's ceremony was new and strange to them, and their hearts were so overwrought that both had to indulge in tears the moment they were alone. They were tears of joy, however, for the days of uncertainty were over. Eudora was a Duchess and Chester was delight-

fully mated. Surely this was the beginning of two great houses.

There were no sluggards at Hurlstone House. One of the rules of the estate was that the tenantry should begin work at the break of day and rest at noontime till the heat of midday had subsided. As a good example, the breakfast hour at the Manor House was eight o'clock.

As the following day was to be an arduous one, all Hurlstone was astir with the third cock's crow. The horses and cattle had to be curried and dressed for the exhibition parade. The fat pigs must be put through their steps. The sheep, goats, and fowl must be gotten ready for the great contest. There was a merit and premium system in vogue among the tenantry which caused great rivalry, and this competition was the means of producing extraordinary results in every article produced on the estate.

The premiums offered by the estate were of great value, running into many hundreds of pounds annually. This system had produced unheard-of yields, increasing the income of the estate enormously.

Near the Manor House was a great oak grove where each year the harvest festival was held. It had long been a custom to invite a house party of smart English people to spend a week at Hurlstone and participate in this annual festival. These people were to become the first friends of the new Duke and Duchess. They were themselves rich and influential, though seldom spoken of as ultra-fashionable. Many of these families were hundreds of

years old, and none could participate in their pleasures but those of their own class.

Mrs. Von Comp was one of the strongest and oldest society leaders of New York. Her fame was spread over the world where the so-called smart society held sway, but none of these English people had ever heard of her. Wealth with them had to be well tarnished by age before it was taken as an evidence of social rank.

In this instance it was sufficient that the daughter of Mrs. Von Comp was the wife of the possessor of one of the largest and oldest landed estates in England. Moreover, they found this good mother a most estimable and well-bred person, whom one could love and respect for her own personality. She was a woman of extraordinary powers and broad experience, which gave her a certain advantage over these conservative people. While she was by no means aggressive, still she needed neither censor nor guide, no matter how new to her the surroundings might be. Eudora, too, was splendidly trained for her new position, although quite youthful. Her age and gentle manners made it almost certain she would be much petted and flattered, yet her good sense and proper training would prevent this spoiling her.

It was a pleasing thing for both the Duke and the grandfather to see these good English people quickly and surely make friends with the women who would henceforth dominate the social affairs of their long dormant establishment. This first night was the crucial test, and it proved a great success.

The young Duke and his Duchess presided over the social affairs of Hurlstone that night with a grace and polish new to these staid old English folk, and the whisperings and head-noddings boded only good opinions.

Chester and his lovely bride-to-be came in for a share of the favorable criticism, too; but that enthralled pair cared little just then what other people were thinking about them. They were thoroughly in love and enraptured with each other.

In the oldest wing of the great mansion was the original oak hall in which King George had been entertained by the early dukes. It was a picturesque room of immense proportions, constructed of heavy, hand-hewn oak beams and timbers, colored only by age. In two sides were vast fireplaces with huge wrought-iron fixtures, including the cranes upon which were roasted the meats with which the gluttons of that period gorged themselves, washing it down with oceans of musty ale.

Much of the armor worn by the men in the procession had been taken from this room, but as all the events of the following day were to represent peaceful pursuits, these ancient accouterments had been restored to their proper places to decorate this oaken hall. This state reception room, as it was usually called, was lighted by immense swinging iron lamps suspended to the beams above by heavy chains.

A circular table accommodated two score persons that night, and for the first time the Duke did the honors.

In his address of welcome he said:

“In taking our position as host and hostess of Hurlstone House, my beloved Duchess and I, after bidding a hearty welcome to our friends, feel constrained to express our gratitude and pleasure that our first greeting is extended practically to all those who are most endeared to us by close family ties and friendship, and who, in future, will constitute our family and social circle. We feel more than grateful that your gracious presence has helped to make our homecoming so delightful. It will endear to us these friends who are gathered with us to-night, and make us feel that they are a part of the ties which will bind us closely at home in future. Our world here will be amply large and our friendships will insure a sweet and wholesome association untainted by worldly temptations and the dissipations and strifes of modern social customs of ultra city life.

“Hurlstone shall be a haven, to which those of our friends who are not equally blessed may flee from cares and social worries; to breathe God’s free air and bask in the pristine sunshine, and help us to appreciate the beauties and blessings of this free and bounteous life.

“On the morrow we shall establish, as a fixed annual festival, the ‘Hurlstone festal week,’ and henceforth this shall be a time of reunion and rejoicing. All those who partake of this, our first annual dinner, to-night, shall be known as the founders of this annual function, and future events will not be considered wholly successful without their presence and participation.

“And now we most truthfully acknowledge eter-

nal gratitude toward this grand, good man, our grandfather, who has proven himself such a faithful guardian and steward over Hurlstone, while patiently waiting the return of those over whom a just and beneficent God has kept a safe watch in other parts of the world, for the purpose, perhaps, of beginning anew the lines which must perpetuate this home of thousands of good, sturdy people. Believing this, I shall dedicate my life toward perfecting and transmitting to others the system which has developed here a worthy institution. It is much more than my ancestral gift of a rich estate. I feel that my soul is more enriched than my person, and upon my conduct in the administration of the affairs of Hurlstone depends the happiness and welfare of all those who have spent their lives in cultivating and beautifying this garden spot. I have received it as a trust, wisely established by my ancestors and wisely fostered and administered by a noble and generous steward. May the sun of righteousness never cease to shine upon this institution, and the God of peace, plenty, and pleasure bless us and all who partake of our life and festivities."

This address by the new Duke was listened to earnestly by all present, and as he finished they arose as one person:

"Long live the Duke of Hurlstone!" and toast followed toast, wishing all sorts of pleasure and happiness to the Duke and his household.

CHAPTER XX

HURLSTONE HARVEST FESTIVAL

OWING to the events, of so much importance to the people of Hurlstone, the preparations for the annual harvest festival were on a much grander scale than ever before. These festivities had always been, and would continue to be, a function wholly belonging to the tenantry. It had been customary for a standing committee of fifty leading tenants to look after the details of these yearly affairs, but Beaufort March was permanent chairman, and his acting steward the secretary of this committee. These two, with six foremen, were the judges of all the contests.

The perfectly friendly though earnest rivalry created by this competitive system was one of the richest assets of the estate, giving its products the preference over all others in the London markets, and at fancy prices.

The whole estate was in a hubbub at this time. The real master of Hurlstone was about to be introduced, and it was essential that each one appear at his best. For several days unusual care had been exercised by those in charge of the preparations for the great show, and it was with genuine joy and satisfaction that the final inspection, on the evening and morning before the opening, revealed a

perfect exposition of the estate's products, beautifully grouped, classified and displayed.

This annual inspection of the Hurlstone tenantry was no sham. The Duke who measured and distributed the use of his lands in a manner to develop a strong yeomanry, builded better than he knew. While the lands could no longer be apportioned in the ancient manner, nevertheless the same standard of physical strength remained, and each year the original one-pound stone was exhibited, with a number of others to be used in a throwing contest for prizes offered by the estate.

A system of handicapping had brought the contest up to a scientific game of strength and skill, and this was one of the most exciting events of the "fest," being not unlike the contests of ancient Greece.

As early as four o'clock in the morning the first blast of the horn was heard, its mellow voice seeming to say: "Arouse, ye sluggards, 'tis break of day!"

At six they began to come. Horses were neighing, cattle were lowing, fat pigs were grunting and squealing; geese were gabbling, cocks crowing, and a multitude of other sounds mingled with the allportentous six-o'clock horn which notified the master of Hurlstone that it was high time he himself was shaking off dull slumber. His whole tenantry would soon be clamoring at his chamber door for him to come forth and inspect their handiwork.

Beneath the wide-spreading boughs of a hundred or more ponderous oaks was a well-protected festival ground. Ordinarily it was simply a portion

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of the wooded park about the Manor House, but now it was an immense bower of beauty. At its outer extremities were erected temporary quarters for the live-stock exhibit, and here were the beautiful animals of every description which were entered for the prizes.

They seemed as sweetly and cleanly housed as the guests of Hurlstone. The odor of the fresh, bright straw, hay, and clover was as perfume in the nostrils of the visitors. The grooms were sturdy, rosy-cheeked, clean-eyed men, bespeaking the sobriety and good morals of the community.

In a great semicircle within the shaded environments were erected booths for the exhibit of products of every possible description, from marrow-fat peas to mammoth pumpkins. There were fruits and vegetables in bewildering variety, their display being enhanced by the pretty decorations of the booths and the handsome, rosy maidens who presided over them. Everything was as free as water, and an inspection of the booth included a taste of anything but rosy lips—these were forbidden fruits, even to the master of Hurlstone.

In the midst of the grove a temporary reviewing stand was erected, large enough to accommodate the master, his household and visitors, which included the important neighbors for many miles around. Radiating from this center, like so many spokes from the hub of a great wheel, were tables, with benches to seat more than two thousand people. These tables were clad in snowy white, and decorated with flowers of every conceivable variety which bloomed at that season of the year. The

flowers were furnished by the tenantry, as were the breads, pastries, preserves, pickles, eggs, milk, butter, cheese, and fowl, of which there was a profuse abundance.

Out beyond these tables were carefully guarded pits, from which were wafted certain savory odors which smacked strongly of well-barbecued beeves, muttons, and pigs, with which to feast the throng.

A limited quantity of ale and cider, and much lemonade, were allowed on these occasions.

The estate supplied all the meats and beverages, and also one specialty which was probably the most interesting feature of the great feast—the “Hurlstone Ball.” With an ample portion of ice cream, each man, woman, and child was given one “Hurlstone Ball,” a sort of sponge cake, of the exact form and size of the original stone used as a land measure. In each of these cakes was a piece of money, ranging in value from a shilling to a sovereign. The distribution and breaking open of these cakes was the most hilarious and exciting episode of the feast, causing much merriment and more noise.

At the hour of ten o'clock all the household was gathered in the great oak hall awaiting orders. The Duke had been given some hasty coaching regarding his duties as host, and he now addressed his company as follows:

“We are about to go forth upon our annual inspection of our estate, and we bid you to accompany us. You are constituted a committee, with power to criticise at will; but hark ye, one and all, look well to your digestion, for you will surely overfeed under the tempting solicitation of those in

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charge of our exhibits. Prepare for arduous duties."

At this moment three tremendous raps were made upon the door, which was thrown open to admit the committee of fifty, headed by Beaufort March. Bowing profoundly, he said:

"We, the committee having in charge the annual harvest festivities, desire to announce to your Grace, our most noble Duke, that all is now in readiness and your people await your gracious inspection of their annual exhibit, craving forgiveness for shortcomings and due praise and encouragement for excellence.

"If it please your Grace, we shall deem it a great favor if you will walk forth with us to the great oak grove, where music and festivity await your coming."

To this speech the Duke responded:

"We extend to your committee and our tenantry heartfelt thanks. We are pleased to obey your summons to participate in your annual festivities, therefore we shall invite our friends to join us in this pleasant duty and will follow your lead."

A horn was sounded and a great cheer responded, then the procession was formed.

At the urgent insistence of the Duke, this procession was headed by Grandfather March, with the Duchess upon his arm; then the Duke with Mrs. Von Comp, Chester with Betty, and the others in proper order.

They marched upon the platform with the band playing and amid the cheers of the tenantry.

The Duke stepped forward and delivered a splen-

did speech, in which he assured his people that their previous conduct, as tenants of Hurlstone, made it impossible for him to suggest changes in the conduct of its affairs, therefore they would continue along the even tenor of their way. The system inaugurated by his forefathers and fostered and developed by the grand old man who stood with him, had wholly vindicated their wisdom by its wonderful results, making Hurlstone the pattern for the whole country, and rendering its people happy and prosperous. His chief duty would be to perpetuate this condition. Then he said:

“While I shall strive to always merit your confidence, respect, and affection, I shall by no means ask these for myself alone. They must be equally shared by my dear Duchess, whom I now present to you; and my dear sister, your own Betty; the Duchess’ mother and her kinsman, who will be wedded to your Betty this day noon. I cannot speak for my beloved grandfather and uncle. They are so grounded in your affection now that it would sound presumptuous for us to ask you to think of them. They are as firm in your regard as Hurlstone itself. While they live I shall look up to them as my safeguards and counselors.

“Now, let your festivities proceed, with the assurance that no one here will enjoy them more than we and our friends.”

Great applause followed the speech of the Duke. The committee of fifty came upon the stage and were presented to the Duke, his household and his friends, and then the regular exercises began.

Near twelve o’clock a horn was sounded from

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the platform, and all the people gathered, in eager anticipation of the wedding of Betty and Chester.

It was quickly over; the grandfather performed the marriage ceremony, and the bride and groom were overwhelmed with congratulations and bombarded with roses. After the excitement had subsided and the exercises were continued, Grandfather March quietly approached Chester and handed him an official-looking package, saying:

"You and Betty may examine this when you return to the house."

That evening they did open the package, and were amazed to find within the evidence that Betty had a life income of twenty thousand pounds and a permanent home at Hurlstone House.

It is needless to extend this story further, for it is plain to be seen that Hurlstone would henceforth be the home of a happy host of people. But before we close we shall refer briefly to some of the important characters of the story whom we have practically disposed of.

Mrs. Von Comp was prevailed upon to gradually arrange her business affairs so as to enable her to remain permanently at Hurlstone, where Chester was to reside. It was a most delightful family which now graced the Duke's mansion.

Nothing more was ever heard of either Mary or James McBirney.

Mr. Buck Finnerty never took to "ederkashun," but did succeed in the tag business, which Chester wholly turned over to him. He later went into politics, becoming a power among the Irish.

Dr. Paul McKim became associated with a large institution and became quite famous as a chemist.

Probably the saddest end came to Pretty Laffelle. One day word came to Beaufort March that an old woman, a morphia fiend, was dying in a hospital and requested that he come and receive her last words. He complied with the request, and was greatly surprised to find it was Pretty Laffelle, the mother of Peter Kelly.

She only wanted to die with an easy conscience, therefore informed him that the true heir was now the duke. She seemed much pleased to know that her own son was well provided for, and that both the legitimate children had been restored to their rights.

Mr. March confided this to no one excepting his own father.

There is a scientific feature about this story which we may not allow to go unnoticed, therefore the concluding short chapter deals with that alone.

CHAPTER XXI

A DUAL PERSONALITY

BEFORE the annual convention of the Medical Society of Great Britain, held in London in 1891, one of its oldest living members read a paper which closed the most remarkable case of dual personality probably ever reported to the society.

The physician making his report was none other than the surgeon who had secretly marked the infant son of Duchess Betty, of the House of Hurlstone.

The case was reported as follows:

J. M. H——, only son of J. M. H——, Duke of H——. Mother, ordinary woman, healthy, but having little education, died while he was an infant.

At the age of six years, J. M. H—— was placed under the guardianship and care of a clergyman, who was also the steward of the Duke's properties.

At the age of nineteen, the Duke provided his son with an ample allowance of money, and putting him under the care of a traveling tutor, permitted him to travel at his own will and discretion.

The son became infatuated with London fast life, drifting into very bad associations, and developing an extraordinary fondness for the vicious.

The tutor became seized with the hallucination that

he had under his charge two youths, one a boy of high moral character and perfect habits, and the other a vicious, dissipated wretch, always running away, and causing him much trouble. He died in a madhouse, possessed of this incurable delusion.

The wayward youth was informed of this curious situation, and took the matter greatly to heart, and for weeks thereafter shunned his bad associations.

Following this, his escapades became intermittent. He practically developed a dual personality, corresponding with the hallucination of his former tutor. At intervals, though, he would indulge in such eccentricities that his father finally sent him home to remain.

The clergyman, his former guardian, was a most excellent man and had a beautiful daughter. At the age of twenty-two the son was against his own wishes caused to marry this clergyman's daughter.

In London he had become infatuated with a dancing girl whom he continued to visit after his marriage.

His father dying, the son became Duke. Eighteen months after his marriage his Duchess bore him a son. On the same day, and almost at the same hour, the London dancing girl bore him also a son. It is in the birth of these two sons we shall find the interesting point.

It was a physical separation of the father's dual self, and a vindication of the old tutor's hallucination.

The two infant sons were physical identities, being so much alike it became necessary to mark them for identification, in order that the one might not be substituted for the other. They both carried the family birthmark in the selfsame spot.

But thirty-six years of time has demonstrated beyond possible question a separation of the father's dual nature.

The son begotten in love, of the vicious mother, developed the peculiarities and eccentricities of the vicious side of the father, and has subsequently manifested this side of the male parent. His peculiarities are not those of his mother.

The son begotten in the quiet and peaceful surroundings of his ancestral home, and of a gentlewoman, manifested the early and moral side of the father's nature to perfection, and this, also has stood the test of thirty-six years.

The inevitable conclusion which we may draw from this is: Environment and habit determined these two natures. They both had been developed in the father and doubtless would not have become physically differentiated had not the hallucination of the old tutor so forcefully impressed the suggestion of his duality upon his mind to influence his subsequent acts.

He was conscious of but one of his personalities at a time, and this nature was stamped upon the child born under its influence. Therefore, we may conclude that the soul and the physical being are two separate things, and that more than one soul may dwell within one single body, but only one at a time. The acts of the physical being will indicate which soul is in charge.

THE END.