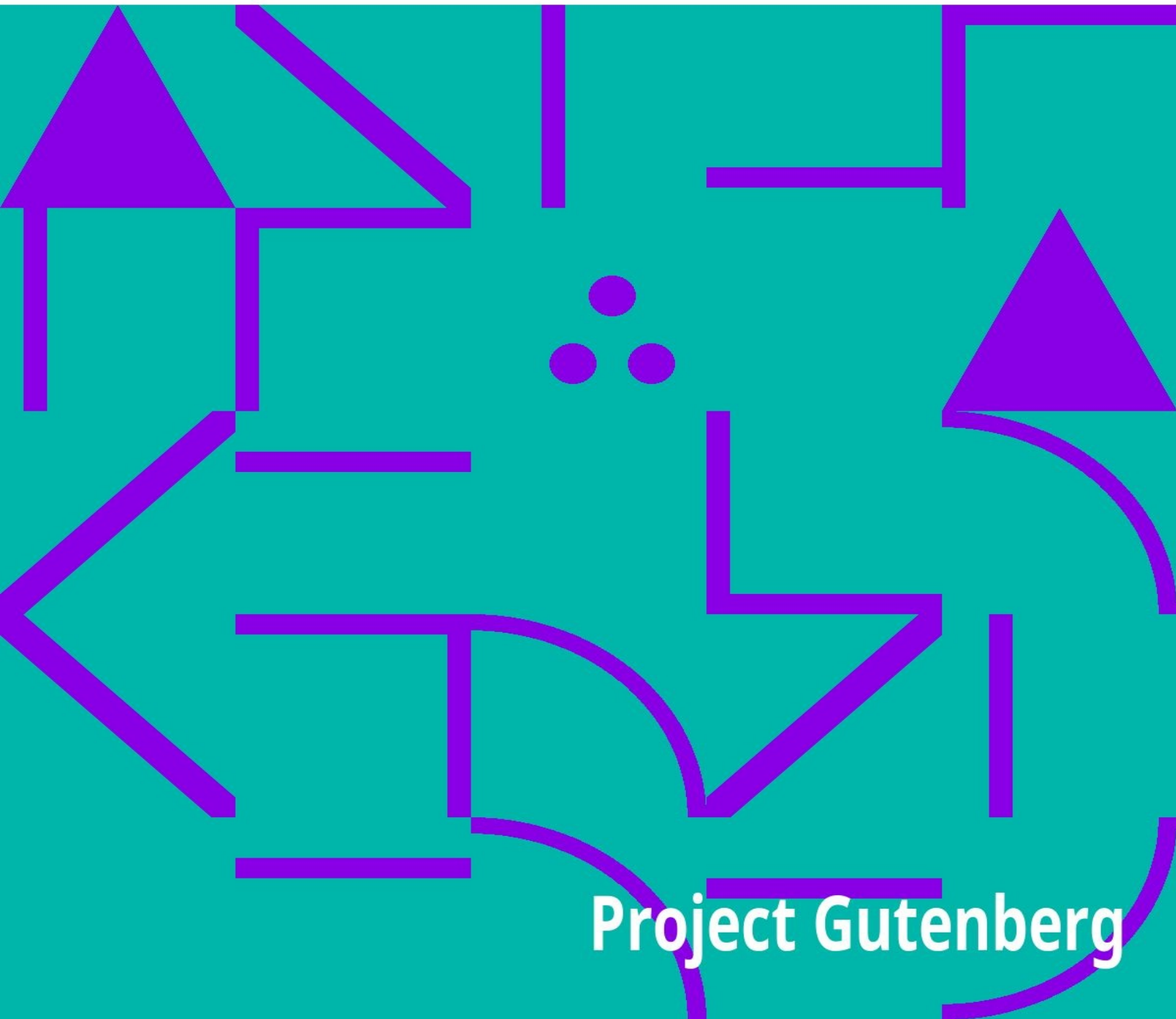


Ambrotox and Limping Dick

Oliver Fleming



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AMBROTOX
AND
LIMPING DICK

BY OLIVER FLEMING

1920



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AMBROTOX AND LIMPING DICK.



CHAPTER I.

THE VISITOR'S SHADOW.

Randal Bellamy's country house was a place of pleasant breakfasts. From the dining room the outlook was delightful; grass, flowers and sunshine, with the host's easy charm, made it almost as easy for Theophilus Caldegard to drink his tea fresh, as for his daughter Amaryllis not to keep her host, Sir Randal, waiting for his coffee.

This morning, while she waited for the two men, the girl, remembering that this was the eighteenth of June, was surprised by the ease with which the five weeks of her stay had slipped by; and she wondered, without anxiety, at what point the guest merges into the inmate.

"I can't live here for ever," she thought; "but as long as there's room for his test-tubes, and his dinner's good, dad thinks it's all right for a girl."

And, as if it was all right, she laughed—just in time for Randal Bellamy to get full benefit of the pleasant sound.

"Laughing all alone?" he said.

"That's when the funny things happen," replied Amaryllis.

Bellamy looked down at her, as if asking a share in her merriment.

"After all, I don't know why I laughed," she said. "I was only thinking it's five whole weeks since we came here, and——"

"And you want to go somewhere else?"

Amaryllis shook her head. "And it's gone like five days, I was going to say."

She took her seat at the table and poured out his coffee. "I'm not going to let you wait a moment for father this morning; it was two o'clock when he went to bed."

"How do you know that, you bad girl?" said Bellamy.

"Because dad can't get out of the habit of putting his boots outside his door," she

replied. "And when he's pleased with his work, he throws 'em out."

"I've heard them," he said, laughing. "But last night I was in bed before twelve; I suppose he took advantage of that and sneaked back to the laboratory again."

"But I thought," said Amaryllis, after a pause, "that Ambrotox was finished and ready to make its bow to the public."

"God forbid!" said Bellamy, in a tone of such intensity that the girl was astonished.

"But surely you've been helping him to finish it—you wanted it finished," she exclaimed.

"Yes, but not published," said the man.

The girl's next eager question was cut short by the entrance of the parlour-maid with the morning's letters; and after her came Theophilus Caldegard.

His person was as unlike the popular conception of a man of science as can well be imagined. His sturdy figure, thick white hair, and the ruddy complexion of his face, where the benevolence of the mouth attracted attention before the keenness of the eyes, suggested rather the country gentleman than the man of genius whose discoveries might move a world.

He kissed his daughter, and, "Tea quick—the kettle's boiling, Amy," he said. "Morning, Bellamy."

And, as Bellamy made no response, "First time I ever saw him absorbed by a letter," he remarked:

"Best one I've had for six months," said Bellamy, looking up. "That young brother of mine's coming down by the three-ten."

"Rolling down, you mean," said Caldegard.

"Can't roll any longer—covered with moss," retorted Bellamy. "Aunt Jenny died and didn't leave me a cent."

"Why didn't he come before?" asked Caldegard.

"Been looking for something to do," said the brother. "Now he's been a soldier, I don't believe there's anything left."

"How long was he in the Army?"

"Twelve months in the trenches, two years in the Air Force, and, one time with another, ten months in hospital," replied Bellamy.

"And as soon as he's clear of the Army, he finds he's got money to burn," chuckled Caldegard. "No wonder it's six months before he pays a visit to his respectable big brother."

Amaryllis gathered up her half-read letters, and walked absent-mindedly to the open french-window.

"Oh well," continued her father, "I'm afraid there aren't many sensations left for your rolling stone."

Amaryllis went slowly down the steps into the garden, Bellamy watching her until she was out of sight.

"Look here, Caldegard," he said, turning quickly. "Your daughter knows it's a secret, but she does not know it's a deadly one."

"Well?" said Caldegard.

"My brother," continued Bellamy, "doesn't know there is a secret, and is coming to live in the middle of it. I think that your daughter should know the whole story; and, when you've met him, I hope you'll think it good business to trust my young 'un as completely as I trust yours."



CHAPTER II.

THE HEN WITH ONE CHICK.

Under the cedar tree on the south lawn of Bellamy's garden sat Amaryllis Caldegard. On the wicker table at her side lay a piece of needlework half-covering three fresh novels. But when the stable-clock on the other side of the house struck noon, it reminded her that she had sat in that pleasant shadow for more than an hour without threading her needle or reading a line.

Her reflections were coloured with a tinge of disappointment. Although her life, passed in almost daily contact with an affectionate father, who was a man of both character and intellect, had been anything but unhappy, it had lacked, at one time or another, variety and beauty. But the time spent in the exquisite Hertfordshire country surrounding the old Manor House had been, she thought, the pleasantest five weeks in her memory.

The worldly distinction of Sir Randal Bellamy gave point to the pleasure she felt in his courtesy to her father and his something more than courtesy to herself. She did not tell herself in definite thought that she counted with Randal Bellamy for something more than the mere daughter of the man whom he considered the first and most advanced synthetic chemist of the day; but there are matters perceived so instinctively by a woman that she makes no record of their discovery. If not without curiosity as to the future, she was in no haste for developments; and Bellamy's announcement of an addition to their party cast an ominous shadow across the pleasant field of the indefinite future.

On the twelfth stroke of the clock Amaryllis laughed in her effort to brush aside the clouds of her depression. Expecting her father to join her about this time, she was determined to show him the smiling face to which he was accustomed.

When he came,

"What d'you think of the news?" he said.

"What news, dad?" she asked.

"Somebody coming for you to flirt with, while the old men are busy," he replied.

"Flirt!"

"Well, I don't think it's likely that this Jack-of-all-trades has left that accomplishment out of his list," said the father.

"Rolling stones get on my nerves," objected his daughter, having known none.

"From what his brother says, this one's more like an avalanche."

Amaryllis laughed scornfully.

"Positively overwhelming!" she said. "But I'm sure I shall never——"

"Hush!" said Caldegard, looking towards the house. "Here's his brother."

Sir Randal was turning the corner of the house, with an envelope in his hand.

"Telegram," said Amaryllis softly. "P'raps it's the avalanche deferred."

"D'you mind having lunch half an hour earlier, Miss Caldegard?" asked Sir Randal, as he came up. "Dick—my brother—is coming by an earlier train. Just like him, always changing his mind." And he smiled, as if this were merit.

Caldegard laughed good-humouredly. "You're like a hen with one chick, Bellamy," he said.

"No doubt," said the brother. "Do you see, Miss Caldegard," he went on, sitting beside her, "how the pursuit of science can harden a generous heart? Both Dick and I were born, I believe, with the adventurous spirit. I was pushed into the most matter-of-fact profession in the world, which has kept me tied by the leg ever since. But Dick was no sooner out of school than he showed the force of character to discover the world and pursue its adventures for himself."

"But, Sir Randal, hasn't your brother ever followed any regular occupation or business?"

"As far as I know," chuckled the man, "he's followed most of 'em, and there are precious few he hasn't caught up with. Two years before the war certain matters took me to South Africa. One evening, in the smoking-room of the Grand Hotel at Capetown, a queer-looking man asked if my name was Bellamy, and, when I told him it was, inquired if Limping Dick was my brother."

"Limping Dick?" exclaimed Amaryllis.

"Yes," said Sir Randal. "That was the first time I ever heard the name he is known by from Söul to Zanzibar, from Alaska to Honolulu."

"Why do they call him that?" asked the girl.

The man smiled. "Because he has a limp," he said. "But how he came by it is more than I can tell you. I told the fellow that I had indeed a young brother Richard, and that my young brother Richard certainly had a limp. We were saved the trouble of further description by the interruption of a high-pitched voice:

"'Not a shade shy of six foot tall; shoulders like Georgees Carpenteer's when he's pleased with life in the movies; hair black as a Crow Injun's; eyes blue as a hummin' bird's weskit; and a grip—wa-al, he don't wear no velvet gloves: Limpin' Dick Bellamy!'

"'That's him,' said the queer man. I agreed that the portrait was unmistakable, and asked if either of them could tell me where he was now, as I hadn't seen him for a long time. So the queer man told me that two years before Dick, who was then overseer of a large rubber plantation north of Banjermassin in Borneo, had given him a job. He added, however, that my brother had left Borneo some six months later. The American had first met him four years before in Bombay, and they had joined forces in a pearl-fishing expedition which took them somewhere in the Persian Gulf—the Bahr-el—Bahr-el-Benat Islands, I think; they had separated four months later and had not met again for more than three years, when the American had run across him as part owner of a cattle ranch in Southern Paraguay."

Amaryllis was interested in spite of herself; but her father had heard these things before, and was thinking of others.

"Jack-of-all-trades," he said, turning towards the house.

"And master of most," called Bellamy after him.

"What a good brother you are!" said Amaryllis softly.

"He's all the family I've got, Amaryllis," he said. "Besides, I'm almost old enough to be his father, and I often feel as if I were."

"From what you've told me, he must be thirty at least," objected the girl, "and I'm sure you're not fifty."

"Over," said Bellamy.

"You don't look it," she answered.

"Thank you."

"What for?"

"You make it easier."

"What easier?"

"What I'm going to say to you."

Amaryllis looked up, surprised.

"Before I met you, Miss Caldegard, I had got thoroughly into the way of thinking of myself not as an elderly man, but as a confirmed bachelor. For more than a month I have been enjoying your company and admiring your goodness and beauty more and more every day, without perceiving, until some few days ago, that I did so at great risk to myself. If I were twenty years younger I should put off speaking like this, in the hope of gaining ground by a longer association with you. But to-day I have made up my mind that my best chance of winning at least your affection lies in telling you simply and at once how completely you have conquered mine."

That this must come sometime, Amaryllis no doubt had foreseen; yet at this moment she felt as much surprised and embarrassed as if she had never read the signs.

If a woman, mother or sister, could have asked her yesterday whether she were willing to marry Randal Bellamy, she might, perhaps, have answered that she liked him awfully, that she valued his love, and felt very sure of being happier as his wife than as an old maid; but now, with the famous lawyer's kind and handsome face before her, and that pleading note mixing unexpectedly with the splendid tones of his voice, her delicacy rebelled against taking so much more than she could give.

Twice she tried to speak; but, instead of words to her tongue, there came a tiresome lump in her throat and a horrid swimminess over her eyes which she was determined should not culminate in tears.

"What a dear you are, Sir Randal!" she said huskily. "But—but—oh! I do like

you most awfully, but—I can't say what I mean."

The new beauty in the face which he had from the first thought so lovely, the new brightness of tears in the dark-brown eyes, and the womanly tenderness which he had never before found in her voice, made his heart quicken as never since he was thirty. That extra beat, if it told him that he was still young, warned him also of the pain which is the tribute imposed on conquered youth.

But before he found words, Caldegard appeared on the terrace, shouting that it was five minutes past one, and lunch waiting.

The pair walked side by side to the house.

"Don't answer me to-day, Amaryllis," he said, "but just turn me and it over in your mind now and then between this and Friday."



CHAPTER III.

"HUMMIN' BIRD'S WESKIT."

At a quarter past two that afternoon, Amaryllis, with her bull-dog, set out for a walk.

Her father was in the laboratory, ostensibly at work, and Sir Randal, beaming expectant, had driven off to St. Albans.

Tea-time, or even dinner was early enough, thought Amaryllis, to meet the new-comer; and then, in spite of the mixture of bewilderment, pride and regret which oppressed her, she remembered the words of the American in the Cape Town bar: "Eyes blue as a hummin' bird's weskit."

"How absurd!" she exclaimed, laughing to herself.

Then she sighed, and was quite sure she really wanted to be alone, and set herself, as she strolled down through the hazel copse towards the London road, to think seriously of Randal Bellamy and his offer.

But the trouble was that Miss Caldegard had never seen a humming bird, and therefore found herself brooding on the blueness of all the blue things in her experience, from willow-pattern china to the waters of the Mediterranean, instead of considering the answer which she must give to Randal on Friday.

A quarter of a mile of winding path led her downward to the level of the road. When she reached the stile, her thought was still far from the matter she had promised to consider.

She turned to call her dog, and, knowing his insatiable curiosity, was less surprised than annoyed to find that she had let him stray. She could not remember whether she had last seen him behind her, in front, or blundering through the undergrowth, still confident, in spite of perpetual disappointment, in his power to overtake a rabbit.

Now the dog's temper, admirable with his friends, was uncertain with strangers, and Amaryllis was accustomed to keep him close at heel in public places. So, having whistled and called in vain, she crossed the stile and looked down the

road towards Iddingfield.

There was the tiresome beast, if you please, a hundred yards away, gambolling clumsily round the legs of a man walking towards her.

Her second whistle brought the animal to a sense of duty, and he trotted towards her, with many pauses to look back reluctantly at his new friend.

She caught the dog's collar with the crook of her stick, and bent down, slapping his muzzle in mild reproof.

As the stranger passed, his glance was downward, for the dog, rather than the woman. As she stood erect, she saw him standing with his back towards her, in the middle of the road, with face turned to the stile she had just crossed.

Then he swung round, raising his hat as he approached her.

"Please tell me if that path leads to the Manor House," he said.

Amaryllis saw a tall, well-made figure, a face clean-shaven and deeply sun-burnt, and under the lifted hat caught a glimpse of sleek black hair. But when she saw his eyes, she knew his name, for they were the bluest she had ever seen.

"Yes," she said. "I think you must be Mr. Richard Bellamy."

"I am," he said. "How did you know?"

"Sir Randal Bellamy was telling us about you," she answered. "I am Miss Caldegard. My father and I are staying with Sir Randal. Yes, over the stile is your quickest way to the house." And she looked down the road.

"Aren't you coming, too?" asked Dick Bellamy.

Amaryllis looked at him for a moment.

"Perhaps I'd better," she said, going towards the stile.

"Why 'better'?" he asked.

"There is no one to receive you," she replied. "Besides, the village isn't very interesting."

"Awful," said Dick. "Worst beer in England."

Amaryllis did not reply. When they were amongst the trees, he spoke again.

"I know Randal was to meet me at St. Albans, but I 'phoned from Iddingfield and told 'em to send him back at once. I got my car back from the vet. at mid-day, and if I hadn't had a bit of a smash just outside Iddingfield, I'd have got here before."

Amaryllis was a quick walker, and had set a good pace up the slope from the stile. Suddenly she remembered her companion's nick-name, and, slackening her speed, involuntarily glanced down to see if indeed this man were lame.

He came up beside her.

"It's all right, Miss Caldegard," he said kindly. "My action's a blemish, not a handicap."

"Oh, Mr. Bellamy!" she said. "I never even noticed it until this minute."

"I thought that was how you recognised me in the road," said the man.

"It wasn't that," said Amaryllis, and in fear of further questioning, whistled her dog back to the path.

"Silly old thing," she said. "He won't believe that Mr. Bunny is too quick for him; he's never caught one yet except in his dreams."

They were making their way towards the house when they heard the car drive up to the front door, and before they reached the windows of the dining-room, Randal Bellamy turned the corner.

Amaryllis stood apart watching with a certain curiosity the meeting of the brothers.

The elder's face was beaming with welcome, the younger's she could not see, but something in his bearing suggested a pleasure no less. All she heard, however, was: "Hullo, young 'un!" and "Hullo, Bill!"

And, when they came towards her, the expression of the two faces was that of men who, having breakfasted together, had met again at luncheon.

"Somebody's forestalled my solemn introduction, I see," said Randal.

"Gorgon performed the ceremony," said Amaryllis.



CHAPTER IV.

COFFEE.

Randal Bellamy at fifty was the most successful patent lawyer of his day. He had taken silk before he was forty, and for many years had enjoyed, not only the largest practice, but a distinction unrivalled in his own country and unsurpassed in the world.

Such a man's knowledge in physics, chemistry and biology, though less precise, is often wider than that of the individual specialist. His friendship with Theophilus Caldegard, begun at Cambridge, had lasted and grown stronger with the years.

On the evening of his brother's arrival he dressed for dinner later than was his custom. His bath had filled him with a boyish desire to whistle and sing; and now, as he tied his bow and felt the silk-lined comfort of his dinner-jacket, he heard with a throb of elation the soft sound of a skirt go by his door.

He murmured as he followed:

"—lentus in umbra
Formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas."

But before he reached the stairhead, all other sounds were drowned by shouts of laughter from the billiard-room—good laughter and familiar; but the smile left his face and his pace slackened. He was, perhaps, too old to wake the echoes, and Dick's laugh, he thought, was infectious as the plague.

In the wide, comfortable hall used instead of the drawing-room which Bellamy hated, he found Amaryllis smiling with a sparkle in her eyes, as if she too had been laughing.

"Did you hear them?" she asked.

Randal nodded.

"Father hasn't laughed like that for years—billiards!" she said. "Your brother is

just telling him shocking stories, Sir Randal."

"How d'you know?" he asked.

"I dressed as quickly as I could, and went to the billiard-room. Father couldn't speak, but just ran me out by the scruff of the neck."

At this moment her attention was distracted by the bull-dog, sliding and tumbling down the stairs in his eagerness to reach his mistress.

"Gorgon's behaving like a puppy," said Randal, smiling.

"Oh, he's been laughing, too," said Amaryllis, fondling the soft ears. "And he wants to tell me all the jokes."

And then Caldegard and Dick Bellamy came down the stairs together.

"What have you been doing to Gorgon?" asked Amaryllis.

"Never mind the dog," said her father. "It's what this 'vaudeville artist' has been doing to me!"

"Oh, Gorgon, Gorgon! If those lips could only speak!" laughed the girl. "Don't you think Gorgon's a good name for the ugly darling, Mr. Bellamy?" she said, as they went in to dinner.

"Surely the Gorgon was a kind of prehistoric suffragette," objected Dick.

"There you are, Amy," said her father, and turned to him. "Your brother and I have quite failed to convince my illiterate daughter that the word *Gorgon* is of the feminine gender."

"Anyhow," said Amaryllis defiantly, as she took her seat at the dinner-table, "I looked it up in the dictionary, and all it said was: A monster of fearful aspect."

"He deserves it," said Dick.

"He seems to have taken a great fancy to you, Mr. Bellamy," said the girl.

"Dogs always do," said Randal.

"Always at the first meeting?" asked Amaryllis.

"Nearly always. But that doesn't prove that I don't travel without a ticket when I get the chance," replied Dick.

"What *do* you mean?" asked the girl.

"Oh, the dog-and-baby theory's not dead yet. But I assure you, Miss Caldegard, that the hardest case I ever met couldn't walk through a town without collecting every dog in the place. That's why he never succeeded in his first profession."

"What was he?" asked the girl.

"Burglar," said Dick.

"That's all very well," said his brother. "I know nothing about babies, but I've noticed that the man whom all dogs dislike is no good at all."

"That's quite true," said Caldegard. "Remember Melchard, Amy?"

Dick Bellamy caught the quiver of disgust which passed over the girl's face before she answered.

"Horrible person!" she said. "Trixy bit him, the dachshund next door always ran away from him, and Gorgon had to be chained up."

"Who is this Melchard, Caldegard?" asked Randal.

"He came to me about eighteen months ago, and stayed about nine; a very capable practical chemist; had worked for some time in the factory of a Dutch rubber company. Sumatra, I think, or the Malay Peninsula. Tried unqualified dentistry after he came home, went broke and got an introduction to me. That's what he told me. An accurate and painstaking worker, and never asked questions."

Dick began to be interested.

"But I really can't see anything horrible in all that," said Randal.

"At first it was what he was, not what he did," said Caldegard. "Tall, slender, effeminate, over-dressed, native coarseness which would not be hidden by spasmodic attempts at fine manners, and a foul habit of scenting his handkerchiefs and even his clothes with some weird stuff he made himself; left a trail behind him wherever he went. It smelt something like a mixture of orris-root and attar of roses."

Amaryllis wiped her lips, and Dick Bellamy thought her cheeks nearly as white as the little handkerchief.

"What did the fellow do?" asked Randal.

"For one thing, I discovered that he carried a hypodermic syringe; so I watched him—morphia—not a bad case, but getting worse. And then," said Caldegard, looking towards his daughter, "he had the presumption——"

"Oh, father, please!" cried Amaryllis.

"I'm sorry, my dear," said her father. "I was only——"

He was interrupted by a crash, a fumbling and a burst of flame. One of the four-branched candlesticks had been upset, and its rose-coloured shades were on fire. Very coolly the two Bellamys' pinched out the flames and replaced the candles.

"Hope that didn't startle you, Miss Caldegard," said Randal.

"Not a bit," said Amaryllis, smiling.

"What a clumsy devil you are, Dick," he continued.

"I was trying to get the sugar," said Dick.

Randal tasted his coffee. "Cook's got one fault, Dick," he said. "She can't make coffee; and we've been spoiled."

"Yes, indeed," said Caldegard. "I've never in my life drunk black coffee to beat what your yellow-haired Dutch girl used to make."

Randal turned to his brother. "Parlour-maid, Dick. Best servant I ever had. Didn't mind the country, and after she'd been here a fortnight disclosed a heaven-sent gift for making coffee. Took some diplomacy, I can tell you, to get cook to cede her rights."

"Why haven't you got her now?" asked Dick.

"Mother started dying in Holland," replied his brother, "and we miss our coffee."

"I'll do it to-morrow night," said Dick.

"What'll Rogers say?" said Randal.

"Rogers? You don't tell me you've got Rogers still?"

"Of course I have."

"Not *my* Mrs. Rogers!" exclaimed Dick. "Why, she'd let me skate all over her kitchen, if I wanted to."

Randal Bellamy, although he had a motor-car and used the telephone, lagged lovingly behind the times in less important matters. He was proud of his brass candlesticks, and hated electric light.

While Amaryllis was saying good-night to her host, Dick Bellamy lighted her candle and waited for her at the foot of the stairs. When she reached him, she did not at once take it, so that they mounted several steps together; then she paused.

"Good night, Mr. Bellamy. I hope you didn't hurt your fingers, putting the fire out. Are you a very awkward person?" she asked, looking up at him whimsically.

"Shocking," said Dick. "I'm always doing things like that."

"I believe you are," she replied softly. "Thank you so much."

When he went to his room that night, Dick Bellamy was followed by a vivid ghost with reddish-gold hair, golden-brown, expressive eyes, adorable mouth, and skin of perfect texture, over neck and shoulders of a creamy whiteness which melted into the warmer colour of the face by gradation so fine that none could say where that flush as of a summer sunset first touched the snow.

As he got into bed, he told himself that he did not object to being haunted up to midnight, nor even over the edge of sleep, by a spook so attractive. But if it should come to waking too early to a spectre implacable—well, that had happened to him once only, long ago, and he didn't want it to happen again.

But the car would be all right to-morrow—there was always the car.

CHAPTER V.

AMBROTOX.

Amaryllis found her father and Sir Randal at the breakfast-table.

"I'm so glad I'm not the laziest," she said, as she took her seat.

"I'm afraid you are, my dear," replied her father.

"Dick's fetching his car from Iddingfield," explained Randal.

The air was torn by three distinct wails from a syren.

"How unearthly!" said Amaryllis, with her hands to her ears.

"That's Dick," said his brother. "He would have a noise worse than anyone else's."

Dick came in from the garden. "Morning, Miss Caldegard," he said, as he sat down. "How d'you like my hooter? Sounds like a fog-horn deprived of its young, doesn't it?"

Amaryllis laughed.

"I hate it," she said.

Randal looked up from the letter he was reading.

"I'm afraid you two will have to amuse each other this morning," he said, glancing from the girl to his brother as he handed the letter across the table to Caldegard. "That'll take a lot of answering, and I can't do it without your help. I'm afraid Sir Charles has got hold of the wrong end of the stick."

"How are you going to amuse me, Miss Caldegard?" asked Dick.

"I haven't the faintest idea," she replied.

"Help me try my car?"

"I should like to—if you can do without me, dad?"

At half-past seven that evening Sir Randal went to his brother's room, and found him dressing for dinner.

"Nice sort of chap you are," he said. "I ask you to amuse a young woman after breakfast——"

"I did," said Dick.

"And you keep her for eight hours. Where have you been?"

"Miss Caldegard bought things in Oxford Street. We had lunch in Oxford, and tea at Chesham," said Dick, brushing his hair carefully back from his forehead. "You can't call that wasting time."

"Not yours," said his brother. And they went to dinner.

Before Amaryllis left the table, Dick rose from his seat.

"Where are you going?" asked his brother.

"To keep my tryst with Mrs. Rogers," said Dick, and went out.

"I've told 'em we'll have our wine and coffee in the study, Caldegard," said Randal. "I think it's the safest place for what we're going to talk about."

Amaryllis rose to leave them together, but her father stopped her.

"You'll come with us, won't you, my dear? You're one of the gang," he said.

"What gang?" she asked, looking at him with eyes opened wide.

"The Ambrotox gang," replied her father, lowering his voice almost to a whisper. "The only four people in the world, I believe, who know even that silly nickname you invented, Amaryllis, are in this house. Sir Randal knows its properties. I know all about it. You know that I have spent two years in reaching it, and Dick Bellamy knows there is something in which we three are deeply interested. And so Sir Randal has advised me to take you younger people into full confidence."

He slipped his arm through his daughter's, and led the way across the hall and down the narrow passage beyond the stair, to the study.

Randal, with his back to the open door, was filling the port glasses, while Amaryllis and her father were gazing from the open french-window across the moonlit lawn, when all three were startled by a thin, high-pitched voice behind them.

"Me lib for make one dam fine lot coffee, missy," it said.

But, turning, they laughed to see only Dick, setting down the tray.

"When does the séance begin?" he asked, turning to close the door.

"Now," said his brother. "Better leave that open, and sit here where you can see right down the passage. Miss Caldegard," he went on, "please make Gorgon lie outside the window."

Amaryllis stepped out upon the terrace, and the dog followed her. "Lie down," she said. "On guard."

She came back into the room, and Randal drew the heavy curtains across the window. "Keep your eye on the end of the passage, Dick," he said. "There's no other door in it but ours."

Then he sat down. "Coal-tar," he said, "the mother of wealth, the aunt of colour, and the grandmother of drugs, is a mystery to the layman. The highest, if not the best known, of its priesthood, is my old friend Caldegard. Some little time ago he penetrated too far into the arcana of his cult; and on one of the branches of that terrific tree he found and coaxed into blossom a bud which grew into the fruit which his daughter has named Ambrotox—as if it were a beef essence or a cheap wine. Tell 'em its properties, Caldegard—in the vernacular."

Between the first and second puffs at a fresh cigar, Caldegard grunted a sort of final protest.

"You answer for him?" he asked, nodding to Dick.

"Of course. And you for your daughter."

"It is," began Caldegard, "the perfect opiate. As anodyne it gives more ease, and as anæsthetic leaves less after-effect to combat than any other. Morphia, opium, cannabis Indica, cocaine, heroin, veronal and sulphonal act less equally, need larger doses, tempt more rapidly to increase of dose, and, where the patient knows what drug he has taken, lead, in a certain proportion of cases, very

quickly to an ineradicable habit. In wise hands, the patient's and the public's ignorance being maintained, Ambrotox"—and here he bestowed a little laugh on amateur nomenclature—"Ambrotox will be a blessing almost as notable as was chloroform in the fifties.

"But there's another side: carry the thing a step further, and you have a life, waking, and dreams, sleeping, of delight such as has never been—I think never could be expressed in words; not because, as with De Quincey and his laudanum, the coherent story of the dreams and visions cannot be remembered, but because the clear sunshine of personal happiness and confidence in the future—the pure joy of being alive—which the abuser of Ambrotox experiences in his whole daily life, is incommunicable. It is a period of bliss, of clear head, good impulses, celestial dreams, and steady hope. These effects last, on an even dose, longer than with any other drug of which I have experience. And then there begins and grows a desire for action, the devil preaching that no good works have resulted from the faith, the hope and the good intentions. A little more, and we shall accomplish, he assures us, the full measure of our dreams. The dose is increased, confidence returns, and performance is still for to-morrow. I have never seen a victim of Ambrotox pursue this descent to the grave, but all analogous experience assures me that the final stages must be hell."

"How do you know so much about the effects?" asked Dick.

"There was only one possible subject for experiment—myself," replied Caldegard.

Amaryllis sat upright in her chair, and drew in her breath sharply. But she did not speak.

"Ghastly risk to take," said Dick.

"Ghastly," assented Caldegard. "But it wasn't the first, nor the second time that I'd chanced it. The very memory of the horrors I went through in curing myself after a course of hashish, gave me faith in my power to push this tremendous experiment to the point I had determined upon, without overshooting the mark."

"What was the mark?" inquired Dick.

"The appearance," replied Caldegard, "of certain cardiac symptoms which I expected."

"Oh, dad!" exclaimed Amaryllis. "That must have been the time when you sent

for Dr. Greaves at three in the morning."

Caldegard nodded.

"For three weeks after that," went on Amaryllis indignantly, "I thought you were horribly ill."

"That, my darling," answered her father, smiling at her, "was because I was getting better."

"I've been wondering, Caldegard," said Randal, "how often and how strongly the remembrance of that incommunicable bliss cries out for an epicurean repetition of those early stages of your scientific experiment."

Caldegard laughed. "Oh, she calls, and calls pretty loud sometimes," he said. "Let her call. It's all part of the experiment. Knowledge, you see, has the sweeter voice."

Amaryllis had tears in her eyes, and for a moment the others waited on her evident desire to speak.

"But do you think, father," she said at last, "that it's really worth while to let the world know you have found a more delightful temptation than opium or cocaine, just for the sake of giving a few sick people a more comfortable medicine than they've been accustomed to. Ambrotox!" she sighed scornfully. "I wish I'd never given it that pretty name. I think it's horrid stuff!"

"That's what I was going to ask," said Dick.

"As for publicity, my dear boy," replied Caldegard, "Ambrotox will very probably do more harm than good if its properties become general knowledge. But the Home Office is drafting a comprehensive measure for State control of the manufacture and distribution of injurious drugs. You all know that the growth of the drug habit caused serious alarm in the early days of the war, and that even the amendment to the Defence of the Realm Act, forbidding the unauthorised sale and possession of cocaine and other poisons, did little to diminish the illicit traffic. Such contraband dealing is immensely lucrative, and prices rise in direct ratio with the danger. But the new Bill may contain a clause vesting in the State the formulæ and the manufacture of all newly-discovered drugs of this kind. The Government is relying in this matter greatly upon the experience and advice of Sir Randal, and if a sufficiently stringent clause can be devised, it is probable that never more than three living persons, in addition to

the discoverer, will be acquainted with the processes necessary to the manufacture of a newly discovered chemical compound which has been brought under State control. In regard to the good which may be done by Ambrotox—do you remember, Amaryllis, the two pretty little old ladies who lived in the small grey house with the red blinds? Don't say names, my child, nor mention the town. They were sisters and devotedly attached."

The girl's face was a picture of curiosity.

"Yes, father," she said. "And they grew pale and anxious. One of them came to see you, and then the other, several times; and once, just before I went to Scotland, they both came together. I remember how dreadfully ill they looked. But when I came home, their cheeks were pink again, one always laughed when the other did, and their garden was full of roses."

"What about 'em?" asked Dick.

"This," said Caldegard: "For several years each of those old women had been taking morphia; each had been concealing it from the other; each had suffered in conscience the torture of the damned; each confessed to me her vice, and the dreadful failure of her struggle to overcome it. Experimentally I treated each with Ambrotox, in gradually decreasing doses. The return to health was quicker and more complete than I had dared to hope; the craving for morphia has not reappeared, and I do not think it will."

"Oh, you darling!" cried Amaryllis. "I always thought you'd something to do with it."

"It is the story of two cases only, I admit," continued Caldegard. "But I am convinced that I have found a means of releasing at least unwilling slaves from that bondage."

"But what do you gain by telling us?" asked Dick.

"Secrecy," said Caldegard. "You and my daughter know now the importance of my two years' work, and you cannot fail to see the danger of a rumour that 'Professor Caldegard, we understand, has achieved an epoch-making discovery in the history of science. An anodyne with more than all the charms and few of the dangers of opium will bring comfort with a good conscience to thousands of sufferers in this nerve-racked world.' Every chemist in the country that knows my line of work will be searching in a furious effort to forestall the new

legislation by discovering and putting on the market new synthetic opiates. There is not, perhaps, much fear that chance shooting will achieve the actual bull's-eye of Ambrotox. But there is a greater danger than commercial rivalry—criminal! The illicit-drug interest is growing in numbers and wealth. Every threat of so-called temperance legislation stimulates it. We have lately heard much of crime as a policy. Soon, perhaps, the world will learn with startled disgust, that crime went into trade two years ago.

"There are men in every big city to whom thousands of pounds and the lives of many hirelings would be a small price to pay for the half-sheet of paper and the small bottle hidden in the safe in that alcove.

"Knowing a little," he concluded, turning to Dick, "you might have told too much. Knowing everything, you will tell nothing at all."

There was a silence in the room, so heavy that it seemed long. And then,

"Some dope," said Dick Bellamy.

CHAPTER VI.

AMARYLLIS.

A little after noon on the following day, Amaryllis and Dick Bellamy, followed by Gorgon with his tongue hanging out of his mouth, entered the hall by the front door, clamouring for drinks, to find Caldegard swearing over a telegram.

"What's the matter, dad?" she asked.

"Sir Charles Colombe," replied her father. "He will be deeply indebted if I will call at the Home Office at one-thirty p.m. I should think he would be! If the message had been sent in time I could have caught the twelve thirty-five. It's a quarter past now, and it can't be done."

"Yes, it can," said Dick. "Grab your hat and tie it on, while I get my car."

Randal, coming from his study, was in time to see the car vanish in a cloud of dust.

"Where are they going?" he asked.

"To catch the twelve thirty-five," replied Amaryllis. "Dick says he can do it in seven and a half minutes."

Randal not only noticed the christian name, but also the girl's unconsciousness of having used it.

"They want father at the Home Office. Who's Sir Charles Colombe, Sir Randal?" she asked.

"Permanent Under Secretary," he answered. "I suppose Broadfoot is making trouble again."

And he looked at her as if he were thinking of Amaryllis rather than of permanent or political chiefs of Home Affairs.

"This is Friday, you know," he said at last.

"Yes," replied the girl, and Randal thought her face showed embarrassment—but

of what nature, he could not tell.

"I won't spoil your lunch, my dear child," he said, looking down at her with eyes curiously contracted. "But if you'll give me half an hour in the afternoon——"

"Of course I will," she replied, with frank kindness. "And, oh! may I have a lemon-squash?"

A little later, as he watched her drink it, he admired her more than ever before. Since he first met her he had taken increasing pleasure from the tall figure, of which the fine lines and just proportions hid the strength and energy he had seen her upon occasion display; and he had often asked himself in what attitude or action her inherent grace appeared most charming. Sometimes it was driving from the tee, at another taking a swift volley which she must run to meet; or, again, just pouring out his coffee. But now, lounging on the old leather sofa, with her head tipped well back for red lips and white teeth to capture the slip of ice sliding to them from the bottom of the long tumbler, he thought her the very perfection of innocent freedom and symmetry.

And when the ice was crunched and swallowed, she laughed joyously, showing him that the teeth he had cried pity on were sound as ever; so that he raked his mind for jest and anecdote just that he might see them flash yet again.

But there was a difference in her to-day—a softer touch, as of happiness to come, flinging backward in her face a clouded reflection from the future. The image in that distant mirror, however, he could not see, and his gaiety failed him.

"I'm awfully untidy," she said at last, springing to her feet and pushing back loosened hair. "It's nearly lunch time—I hope so, at least, because I'm horribly hungry."

Perhaps it was best, after all, standing a little to one side, to see her mount that flight of broad, shallow steps; yet, being unable at once to make up his mind, he waited there at the stair's foot to see her come down again.

She came at last, with so new a smile on her lips, that criticism was lost in curiosity. Its subtle curves blended expectancy, fear and tenderness, seen through a veil of restraint.

Then he saw that she was looking over his head, and turned to see his brother standing in the doorway, with the sunlight behind him.

The half-hour she had promised him left Amaryllis little less unhappy than Randal Bellamy.

Tea under the cedar was over, and Amaryllis could not eat even another éclair, when he had said to her, "It's half-past five."

"Oh, yes," she replied, and folded her hands in her lap.

"So I've got till six o'clock," he went on.

"Yes," said Amaryllis, adding, a little uneasily, "and as much longer as you like, Sir Randal."

He smiled at her mistake, and shook his head in resignation.

"You don't mean that—not in my sense," he said. "But look here, my dear: I do really think it wouldn't be a bad thing for you to marry me. You have no idea how good I should be to you. I have money and position. You like me, and you will like me better. And for me—well, it hardly seems fair to tell you what it would mean to me."

"Why not fair?" asked the girl, pained by his eagerness, and wishing it all over.

"I've always thought that appealing *ad misericordiam* was taking a mean advantage. If I do it now, don't listen to me. But, if I'm worth it to you, Amaryllis, take me, and you shan't regret it."

"You are worth anything—everything!" she cried, much distressed. "Worth ever so much more, dear Sir Randal, than I could give. But I'd give you all that I am—indeed I would—if it wasn't for—for——"

"Yes?" he asked. "Go on. Wasn't for what?"

"If it wasn't for something that says 'don't!' Oh, please understand. I like you awfully, but it says it, and says it—I don't know why."

For a moment neither spoke.

"You *do* understand, don't you?" she asked at last.

"I believe you, my dear," he answered; then added gently: "There's a happier man somewhere, I think."

Amaryllis opened her eyes wide, almost, it seemed, in fear.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried. "Truthfully, I don't know any more than I've told you."

When he was gone, she sat for a long time, wishing she could feel alone.



Several times between lunch and dinner that day had Amaryllis wondered why Dick Bellamy was so taciturn—silent and sombre almost to moroseness. But Randal had no doubt that he knew.

Dick, the least sullen and most even-tempered of men, was for once at war with himself. The midnight phantom had become a daylight obsession.

Although he thought he knew what women were, he had never reached a definition of "being in love." For, having more than once believed himself in that condition, he had as often found himself too suddenly free.

Before this English girl had seized upon his thoughts so that nothing else interested him, he had said there was always the car in which to run away.

He was not afraid of offending his brother, for Randal knew him as he knew Randal. But a man does not throw himself into the sea just because there is a lifebuoy handy. Secure, therefore, in his power to escape, it was not until this afternoon that he found decision forced upon him. If he went, there was good chance of freedom; if he stayed, no chance at all.

He was lying on his back, looking up through the branches of a huge tree, when he reached what he considered this clear alternative. He was a man who seldom lied to himself; so now it was with a sudden sharpness that he felt the sting of self-deception.

"I've been trying to kid myself that I'm like the damn fool who runs away from the girl he's getting fond of because he's afraid of marriage. But I'm not. I'm the coward who's up to his knees, and funks letting himself all in for fear of not being able to reach what he's at least able to swim for."

At dinner, Amaryllis, in sheer kindness of heart, shone with good humour, readiness of reply and flow of conversation. Randal, while he felt that she now and then forced the note, caught her motive, and responding, smoothed her way. But Dick, having from childhood accepted Randal's immunity from love as an axiom, took it all in good faith, and emerging by quick degrees from his

taciturnity, soon had his share of the talk and laughter.

He too had noticed at first a certain strain and effort in the girl's manner; but put it down to the absence of her father from the table. And so, when the trunk-call came to tell them he was dining with the Secretary of State and would be home late, and Amaryllis seemed to "settle into her stride," Dick thought of the matter no further, but only of her.

After coffee in the hall, Randal excused himself on the plea of letter-writing, and Amaryllis, alone with his brother, fell silent.

For a minute he watched her unobtrusively, and wondered why the life had gone out of her.

"Sleepy, Miss Caldegard?" he asked at last.

"No," she replied. "Tired—a little—and worried. Everybody's so keen on something. Father on—you know what. You, though I've never seen you do anything, look keener than any man I ever saw; and Sir Randal's keen about horrid business-letters. Generally I don't even want to open mine."

"'Cause you don't want to answer 'em," suggested Dick.

"Yes," admitted the girl, laughing—and suddenly stopped.

"What's up?" asked Dick.

"You've reminded me," she answered, pressing the bell beside her, "that there's one of my letters this morning that I never looked at. We were talking such a lot. I remember the look of the envelope. I haven't a notion what was in it."

"Might be money," suggested Dick.

"Or bad news," said Amaryllis. "I hate letters. When you want them, they don't say enough. When you don't, they say too much." Then, to the parlour-maid she had summoned: "I have left some letters on my table. If there's one that hasn't been opened, please bring it to me." And to Dick: "I wonder what it's like having dinner with Home Secretaries."

"Nearest I've been to it was having breakfast with a Prime Minister," he answered. "It was soon over, and not so bad as it might have been. The omelette was dispersed by shrapnel, and a machine-gun found the range of the coffee-pot."

"What did the Prime Minister do?" asked the girl.

"Forgot where the door was, and went out of office by the window."

"Was it a war?"

"Oh, no," said Dick. "Only Mexico."

The parlour-maid returned with a sealed letter. Until she was gone, Amaryllis eyed the writing on the envelope with reluctant displeasure; then looked at Dick.

"Please do," he said.

When she had glanced at the letter.

"I wish you'd said don't," she complained. "Neither money nor bad news. Foolishness from an unpleasant person—that's all."

On the point of tearing it, she checked herself.

"It's dad's business after all," she murmured, more to herself than Dick; and rising, went upstairs quickly, as about to return.

As she disappeared from the eyes which could not help watching her, Randal came up the narrow corridor from the study. Dick sank back into his chair and looked up at his brother.

"Billiards?" said Randal. "Give me fifty, and I'll play you a hundred up."

Dick shook his head. "Too lazy," he answered.

"Miss Caldegard gone to bed?" asked Randal.

"Looked as if she was coming back—though she did say she was tired."

"Then I'll practise that canon you were showing me. See you again," said Randal, and went upstairs.

In the passage above he met Amaryllis. The sound of their voices, but not their words, trickled down to Dick in the hall.

Then she came; and the man, lest he should show in his face the pleasure that came with her, did not look at the girl until she was at the foot of the stair; and when he did raise his eyes, it was to find hers averted, and to see her turn at once to her left and make for the study. Just as she was disappearing into the narrow

corridor, he saw, or thought that he saw, her white shoulder shaken by a sob without sound.

With an eager instinct he sprang to his feet—and sat down again. If she wanted his help, she would ask for it.

Almost at once, however, he rose again, unsatisfied and restless; and hardly knew what he was doing before he found himself at the study door, and in his ears a sound which told him that he had read her shoulders correctly.

He went in, closing the door as softly as he had opened it.

Randal had left his shaded lamp burning on the writing-table. And there, shining head bent over the table and lit by the broad circle of light, her body shaken with suppressed sobbing, was Amaryllis.

Dick was close to her before he realized that she had not heard his approach. Gently he touched her arm.

Without starting, she looked round at him, and he saw the tears on her face.

"Excuse my butting in," he said. "Do tell me what's the matter."

The girl tried to speak and failed.

"I'm a stranger to almost everybody here," he said. "When you're in a hole, the stranger's about the best man to take troubles to."

Amaryllis shook her head.

"Come, let's see if I can't help," pleaded Dick.

In her mind Amaryllis, as she felt the tender concern of his voice, and looked up into the brown face above the white shirt-front, was struck with a consoling sense of protection, and knew that, while he was the last person she could "take her trouble to," yet his was the sympathy which would most surely soften, if it could not remove, any misfortune which could ever befall her.

"I can't—I can't! I wish I could," she said, winking her eyes. "But I'm going to be good. Please be a dear, Mr. Bellamy, and go back to the hall. I shall be all right soon."

"Promise?"

"Honest," said Amaryllis.

Dick closed the door behind him, and walked up the passage with the limp which was always more strongly marked in moments of preoccupation.

The balls were clicking in the billiard-room upstairs, and he hesitated with a foot on the lowest step. But the bond of the protection which had been accepted even while confidence had been withheld, seemed to tie him to the post she had assigned him.

He lit a cigar, sank into the very chair he had left, and let his mind revert to his discontented mood of the afternoon, laughing softly as he admitted that it had needed only the trace of trouble on that charming face to convince him that he was indeed "all in."

Something in the girl's face as she looked up at him had planted a seed of hope.

A clock somewhere struck softly and many times. The cigar had been a dead stump between his teeth for how long Dick did not know.

Randal's voice broke his reverie.

"I'm sick of knocking the balls about," he said. "Come and give me a game, you slacker."

"Eleven!" exclaimed Dick. "Of course I'll play. Let's go and fetch Miss Caldegard and I'll play the two of you."

"All right," said Randal. "Where is she?"

"In your study," replied Dick, leading the way. It was an hour since he had left her and he was anxious to rouse the girl from her depression.

He opened the door, entered quickly, and stopped.

"Good God, she's gone!" he exclaimed.

"What d'you mean?" asked Randal.

"I left her here about an hour ago," said Dick. "She's not come out this way. There's something wrong."

"My dear boy, don't excite yourself," said his brother. "Here's the french-window. I expect she's out there."

"With bare shoulders and thin dress? It's been raining like hell since ten o'clock. I tell you there's something wrong," said Dick, taking one stride to the table, and lifting the lamp above his head. He glanced swiftly round the room.

"Look at your safe," he said.

Randal, impressed by his brother's tone, went quickly to the alcove, between whose looped curtains showed the green door of a safe embedded in the wall. Before he touched it,

"My God! There's a key!" he said.

"Where's yours?" snapped Dick.

"Here," said Randal, pulling a bunch from his pocket.

"Look inside."

Randal turned the key, swung back the heavy door, groped for a minute, and swung round with a face like death.

"What's gone?" cried Dick.

"Caldegard's drug-bottle and formula!"



CHAPTER VII.

PERFUME.

Search of house and grounds was fruitless.

Before half-past eleven the rainstorm was over, and a bright moon lighted the brothers and the men-servants to the discovery of just nothing at all.

Except to give an order, or make a suggestion, neither Bellamy spoke until they stood alone together in the hall.

They looked at each other like men who from dreams of hell have waked to find it.

Then the elder groaned, beside himself.

"The poor girl!" he said. "To think of her ill-used—murdered, perhaps!"

The younger man cut him short with a glance, which even through his agony pierced Randal as if the livid lightning of a god had been launched at the ineptitude of human compassion.

"Cut it out," said Dick. "That's a car coming. The father. Take him right back to town in it. You've got the pull. You can make the political coves get Scotland Yard and the police of the world working, before you'd get the county bobbies into their trousers."

The car drew up in front of the house.

"How shall I tell him?" said Randal.

"I shall," answered Dick. "You get into tweeds—jump." And he went to meet Caldegard at the door.

"Good God!" said the old man, when he saw the young one's face. "What's happened?"

"I'll tell you," said Dick. "Is that a good car?"

Caldegard knew how to obey. "It's Broadfoot's—Rolls-Royce, six cylinder," he replied promptly.

"Tell the man he must take you back to town."

When the order was given, the lover, in curt and terrible phrases, told the father what had happened. And Caldegard's face, as he listened without a word, was a tragedy which Dick Bellamy, heeding it not at all for the moment, remembered all his life.

"Set every dog in the world on the men who've stolen Ambrotox," he said in conclusion, "and you'll find Amaryllis. A trace of one is a track of the other; news of either is news of both. Leave the local work to me."

Caldegard looked into the strange face, and almost flinched from the terrible eyes.

"I'll do all you say," he replied simply.

Then Randal came, pulling on his coat. His brother made him swallow whisky and water, forced the elder man to do the same, and before they left, demanded money of Randal.

"There's a hundred and twenty pounds in notes, in the small right-hand drawer in the safe," he replied, "—unless they got that too."

"No," said Dick. "They were hustled. Let her rip," he said to the driver, and went back into the house.

Trembling with excitement and keeping back genuine tears for Amaryllis, a guest to serve whom had been pleasure, the parlour-maid fetched him cold meat, bread and beer. When he had changed his clothes, he ate hastily in the hall, swallowing doggedly what he could not taste.

"Twenty-five minutes—they'll be in town. Another fifteen and the wires'll be humming," he calculated. "Twenty more—the local police will be here, and rub out every trace. Is there a trace, a mark—a print—a smell, even? I've got an hour."

He sent all the servants to bed, except Randal's chauffeur, whom he summoned to the hall.

"My car's fit to travel, Martin," he said. "Shove in as many tins of petrol as she'll

hold. I may want her to-night. Run her out into the drive, put on an overcoat and sit inside till I come."

Then he went to the study, lit all the candles and another lamp, opened the safe with the duplicate key, and found, as he had expected, the money in its drawer.

"Mostly one-pound notes," he muttered, as he locked the safe.

Turning to leave it, he stood suddenly stock-still, head up and sniffing the air, puzzled by an intangible association of sense and memory.

Failing to fix it, he left the alcove, and went to the writing-table, choosing the chair she had sat in, when she could not, or would not, give reason for her tears. And now he gave a flash of thought where before he had refrained even from speculation. Could it have been the forgotten letter that had made her weep? Yet there had been no trouble in her face while she read it, and it seemed certain that the handwriting was unfamiliar.

While he mused his eyes were fixed on the alcove at the end of the room. The light of the candle he had left there outlined sharply the edges of the two curtains which hung from the rod crossing the recess. At the ceiling their edges met, but, at a height of some two and a half feet from the floor, their folds were looped back to the wall in a style formally old-fashioned. And now, even before his mind became concerned, his eye was irritated by a lack of symmetry in the draping; for the drooping fold of the right-hand curtain was out of shape. Again, his thought ran, if thieves playing for so great a stake as Ambrotox had found a woman in their way, their best card was prompt murder. If they could abduct in silence, they could have killed silently. And this made clear to him the soundness of what had been hitherto a merely instinctive conviction; since they had not left her body dead, they had taken it away alive—and with no intent to kill elsewhere. For, if murder were to be done, the dead was safest of all behind them in the place of the theft.

Then again—while the distorted loop of the curtain haunted his subconscious mind, so that with imaginary fingers he was adjusting its curves, even while his mind pulled and twisted the elements of his problem—then, again, he thought, this thief—had he shrunk from murder, or merely from *this* murder?

"If I could know that!"

And before he was well aware of what he did, he was in the opening of the

alcove, handling that awkward fold—and again he drew breath, deep and slow through the nose; again the vague memory—again the elusive association. Was the scent—sweet as well as musty—was it in the curtain? But as he stooped, he saw what made him forget that vague odour: a crumpled bunch of the soft linen had been squeezed together, and was not yet recovered from the strain of some violent compression. Gently stretching the stuff, and bringing it closer to the light, he found the almost regular marks, above and below, as of some serrated, semi-trenchant tool which had been closed upon the doubled piece of cloth.

"Teeth, by God!" said Dick. "Tried to gag her with it—shoved a bag of it in with his fingers, gets 'em out, and stoppers the lot with his hand. Before she faints, she bites—here and there she's gone clean through the stuff."

Indecision gone, he took the smaller lamp in his hand, and made a tour of the room.

At an angle to the fireplace was a broad-seated, high-backed oaken settee, covered with cushions. The back almost hid the hearth from the french-window. The silk pillow nearest the alcove still kept the impress of a head.

"When they came in," he reasoned, "the back of that thing hid her. She'd lain down to rest, and stop that sobbing before she came back to me. Fell asleep—women'll do that, happy or wretched, before they know where they are. They reached the safe, and that arm at the end would hide even her hair. While they're messing round with the safe, she wakes and peeps at 'em—was it cold feet or sand kept her from yelling? What next?"

He was back at the alcove now, on hands and knees, the lamp set on the ground, searching the thick pile of the carpet for signs of the struggle there must have been. And again the smell—near the right hand curtain where the wool of the carpet was rubbed.

Roses—attar of roses! Where had he heard of attar of roses combined with—with what? And again the two wires would not touch—but they were throwing a spark across the gap.

Yes, it was Caldegard—Caldegard had said something—something of a foul man and a rotten stink. It was some story he'd been telling that first night at dinner.

Then a glitter in the carpet. Half-hidden—trodden in amongst the roughened

wool, he found it—a morsel of bright steel—the needle of a hypodermic syringe. Who had spoken lately of a morphinomaniac that carried his syringe always with him?

Why, Caldegard, Caldegard!

"Melhuish?—Melford?—Meldrum?—Melcher?—*Melchard!* By God, the swine that stank!"

And he remembered how he had upset the silver candlestick, setting fire to the shades, to cover the girl's discomfort, and the smile she had paid him with. Then it was this particular murder from which the thief had shrunk.

Melchard, the chemist, had guessed at the direction of Caldegard's research. Discharged at a moment when his hope of mastering a valuable secret was at its height, he had found means to track Caldegard's movements, and even, it seemed, to discover the hiding-place of the perfected drug and its formula.

"Agent—or, p'r'aps, a leading member of the Dope Gang Caldegard hinted at. He lays his plans to grab the stuff and the formula. Just as he gets his fingers on it, up pops the only being on earth he'd give a damn about knifing. Twenty years' clink if he leaves her to talk. Takes her with him—hell's blight on him! Wouldn't have been dosing himself on a game like this. Used the syringe on her."

To find Melchard was to find Amaryllis. The first thing to do, therefore, was to find Melchard's address, and the first man to ask was Caldegard. If Caldegard could not give it to him, it meant a long hunt with the police. Anyway, he must begin with Caldegard.

He crossed to the telephone, lifted the receiver, and, hearing no tinkle, blew into the transmitter with the receiver at his ear. Hearing nothing, he hung it up with a curse.

Sitting at Randal's desk, he wrote rapidly the following note:

"Got the money. Enclose key. Melchard's the man we want. Get his address. 'Phone cut outside. Wire me address P.D.Q.—DICK."

Through the window he went to his car in the drive.

"Martin," he said, "get out Sir Randal's car and take this note to him. Go to New Scotland Yard. They'll tell you where he is. Drive like hell."

He went back into the house, ran upstairs, lit a candle in his room, stuffed one pocket with handkerchiefs, and into another dropped a tin of tobacco and an electric torch.

Why hadn't he brought a gun? Oh, well, it only meant five minutes at his flat in Great Windmill Street.

As he came down the passage, his eyes, obeying a new habit which seemed already old, lingered a moment on Amaryllis' door. But it was not sentiment which checked his feet.

"There might be something," he muttered, and, without hesitation, entered the room.

An oppression of silence weighed upon him painfully as he felt for his match-box. When the candle showed it, the pretty room was a cruel jest.

His examination was made with business-like care. On the dressing-table was nothing but the pretty things which served her toilet; but on the writing-table in the window lay a pile of letters. The topmost he recognised at once for that which she had read in his presence after dinner.

As he pulled the stiff sheet from the envelope, he was aware once more of the odour which he had smelt first in the alcove of the study.

He spread the letter open. It was signed "Alban Melchard."

It was written on good paper, stamped with the address, and read as follows:

"Rue de la Harpe, 31,
"Paris,
"June 18th.

"MY DEAR MISS CALDEGARD,

"I fear that you will be surprised at my venturing to write to you, considering the distressing circumstances under which we parted. Although the small request I have to make of you is of some importance to me, I should not have the presumption to make it, if it were not that it gives me the opportunity to assure you that the passage of time has made a wiser man of me—and a grateful one, for the delicate forbearance with which you taught me my place.

"I have recently met with good fortune in my profession, and am settling down as a man of business in the neighbourhood of Millsborough, with considerable prospect of success.

"In the happy days when it was my privilege to pick up unconsidered scraps of your father's scientific wisdom, I kept, jotted down in a notebook, many items for future use. Until recently I have had no occasion to refer to these notes, which I now find are essential to the success of my most promising scheme. I must have left the memoranda behind me with some other things, when I departed so suddenly last September.

"If you can have this notebook found for me, I will ask that it may be posted to me at The Myrtles, Grove End, near Millsborough, as I shall only be in Paris for three days longer.

"I heard, quite by chance from a friend, that Professor Caldegard was staying with Sir Randal Bellamy in Hertfordshire, so I have ventured to use his address.

"Thanking you gratefully in anticipation,

"I remain,
"My dear Miss Caldegard,
"Yours very sincerely,
"ALBAN MELCHARD."

"H'm, in Paris, is he? No more in Paris than I am. Wrote this in case he should be suspected, but didn't count on having to cart the girl along. False addresses wouldn't help him. These two are straight goods. Clever move, if it hadn't been for the girl. Your alibi'll hang you, Alban Melchard. That fixes Millsborough."

Savagely he cranked up his engine and jumped into the driving-seat. The car rushed forward.

When St. Albans was behind him the confusion of excitement began to settle, and his thoughts presented themselves clear as those of a dispassionate spectator. For him, in all this tangle, there was one thing, and one thing only, that mattered; to be in time. He did not fear murder; but the very reason of her security from death was the cause of a fear so horrible, that he knew inaction would have been torture past endurance.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SWINE THAT STANK.

When Amaryllis left her bedroom, having laid Melchard's letter on her table, she had intended returning at once to pleasant and frivolous conversation with Dick Bellamy. For to-night she was nervous—a little unstrung, it may be, by the pain she had given to his brother; and Dick, with his quiescent vitality, his odd phrases and uncompromising directness of expression, seemed to her at that moment the most restful companion in the world. If she could only get him started, he might amuse and interest her as on the long drive the day before. And then, he seemed to be one of those people who understand even when you don't talk—and she remembered how he had cut into her father's chatter about Melchard by upsetting the candles.

But Sir Randal had met her between the door and the stairhead.

"Dick tells me I've got to play billiards all alone," he said; and though his self-pity was merely playful, it struck the girl painfully.

"What a shame!" she began—and then a stupid lump came in her throat, and Randal saw the change in her face.

"My dear," he said, "you mustn't. I'm all right. Believe me, if it does hurt a little, it won't spoil things for me as it might for a young fellow. The world's a very interesting place, and I'm going to be jolly in it, just the same."

He looked at her for a moment anxiously.

"Be jolly too—there's a good girl. And, I say," he added with simple eagerness, "you won't go running away from here to some dreadful aunt, will you?"

"I'll stay just as long as you and father want me to," she replied; but, finding speech difficult, finished with the best smile she could command, and went down the stair, avoiding Dick and seeking refuge in Randal's study.

There the tears overcame her—though she tried to hide from herself their full reason.

Randal she had known for many weeks, and for Randal she was indeed tenderly grieved; but the other man, with his abruptness, his humour, and his lurking intensity, she had first seen the day before yesterday; and although she knew nothing of Mr. Richard Bellamy's opinion of herself, and admitted in regard to her own future no more than that she found him interesting, she was too well aware to deny, even to herself, that he had pushed his brother out of his chance.

To say this, she told herself, was but to confess that the younger man had unconsciously reminded her of possibilities and dangers; but it seemed to be not only unkind but unjust that Sir Randal's misfortune should arise out of the very eagerness of his affection for this weird brother of his.

And then her father! He had said nothing, implied nothing, but she foresaw disappointment.

It was all rotten, and the tears flowed.

Then came that hand on her shoulder, whose touch, although they had never, she remembered, even shaken hands, she knew before lifting her eyes to his.

When he had left her, although her tears were soon dry, she felt a curious restlessness of mind, and what she would have called "an excited tiredness," and she stretched her body on the cushions of the settee for a moment's relaxation, which slipped at once into half an hour's sleep.

A whisper awoke her. She raised her head. The voice was behind her. Cautiously, kept silent between fear and curiosity, she rose and turned her face to the alcove.

A man was there, with his back towards her—not one of her men. His clothes were grey; his right hand was on the open door of the safe, the left holding a small parcel wrapped in white paper, and, separate, an envelope.

Amaryllis knew what he held, and the courage rose in her to hold back the scream which was coming, until she should have tight hold of the thief—the fingers of both hands, she hoped, fast in his collar.

She was close behind him, and he was locking the safe, when suddenly he felt or heard her presence and swung round.

It was the face of Melchard; astonishment and disgust for a fatal moment took away her breath. Before she could scream, his hands were on her mouth and naked neck, pushing her roughly backward until she was against the right-hand

curtain and the corner of the wall. From behind the curtain, it seemed, two small, soft hands stole over her shoulders and gripped her neck, squeezing it savagely.

Melchard took his left hand from her mouth, and as she tried in vain to scream in spite of the double grip on her throat, he crammed a handful of the linen curtain between her tongue and palate with his long fingers.

"Take your cat's claws off her neck," she heard him mutter. "I'll keep her quiet."

And that was all before she fainted.



Her next sensation was of half-sitting, half-lying in an uneasy arm-chair—a chair which jolted, slid and swung, and then again glided smoothly. There was something hairy over her face, and she drew her breath with difficulty.

She was in a car—the weight on her face was the hairy side of a rug. Movement seemed impossible, and the fur now and then hurt her eyes. With an effort she managed to close the lids, and as tears slowly refreshed the eye-balls, she was so much relieved that she might have fallen asleep, but for Melchard's detested voice sounding above her.

"I think that's Escrick we've just run through. York in ten minutes about. When I say 'now,' down you go under the rug again. I'm the only passenger through the town."

"Why not go round York?" asked another voice, which Amaryllis had heard before; but where, she could not remember.

"We mustn't waste any time," answered Melchard. "Besides, if more people see you in the streets of a town, fewer look at you than in the country. You'll have to duck in a minute, and I shall pile the bags and things on top."

"They hurt me last time," said the softer voice.

"A thousand apologies," replied Melchard carelessly. "But it's all in the good cause. By the way, you'd better have a look, and see if the girl's all right before I cover you over."

"Oh, damn the girl!" answered the woman. "What's it matter if she dies?"

"If I'd wanted that, I'd have left her dead in her lover's study."

"Lover! Old Bellamy!" said the woman—and laughed.

"Not old enough, I guess, to help it."

"Nor you, Alban, to hide it," she retorted, groping at the rug which covered Amaryllis. "You gave her enough to keep her quiet another hour or two, didn't you?"

"It's hard to tell with a new subject," he answered. "Morphine is tricky in opiate doses."

Then Amaryllis knew she had been drugged, and to appear as when they last saw her, she half-opened her eyes, showed her teeth between drawn lips, and managed to keep her face rigid without even the quiver of an eyelid.

The rug was lifted for a moment and a face peered at hers; and she knew it for that of Sir Randal's late parlour-maid and lamented coffee-maker.

"She's just the same," said the woman. "Quite insensible, but not dead yet. Blast her!"

Melchard laughed. "The green-eyed monster as per usual," he said. "You ought to know me by this time, but you always mistake my universal admiration of beauty for the tender passion."

"Don't be a fool," she answered. "What are you going to do with her?"

Melchard was silent, and the woman spoke again.

"Look here," she said, "I'm going to be right in this. I found the stuff for you. I got the key. And if I hadn't been with you to-night you'd have been lagged. I'm not so sure that you won't be, now, with that —— letter of yours from Paris."

"What's wrong with the letter?" asked Melchard.

"It would have done well enough if we hadn't had to bring this red-haired wench of yours with us. Now that the girl's disappeared, it'll only attract attention."

"My sweet child," retorted Melchard, "that letter is a masterpiece. I did leave a notebook behind. Legarde and Morneaux, besides swearing to it themselves, would bring a dozen others, all most respectable men, to say that I did not leave Paris until the twenty-second, the day after to-morrow."

"H'm!" said the woman. "M'yes, perhaps. And anyhow," she went on, with a chuckle of relish, "by the time we've shipped the girl to Holland, she won't remember her own name."

Then at last horror seized the soul of Amaryllis, and consciousness left her.



CHAPTER IX.

THE POLITICAL COVES.

For the better part of their journey to town Caldegard and Randal Bellamy ate their hearts in silence. The road was good, and they had it almost to themselves.

As they were nearing London, Caldegard spoke.

"Bellamy," he said, "that brother of yours won't stop at killing if——"

"He'll begin with it," replied Randal, "if he gets a fair chance."

"It gives me unreasonable hope," said Caldegard.

"Men who've trusted Dick would call your hope reasonable."

"Yet he's sent us after Ambrotox," complained the father, "and my heart's breaking for my little girl."

"His argument convinced you, anyhow," said Randal.

At New Scotland Yard Sir Randal's card gained them instant admission to the presence of the Superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Department.

He listened without a word to Randal's compact and lucid statement of the facts.

"It's a good thing I was kept here so late to-night, gentlemen," he said. "We shall act without losing a moment in the matter of your daughter's disappearance, Dr. Caldegard. But the theft of your secret, of which both Sir Charles Colombe and the Home Secretary have spoken to me, is a matter of such tremendous importance, that I am obliged to communicate immediately with both these gentlemen and the Commissioner. And you will be doing me a great kindness if you will both remain here until I hear from them."

An hour later a sombre group of six, after protracted discussion, seemed almost to have exhausted the evidence, suggestion and counsel which could be brought to bear upon a crime so sudden and so obscure.

Sir Charles Colombe looked anxiously round him as he spoke.

"That is the danger," he said, "which we have to face: that these foul pests of society should escape with Professor Caldegard's discovery and master his secret—a peril to which all the dangers mankind has run since the world began from greed, bigotry, alcohol and opium are child's play. The bill of which Sir Gregory has just spoken would give us powers to lay hands on all these local branches of what Superintendent Finucane has described as 'the Dope Gang.' We know already some twenty-five or thirty of them. If we were as well advanced in our knowledge of their central organisation, we might even now do something fairly vigorous under the law of conspiracy. As it is, we can only proceed against individuals trafficking in and supplying certain specified drugs. The secret of this greatest drug of all must not, if human power can prevent it, come into the hands of the inner ring before we have our grip on it. Needles, before now, have been successfully hunted in haystacks, and perhaps even you, Professor Caldegard, have no adequate conception of how close the meshes are in the net Superintendent Finucane is spreading. And I should like you to understand, sir," he said, drawing nearer to the old man who sat staring with fixed eyes out of a ghastly face, "that, though our duty makes us think of millions where you can think only of one, every effort which the Criminal Investigation Department makes, every trap it lays, every device it contrives to recover your property is equally adapted to finding your daughter. In your fear for her safety you have forgotten your drug; in our fear for the drug we cannot let your daughter out of our minds."

"She may be—dead," said Caldegard.

The Superintendent answered him.

"I don't believe it," he declared. "You see, sir, the thief's plan worked smoothly, bar the one unexpected factor—the young lady in the room. If he didn't kill her then, he don't mean to kill her."

"That's my brother's argument," said Randal, adding his word of comfort.

There was a tap at the door, and a constable entered.

"Sir Randal Bellamy's chauffeur, sir," he said to Finucane. "He has brought this letter. Says it's from Mr. Richard Bellamy."

Randal glanced at the note and then read aloud:

"Melchard's the man we want. Get his address. 'Phone cut outside. Wire me

address P.D.Q."

"From my brother Richard," he said. "Dr. Caldegard knows this Melchard, I believe."

When Caldegard had told them all he knew of the man, the Superintendent looked at the Commissioner,

"I think, sir," he said, "we'd better inquire about Mr. Alban Melchard."

"Rather a wildgoose chase," grumbled the Home Secretary.

"I shouldn't wonder, sir," replied Finucane, "if Mr. Richard Bellamy isn't a very wideawake young gentleman."



CHAPTER X.

THE GREEN FROCK.

Seven miles south of Millsborough, just before you come to the cross-roads, whose eastern branch runs to the coast some thirty miles away, there stands, the only house in sight, a little roadside inn called "The Coach and Horses."

At half-past seven on the morning of Saturday, June the twenty-first, there drew up before it a long, low two-seater car.

The landlord, a sharp-faced little man with kindly eyes and a shrewd mouth, came to the door.

"Looks like you've been travelling all night, sir," he remarked pleasantly.

"It looks right," said Dick Bellamy. "I want a house called The Myrtles."

Turning to the north, the landlord waved his hand towards the right.

"Two mile, mebbe more, mebbe less. Lies in a bit of a hollow. But you won't see no myrtles—less they've growed in the night—just a low stone house with a bit of a copse back o't. Mr. Melchard you're seekin', like? He's a girt man wi' the teeth," said the landlord, chuckling.

"Big eater?" asked Dick.

"Dentist's my meanin', sir. They do say he keeps seven shops in Millsborough district, and never drew tooth in his life. Just drives round so free, takin' t'money. But I reckon, if you're goin' to t'Myrtles, you know the gentleman."

"I'm going to leave my car here. Don't know how long, but I'll pay you five shillings a day. I want some food and I've only got five minutes. Can you manage it?"

Waiting, he scribbled a note in pencil, tore the leaf from his notebook, demanded an envelope, addressed it, and attacked the cold beef and beer hurriedly set before him.

"Can you post this?" he asked.

"You passed t'box quarter mile back," said the landlord.

"Half-a-crown if you'll take it yourself."

"All right, sir. But there's no stamp in the house."

"Post it without," said Dick, well pleased.

He laid down his knife and fork.

"Walkin'?" inquired the landlord. "Then you'd better take path across t'moor. I'll show'ee."

Alone on the heath, Dick felt he had at last a few minutes to consider his position. Plans must come with events. Though besieged still by the fear which had haunted him throughout the night, he found comfort, however indefinite, in the daylight. Time was everything; but if he were indeed in time, it was well to have the day before him.

The letter to his brother, which he had posted in York at three o'clock in the morning, though it gave the address of the man he was hunting, could not, any more than that which he had just entrusted to the landlord of "The Coach and Horses," reach Scotland Yard in time to bring help in the immediate danger which he foresaw—danger which he would never have run the risk of bringing upon Amaryllis Caldegard but for his conviction of that worse peril threatening her. He was, indeed, sure that his course, rash as it would be accounted in the event of failure, offered the best, and perhaps the only chance of taking home with him an Amaryllis as happy and full of laughter as he had known on the road between Oxford and Chesham.

Twenty minutes' walking led him up a sharp rise to the level of the road, from which he looked down into the corresponding hollow on the other side. And there he saw what the little man of "The Coach and Horses" had described: a long, low stone house of two stories, facing south-west; windows neatly curtained, and fitted—an exotic touch—with *persiennes*; gravelled walks and smooth grass plots, a tree or two, shrubs and a few garden saplings; a garage big enough for one car which would look bigger than its envelope as it came out; and a pretentious gate—suburban villa half-heartedly aping country house—guarding the drive.

He stood in the road, boldly looking down at the blinded windows, thinking how common these houses were; in many parts of England he had seen them,

grinning, sulking, boasting, counterfeiting, smirking at a world that would not look twice.

But this house seemed to leer at you through a filthy parade of modesty.

On a bench in the shade of a large tree not more than thirty yards from the road was a patch of colour: a woman's garden hat, bound with an orange scarf. Since it was not hers, it seemed the best thing in sight.

Fearing observation, he turned from the house, walking eastward.

The copse of which he had been told lay not only behind the building to the north-east, but encroached on its eastern side so as to intervene with the tops of its younger trees between him and the back of the building.

He followed the highway until he came to a field of ragged oats running from the road northward behind the little wood. Vaulting the stone fence at the roadside, he scrambled down the steep bank. Soon he was among the trees, making his way to the left towards the rear of "The Myrtles." Bushes and tree-trunks gave him cover until he was within five yards of the low wall of unmortared stone which made an irregular and dilapidated fence about the back of the house.

From the wood's edge to the wall he crawled with the speed and silence of a Houssa scout, and, once in shelter of the stones, was not long in finding a crevice roughly funnel-shaped, which gave him, with small eyepiece, a wide outlook.

Wretched grass-plots trodden into patches of bare earth, ashes, bones, potato-parings, a one-legged wheelbarrow; a brick dustbin overfilled till its rickety wooden lid gaped to show the mouthful it could not swallow; a coal-shed from whose door, hanging by one hinge, a blackened track led across the dying grass to a door standing open outwards from the structural excrescence which must be kitchen or scullery: these made the sordid complement of the hypocrisy which exuded from the front.

That open door tempted him.

If only he could find some indication of her room! For that Amaryllis was in that house he had less doubt than proof.

From the front the windows looked out at no great distance on the high road. Signals were possible. They would lodge—imprison her at the back, and surely

on the upper floor. But even that, on this side, had six windows, and he searched their flat glitter in vain for a peg to hang a guess upon.

He had almost made up his mind to creep to that open scullery door and try his luck when, from the third window from the right, behind the glass there shone something white.

Now the first window in this row was next the end of the house; the second, over the roof of the scullery; and the third had beneath it a straight drop—some seventeen feet of unbroken wall—to the ground.

There was, indeed, three feet below the window-sill a rough string-course, which might give to a fugitive a moment's finger-hold before dropping to earth. But the fall between shoes and ground would be some two and a half yards—a serious matter even for an acrobat so placed that he could not watch his feet.

And how should man or woman escaping get even the moment's grasp of that two-inch projection of stone?

It was, then, a safe room for a prison.

Bad glass refracted grotesquely the white shape behind it, but could not make its movement unfeminine; and, when the lower sash was slowly raised until it jammed about a foot above the sill, and two hands showed their fingers under the frame straining to force it higher, Dick's heart leapt to the belief that they were those pretty, expressive hands he had watched so often in lazy pleasure.

He was upon the point of making a signal above the edge of his cover when a footfall checked him.

A woman, dressed in a blue overall and carrying an empty japanned bucket, was hurrying from the scullery along the grimy track to the coal-shed.

This out-house was so near to the watcher, that he could hear the pretty, eager, flaxen-haired, savage-faced little woman muttering to herself as she scraped and shovelled. He could, after a fashion, speak the Taal, and knew her more distinct phrases for European Dutch.

"Not used to the job," reasoned Dick. "And no skivvy in the house *this* week." And he remembered the garden hat with the orange band.

Half-way back she set down her load, straightened her back, and glanced at the

upper part of the house.

The sight of the partly-opened window and the white figure now drawn back a little into the room seemed to fill her with rage. She ran forward and, standing a few yards from the house, shook her fists furiously, pouring out a stream of abuse and threats of which hardly an articulate word reached Dick's ears. Having come to a climax with a shriek, hoarsely suppressed, she ran back to the bucket and with it stumbled quickly into the house.

Dick was over the wall almost before she was out of sight; but clattering of coal-shovel and fire-grate told him she had not yet started on her way upstairs, and he followed with extreme caution.

The door which stuck out into the yard soon hid him from the open doorway, and enabled him to bring his eyes above the sill of the window, which must be passed to reach the house, without fear of attack from behind.

In the scullery, at the end further from the main building, was a small hobbled grate. By this the woman with the flaxen hair had set her coals, and was now lighting a fire, of which the paper was flaming high and the wood began already to crackle.

In this commonplace task she seemed so unnaturally absorbed that Dick watched her with intense curiosity, his head held horizontally, so that one eye only topped the lower edge of the window-sill, thus making the least possible exposure of his head above it.

Every now and then she would turn and pick out with her fingers little lumps of coal and drop them in the hottest crevices among the sticks; and each time he saw a face of cruelty more determined.

He thought of Amaryllis, and knew that it was of Amaryllis that this little Dutch devil also was thinking.

"Melchard's!" he thought; and knew that for him, Dick Bellamy, she must be, in what was coming, not a woman but a tiger or a bad man.

The fire now glowed under its blaze. She took a shovel and strewed a thin layer of small coal over all. Next she spread a doubled sheet of newspaper on the stone floor, and laid on it small sticks and again small coal.

Several times during this fire-lighting Dick had seen her glance, as she turned, at

a small mound of stuff which lay on the further side of the hearth. She now lifted it, holding high, with a finger and thumb pinching each shoulder-strap, a woman's frock—a light, slender slip, of these latter days, to add the last exquisite grace.

The fire flared, and shed its changing light on the green silk, so that by its iridescence of interwoven colours, chasing each other as the garment wavered in the draught, he knew it. Amaryllis had worn it at dinner last night.

Under the light of the big lamp in the hall it had made her figure turn colour like an opal. And again, as she ran with that letter to her bedroom, crimson, purple, peacock blue and a green never the same, had chased each other down the swaying folds of her skirt.

The little Dutchwoman eyed the frock, hating while she admired; then suddenly she pushed a fold of the silk into her mouth, and pulled with hands and tore with teeth until long streamers of silk flickered their reds and greens towards the fire.

At last, with a sound between purring and growling, she bunched the stuff together and pushed it down on the coals, lifted the paper tray of fuel from the floor, laid it in the grate over the silk, turned away, threw off her overall and ran cat-footed into the house and out of his sight.

And with her vanished Dick's last shadow of hesitation.

He crept from behind the door, faced its outer edge, laid a hand from each side on its top, set his right foot on the inside knob of the handle, raised his left to the outer, and thence with a quick movement sprang astride of the top.



CHAPTER XI.

THE WINDOW.

When Amaryllis awoke from a sleep in which the remains of the drug Melchard had given her had happily combated the restlessness of fear, she had no memory of how she came to the room in which she found herself.

Under the shock of the strange surroundings she sprang from the bed, and as her feet touched the floor, last night came back to her.

She tried the door—locked!

She went to the window, and had already raised the lower part until it jammed, when there came running beneath an angry woman, threatening with gesture and unintelligible words.

It was Fridji, who was once Sir Randal's parlour-maid, and last night Melchard's companion in the car.

Amaryllis drew back and looked round the room for her gown—the green silk she had worn at dinner last night. It had been taken from her body before she was laid on the bed. The rest of her clothes she still wore, even to the evening shoes which were hurting her feet. But the green frock was gone—an added precaution, no doubt, against her escape.

Fear thrilled in her heart, and grew so terrible that, if the window had given her any prospect but that foul yard and the dark pine trees behind it, she would have broken its glass and screamed for help.

Almost in despair, she sat trembling on the bed, and thought of her father and of the two Bellamys, and of what they would do, when they caught them, to the men who had stolen Ambrotox and the woman they loved.

All the three? Well, two at least. Yet somehow she felt that it would not be surprising if the worst vengeance should be Limping Dick's.

And inside her she smiled, and the shaking of her body began to subside.

But before her courage was firm in the saddle there came footsteps in the passage—a foot that she knew. The key grated, the door opened, and Melchard entered the room, dressed in a soft, new-looking suit of purplish grey; the jacket too long in the body and too close in the waist, the wide, unstarched cuffs of the mauve shirt turned back—an embryo fashion—over the coat-sleeves.

And with him came the miasma of that nauseating perfume.

The mercy of God sent her anger, and she forgot that she rose before this intruder covered only in white princess petticoat, green silk stockings and high-heeled bronze shoes.

The petticoat was cut low on neck and shoulders, and the white of the lace shoulder-straps showed bluish between the warm cream-colour of neck and of arms. The face, a moment before pale and worn almost to haggardness, was now flushed with the indignation which gave point and edge to the words which overwhelmed for a moment even the shameless and commercialized criminal.

Of what he was, she knew little, but what she thought of him he could not escape hearing.

Yet, when she paused in, rather than concluded her invective, he had already recovered his effrontery.

"My dear Miss Caldegard," he said, "we were compelled last night, for your own good, to exhibit a mild opiate. Your health required it. It has impaired, I fear, your memory of the circumstances which have brought you under my care. When you have had a few weeks in which to benefit by the devoted care and scientific attention which we shall bring to bear on your case, you will learn to look on me as what I am—your medical attendant, and to forget—or—or——" and here he ogled her horribly with his fine eyes—"or remember in a new fashion your old lover."

And with this disgusting phrase he came close up to her.

"Lover still," he said, "though discarded and trampled upon."

Amaryllis could not know that her very truculence was a fan to his flame.

"Go out of my room," she cried, and struck him on his mouth and cheek.

The blow was delivered with the action of a slap, but the fingers were clenched,

and the arm was swung from the shoulder.

Melchard seized her by the elbows, cruelty and joy making in his countenance a horrible mixture of emotion.

With his face close to hers, he said:

"Oh, yes, I'll go—soon! That tawny hair of yours, Amaryllis, is splendidly voluptuous against your skin of live, creamy satin. I long to run my fingers into its meshes."

And actually he would have touched it—her hair!—but for a voice which spoke sharply through the partly-open door:

"You're wanted, Alban. Come!"

And Amaryllis, in spite of fear and disgust, almost laughed at the disgust and fear in his face as he released her.

"My men downstairs," he said. "Soon—soon I shall see you again."

Then, at the door, he turned to add: "There are four of them, prompt, even rash fellows—all armed but faithful and devoted to me. I beg you to wait until your breakfast is sent up. Attempts to escape are dangerous."

Again the key was turned, and Amaryllis flung herself on the bed, shaking with rage and horror.

But her attention was distracted from herself by the absence of departing footsteps.

The man must be still at the door—listening, spying through some crevice, perhaps.

No—he was talking—listening—replying, in a voice too low for the words to reach her.

And then an answering voice, which rose by swift crescendo, until it drove the man with hasty steps down the passage, followed by a screaming final curse.

Fridji the parlour-maid was jealous, was angry, and was making her Melchard a scene! Oh, but how funny things would be if they weren't so beastly!

But Dutch Fridji, having no humour, entered the room in the worst temper of a

depraved woman.

"You want breakfast?" she said, locking the door and taking out the key.

Amaryllis looked up with disdainful laziness.

"Of course," she said, "please be quick."

"If you cannot wait," replied Fridji, "you must go without."

"You must not speak to me like that. You know very well that parlour-maids say 'ma'am' and are expected to be respectful."

"Parlour-maids! I am no parlour-maid."

"Indeed?" said Amaryllis.

"Here—I am mistress!"

"Oh!" said Amaryllis.

"And you are prisoner—I tell you."

"Yes?" said Amaryllis. "I'm afraid you've let yourself be dragged into a very wicked crime for which you will be severely punished."

"Punish! To punish *me*! Drag in! But me? Me? Me? I am not dragged. I lead."

"Really?" said Amaryllis.

"The head is mine. I plan. And, because you will never leave this place I do not mind to tell you that it is I have done it. All this. We have the New Drug. I hold the man that shall make it and sell it. I am the leader. I get the key. I catch you by the throat, there in The Manor House, my pretty, red-haired mistress! I catch you while my Melchard, who is clever, prick your arm with the needle. I—I—I!"

"Oh, yes," said Amaryllis. "But I do not think you are wise to tell all this to me."

"Because you tell again? Oh, no, ma'am! I squeeze harder next time—and there are other things. This is good old establish firm, no risk taken."

And Dutch Fridji came slowly towards Amaryllis.

"You make love with my Alban," she said, "an' I stop it." Lifting her skirt, she fetched from a sheath in her stocking a sharp-pointed knife. "I have enough of

you. Two months I must say 'ma'am'! And now, it is Alban!"

"You mean to kill me?" asked Amaryllis.

Dutch Fridji was like the nightmare vision of a Fury.

For a moment Amaryllis was paralyzed. But Fridji liked the clatter of her own tongue.

"It is that I mean," she said. "To kill you very slow. Your beautiful frock, it burn now. Soon your shoes, your stockings, your long petticoat, the corset shall burn, till there shall not be a shred they can say was yours. And then the body shall be burned—but first carve and chopped like meat at table."

Amaryllis gasped and shuddered, giving fuel to the blaze, so that it crackled once more into fierce indiscretion.

"I tell you things. Oh, yes, I tell. For the last one that died—it was a pity. He did not know before—knew not ever what was coming to him and to each part of him. That spoil the flavour of my dish, do you see?"

A flourish of the knife put expressive finish to the words.

Amaryllis backed into the corner between bed and door, speaking any word that came. On equal terms she would have fought for life like a cat, but the knife——

"Mr. Melchard doesn't want me to be killed," she said.

For a moment Fridji's rage choked her.

"I'll scream, and he'll come with his men."

"With this I have sent him running from your door," cried Fridji. "It is locked this side, and you will bleed to die before they break it."

Not rushing, but creeping, Dutch Fridji approached.

Amaryllis raised her eyes towards the window and the strip of sky it framed, in silent supplication. And already, half through the window, she saw her answer.

And Fridji saw her victim's face flush with hope, and turned to see its cause.

Through the opening which Amaryllis had left between sill and sash, his hands on the floor, his chin almost touching it, while his legs from knee to feet were

still outside the window, she saw Dick Bellamy.

Fridji, with blood in her mind, knife in her hand, and the proof of Amaryllis' face that this was an enemy, sprang to deal with the defenceless intruder.

Amaryllis had seen the lank black hair, no longer sleek, and had received one gleam from the uplifted blue eyes; and now knew terror such as she had not felt even for herself.

Nothing, it seemed, could come between the knife and Dick Bellamy—Dick who had come to her. And then she saw his left arm dart forward—an arm that seemed, on the floor, to shoot out to twice its natural length—and its fingers gripped Fridji's left ankle, jerking it towards him.

The woman fell backwards, and Amaryllis caught her from behind.

"Stop her mouth," said Dick from the floor.

And the girl, her long hands almost meeting round Fridji's slender neck, squeezed with all her strength, forcing the head and shoulders to the ground.

Fridji gaped for breath.

"Stuff her mouth—blanket," said Dick, with his feet almost clear of the window-sill, yet keeping his hold on the ankle.

Amaryllis forced the corner of the coverlet between Fridji's teeth and held it there, keeping up the pressure of the other hand on the throat.

"That's what they did to me," she thought.

Dick stood beside her.

"Change with me," he whispered, and slid his left hand round the front of Dutch Fridji's neck. Amaryllis stood up.

By the hold of his left, Dick raised the woman almost to her feet and, measuring his distance, struck her with his right fist on the left side of the neck directly below the ear—a short, sharp blow, the sound of which affected the watching girl with a pang of physical sickness.

It might have been the noise made by a butcher flinging a slab of raw steak upon his block.

Dick let the woman's body gently back to the floor, and Amaryllis saw that she was unconscious as a corpse.

"Is she dead?" she said softly.

"For five minutes—p'r'aps ten," he answered. "Where's the key?"

Amaryllis picked it up from the floor.

"Melchard said he'd got four men downstairs—armed," she whispered.

"Heard him—but it's the only way—they've fixed that window. Just scraped in head first and we can't get out like that. Come on," said Dick, and put the key in the lock.

"I've—I haven't got—haven't got any clothes." And there was no other expression of shame in her face than the two large tears that gathered slowly in her eyes.

But Dick Bellamy ignored them, looking her up and down like a man considering the harness needed for a horse.

"Take off her skirt," he said; then added: "Shoes might do." And with his back turned to the girl, he knelt and quickly unshod Dutch Fridji while Amaryllis unfastened the waistband of the skirt.

"Yours wouldn't last a mile," said Dick, going to the window and looking out. "Put 'em on quick—say when."

In a time wonderfully short, he thought, for a girl, she spoke.

"I'm ready," said the small voice; and he turned to face a quaint figure in a skirt too short, and too wide on the hips. The brogue shoes would have looked better if the stockings had been of anything but green silk.

But the pathos of sentiment and custom was in the bare arms and the two hands crossed on the chest and throat, with fingers spread in vain attempt to cover the whole; and in the plaintive simplicity of the voice which said:

"But, oh, my neck! I can't possibly get into her blouse, and a blanket's too conspicuous."

Dick stripped off his Norfolk jacket, holding it for her arms. As she hesitated, glancing at him, he frowned.

"Please obey orders," he said, and she meekly slipped on the loose coat. He took from its pocket a folded white handkerchief, and tied it round her neck by two adjacent corners, so that it hung like a child's bib. Amaryllis pulled the collar up over the knot at the back, and began to button the coat over the linen.

"Don't button it," he said, pulling off his necktie. "Cross the edges. Lift your arms."

And he tied the dark green strip round her waist, knotting it in front.

"Come on," he said; and, stooping, picked up Fridji's knife. "Where's the sheath?"

"In her stocking," said Amaryllis.

"Get it," said Dick, and unlocked the door.

Amaryllis behind him whispered: "She moved a little," and brought him the leather sheath.

They stepped silently into the passage. Dick locked the door and pocketed the key.

"Quietly," he said, and as they crept towards the stairhead, he slid the sheathed knife into the pocket of the tweed jacket.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STAIRS.

The passage ended in an arch, beyond which appeared a balustrade.

The corridor was wider than the archway; and Dick, having made the girl hide behind its projection, stepped delicately out upon the square landing, and looked over the rails.

The staircase mounted in a single broad flight from the floor of an entrance hall larger and more pretentious than he had expected. The attempt at an appearance of comfort was a failure, but money had been spent, and a sort of bad harmony between furniture and decoration forced itself upon the eye.

Across the hall, to the left, the front door stood open to the sunlight. In the wall facing him and the stair's foot were two closed doors, and others, doubtless, to match them, beneath the gallery on which he stood.

He had already made up his mind to lead the girl noiselessly down the stair and through the open door, and thence to make, if necessary, a running fight for it, with the chance of taking his pursuers in detail, when he heard a man's steps, accompanied by a faint tinkle of china, coming towards the hall, he judged, along the corridor immediately beneath that which he and Amaryllis had used.

Something, he remembered, had been said of breakfast, to be sent up, and he waited until there appeared, first the tray and then the man that carried it; a thick-set fellow, with heavy boots, shabby clothes, and a bald spot among the rough sandy hair of his crown.

It was plain that he was making for the stair, and Dick drew back behind the projection of the arch, opposite to Amaryllis. He saw the questions in her eyes and knew she could hear the approaching footsteps.

He made a gesture for silence; a silence which seemed to Amaryllis to last immeasurable time, while tea-cup tinkled against milk-jug, ever nearer and nearer.

She saw him take a swift glance through the arch at the corner she could not see,

draw back three steps up the passage, and start forward again with a face that made her heart jump, and a terrific limping rush of three or four strides to the stairhead. And she craned forward just in time to see the man with the tray, two steps from the top, receive in his stomach a kick which lifted, it seemed, the wretched creature and all that he carried in a single flight to the bottom of the stair.

After a little clash of plates and cups on the impact of the kick, there was a sensible silence before the appalling crash and thud at the stair's foot. Amaryllis held back a scream, but reeled as if fainting.

Dick caught her by the shoulders and shook her, as women will shake a child.

"Buck up," he said; and she clung to his hands a moment. Then,

"I'm all right," she murmured, and stood alone.

Even as she spoke it seemed that in the hall below three doors opened at once, and that from each rushed a man, clamouring questions; and then, having seen the clutter of tray and crockery, stood aghast.

Dick, after one glimpse of the three so standing, took cover again, drawing the girl with him.

"Looks as if he fell backwards right from the top," said a bass voice, which Dick ascribed to the big man with the black beard who had seemed to carry himself somewhat above the others.

"Slipped 'is foot and pitched backwards, and 'e ain't 'arf copped it."

"But why backwards?" asked Black Beard. And Dick imagined a suspicious glance at the stairhead.

"I guess 'e try save tray and lose *balanza* of 'eemself," said a third, whose exotic voice and uneasy English affected Dick with an undefined reminiscence.

"Carry the fool to his kennel, you two," said Black Beard. And Dick heard the crushing under foot and the kicking aside of broken china, and a shuffling of two pairs of feet.

But they had not gone many yards with their burden, when he heard a fourth man enter the hall, and a voice in which langour strove in vain against asperity—Melchard's voice, which he had heard for the first time while he clung with his

fingers to the window-sill of the bedroom and with his shoe-tips to the string-course below it, sinking his head even below his defenceless knuckles.

At the sound of this voice Dick now stretched himself prone, and wriggled, Amaryllis thought, like some horrid worm, laying his left cheek to the floor until he reached a point where his right eye got its line of sight, between the uprights of the gallery's balustrade, on the four live men and the inert, midway between the door out of sight beneath him, and the place where the broken tea-pot had spilt its contents in an ugly pool near the lowest tread of the stair.

"What's that?" Melchard had said. "Oh, put it down." And they laid the body on the floor.

Melchard looked from Black Beard to the cockney, and back.

"Is it beer again? I said not more than a tumbler of whisky before lunch. Beer always plays hell with him."

"Then you should give 'im 'arshish, sir," said the cockney. "It's the Injin 'emp 'e needs. But 'e ain't smelt beer since we left Millsborough. Somethin's just appeared to 'im, and 'e ain't 'arf copped it."

"Appeared? Tell me what happened," said Melchard, querulously.

"Fell right down the stair, tray and all," said Black Beard, "just as if he'd been pushed."

Melchard was stooping over the scarce breathing body.

"He's not dead," he declared.

"He will be," said Black Beard, "unless you 'phone to Millsborough for a doctor damn quick."

"Don't be a fool, Ockley. Better let him die than bring a sharp-witted medical practitioner to *my* house, to-day of all days."

"If we have a death here in *your* house," Ockley retorted, "they'll want to know *how* and *why* and *when*. And 'no doctor called'—and 'this shady Mr. Melchard'—and all the damned things that always happen. Will that be good for your health—with the whole game in your hands, too?"

Melchard was hit, and Dick thought that he saw his face lose colour.

"Well?" he said nervously.

"Either fetch medical aid," replied Ockley, "or bury him under the ash-heap. And that's going a bit far for an accident."

"Was he pushed? I wonder," said Melchard; and the pair, with heads together, spoke in whispers inaudible to Dick, who writhed himself six inches back from the baluster, in fear of the upward glance which might come at any moment.

He had heard enough, and his usual policy came into play.

Amaryllis was able to watch him without exposing herself to the eyes of the enemy; for they had gathered round the injured tray-bearer so near to her side of the hall that the floor of the gallery shut off their view of anything below the top of the arch round whose side she peered, crouching low.

Dick, then, she saw moving snake-wise to the stair; and she marvelled that, even in the hush of the voices below, no slightest sound of his movement reached her ear. Chin first, his head disappeared over the first step, the long body dragging after it, half-inch by half-inch, until all of him that she could see was the thick soles of his boots, clinging, as it appeared, by their toes to the edge of the highest step.

Her heart shook for his danger, which now so closely embraced her own that she forgot its separate significance.

The voices rose again.

"But you're a qualified man yourself," said Melchard. "You'll be responsible."

"Fat lot of good that'll do you," replied Black Beard. "Qualified, by God! When I can't prove it without proving also that I'm off the register, and that my name's not Ockley!" He broke off with an ugly laugh, then added: "Let's go up and see."

And now Amaryllis saw her serpent shoot up to a great rod of vengeance. Before she could ask herself, "What is he going to do?" Dick Bellamy had done it; vaulting, even as he rose, over the rail of the stair, and, with an appalling scream which might have come from a maniac in frenzy, or the mortal agony of a wounded beast, literally falling upon his enemies.

His right foot caught Melchard between jaw and shoulder, shooting him supine and headlong upon the polished floor until his head hit the corner of the stone

kerb about the hearth; while the left knee simultaneously struck the cockney, who fell, with Dick's crouching weight full upon him, heavily to the ground; and Amaryllis, fear forgotten, leaning over the rail, heard at the same moment, but as separate sounds, the blow of the under man's head upon the boards and that of Dick's right fist on its left jaw.

Then Dick was on his feet again, but barely in time. For in the clamour and rushing fall of this wild figure, clad in grey flannel trousers and blue shirt, with lank black hair flying stiffly up and away from the savage mouth and blazing blue eyes, Ockley had leapt back out of reach. But the little Spaniard, standing apart, was astonished; his dark eyes showed wide rings of white eyeball, and the open mouth teeth even whiter, as he stared, aghast yet curious, at the living thunderbolt which had fallen so near to him.

Ockley, however, directly his eyes had taken in what he had leapt back from, had begun what even Amaryllis could see was the rush of an expert. He did not, indeed, catch Dick upon his knees, as she had feared, but left him little time to steady himself. She could see that the big man was brave, and as strong as a bull, so that hers looked slender by comparison.

But Dick was less unprepared than he seemed. Arms hanging and face vacuous, he side-stepped smartly to the left, escaping a swinging right aimed at his head, and, as the great body passed, drove a short, heavy left punch under the still raised right arm, which shook Ockley severely and, increasing the impetus of his attack, sent him staggering against the balustrade of the stair.

And now the Spaniard found what he had been looking for.

"Por Dios!" he wailed, "it iss Limping Deek!" and so fled.

Dick followed up his advantage, forcing the pace, but Ockley would have none of it until he had worked himself into the middle of the floor; then suddenly coming again, got home with a tremendous right which Dick failed to stop with anything better than his left cheek-bone.

The blow was well timed and delivered with the full force of a strong man fighting scientifically, perhaps for his life; and Dick Bellamy knew that, hard as he kept himself, he could not afford to take another of its kind.

Crouching, he watched Black Beard between his fists which protected his face, the perpendicular fore-arms guarding his body; and in the moment while his

sight was clearing, he heard, from somewhere above him, a little agonized moan, and found himself again.

Ockley, elated, pursued his advantage with a savage left drive which might have proved worse for Dick than the right which had just split his cheek, had he not, ducking to his right in perfect time, met the big man with a heavy left jolt in the mouth, and, simultaneously advancing his right foot and straightening his body, followed it up with a right to the jaw that knocked his opponent full length. He fell and lay beyond the projection of the hearth on the other side of which was Melchard, still as death.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE KNIFE-THROWER.

With the sleeve of his shirt Dick wiped the blood from his cheek, looked down at Ockley, and then up at Amaryllis, half-way down the stair.

"That's four. Where's the fifth?" he asked.

"He ran out there," she answered. "You frightened him."

"Come down," said Dick; and when she reached the floor, she found him kneeling by Melchard, searching his pockets.

She came close and touched him on the shoulder.

"Let's get out of the house—now, now!" she pleaded, lowering her voice in the presence of so much that looked like death.

"Pocket these," said Dick, handing behind him some letters and a pocket-book.

With a sharp tug he disengaged the side-pocket wedged between Melchard's body and the floor, and from it took out a small parcel wrapped in white paper. Of its two seals one had been broken. He peered into the opened end.

"Small bottle—white powder," he said.

"That's it," replied Amaryllis. "Do let's go—please."

"Was there anything else?" he asked.

"Oh, do come away. I'm frightened," said the girl, imploring.

"So'm I—badly," said Dick, and rose to his feet.

The letters from Melchard's pocket were still in her hand. He took them, and picked out a white envelope with no writing on it. The wax seal had been broken.

He drew from it a sheet of paper, and unfolded it before her.

"That's the formula—it must be," said Amaryllis.

"Let's hook it, then," said Dick, buttoning the package and envelope into his hip-pocket, and slipping the rest of Melchard's papers into the side pocket of his own jacket, hanging loosely on Amaryllis.

As they crossed the hall he missed Ockley.

"My God!" he cried. "The black bloke's gone. Did you see him go—or hear him?"

Amaryllis shook her head.

"I thought I'd given him a five-minute dose at least," said Dick on the threshold, and taking her left elbow in his hand, began to run. "We've got to grease like hell. It's a mile and a half to my car."

They were half-way to the pretentious gate, and Amaryllis was already distressed by the pace, when they heard behind them the thud of a revolver. A twig with two leaves, cut from a branch above and beyond them, fell into the road. Dick increased his pace, so that Amaryllis was only kept from falling by his firm hold of her arm.

A second shot hit the drive behind them, spraying their backs with gravel.

"High. Low, to left—jump!" yelled Dick, swinging the girl leftward past his body with a force so sudden that she fell on the grass at the roadside, in the shelter of an artificial knoll covered with shrubs; and this time Dick heard the bullet close on his right.

He threw himself on the grass, sharing her cover.

"All right?" he asked.

Speechless for lack of breath, Amaryllis nodded, trying to smile.

"You can't run to the gate," he said, rather as if speaking to himself than to her. "Wind's gone already, and it's a hundred yards without cover. To the bank of the road's only about twenty-five. Breathe deep. Is my cap in that pocket still?"

Amaryllis found and gave it to him. Dick, unrolling it, rose slowly to his knees, facing the rhododendron bush.

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed the girl.

"Wouldn't, if I'd got a stick. Listen; he's using an Army Webley, I think. Six shots. He's fired three. If I can draw the second three before he fills up, it gives us a start while he reloads."

On his knees, he peered through the bush.

"Still at the door," he said. "Breathe deep. On the third shot we go for the embankment. I'll get you up it. Then over the road. There's timber that side as well as this."

Again Amaryllis nodded, and Dick, rising a little higher, disposed the cap between two clumps of leaves, where he hoped it would seem supported by his head.

"Real G. A. Henty stunt, ain't it?" he said. "But I've shaken him up a bit, and it's worth trying."

He raised the cap slightly, let it drop back again on the rhododendron leaves, and laid himself full length on the ground.

"Third shot—if it comes. Breathe deep," he repeated.

There was a pause, agonizing to the girl; and then it came.

Three shots, thumping in rapid succession, the last of them depositing the cap almost in her hands. Clutching it, she scrambled to her feet, and Dick, catching her by the arm beneath the shoulder, forced her into a thirty yards' sprint, in which, while her heart beat as if it would burst, her feet seemed to touch the ground barely half a dozen times before the grey stones of the embankment rushed to meet them almost in the face.

How he managed to force her to the top and bundle her over the parapet, she could never remember, any more than she could forget Ockley's next shot, which was discharged as their figures showed against his sky-line for the two seconds which it took them to cross the road and fling themselves recklessly down the slope of its other side.

"Brace up," said Dick at the bottom. "You've got some guts, anyhow; and once we're well into that undergrowth, your hairy friend may come after us with a Vickers and be damned to him."

To get to it he had to lift her over a swampy patch in a hollow to a stony place

beyond it; whereafter they were soon as well hidden from the road as its outline lay exposed to the search of their eyes.

But Amaryllis at first left the watching to his, closing her own and lying still, in sheer womanly terror of being sick. Somewhere within was a doubt as to whether she did not already adore him, and a pitiable anxiety that "nothing horrid" should be associated in his mind with her person.

Dick, lying at full length, turned his eyes every now and again from his watch on the road to look at the girl's face; and saw, with anxiety as well as pity, how pale it was, and how wasted already by hunger, fear and running—and perhaps by the drug they had given her the night before. He must ask no further exertion of her until she was fed and rested.

His object was to make his way as quickly as possible to "The Coach and Horses," his car, and safety.

But he dared not move from this shelter, nor even stand upright, until he knew what Ockley intended. Already he had tasted the man's quality, and, with the girl on his hands, held him in healthy fear.

"They've gone too far," he reflected, "to back out."

Had Black Beard been playing 'possum when he ought to have been laid out? He must, it would seem, have been pretty fit all the time to get away without making a sound.

Then a thought which sent fear through him like a knife:

"If he saw or heard what we took from that scented swine, no wonder he's shooting to kill. It's God's judgment on me for a fool—a fool that believed in peace and policemen. Limping Dick on a gaff like this without a gun!"

And then he saw a figure, clear against the sky, standing on the road, at the head of the path by which, three-quarters of an hour ago, he himself had gone up to get his first view of "The Myrtles."

It was Ockley; even at three hundred yards Dick could distinguish the black beard and heavy shoulders of the enemy, who was gazing from his high point, not in the direction of the fugitives, but along the moorland path to "The Coach and Horses"—the path which lay open to his eye for its whole length.

"Easy to guess the way I want to go," Dick calculated, "and easier to see that I haven't dared take it." Then, as Ockley turned his head towards the trees, "and easiest of all," he added aloud, "to spot the only cover."

Amaryllis opened her eyes, and he saw that her face was less grey.

"What is it?" she asked.

"The Hairy One," said Dick, "looking for us."

"But he can't see us, can he?"

"No. That's why he knows where we are. He's coming down."

"Don't be worried, Dick," said Amaryllis softly. "You'll get the best of him again. You've been splendid."

"I've been a fool."

"Why?" she asked.

"To be caught without a gun. I could have killed him."

"Would you?"

"It's he or us."

Her answer surprised him. There was no fear in her face, but sympathy filled it; and a little colour came.

"Then you will kill him," she said with assurance. "I'll do whatever you say, and we'll beat him."

Dick nodded. "See those hazels?" he said. "We'll scrounge behind 'em to start with."

By the time they were settled in the new cover they could hear heavy feet in the distance, crashing through the low tangle of undergrowth. And Amaryllis, fear cast out by trust, and her physical prostration for the moment counteracted by the intensity of her interest in him, and by her curiosity to see how next his versatility of resource would show itself, watched Dick's face as he listened to the feet of his enemy. Each step, she thought, had a different shade of meaning for him. His left ear seemed to follow, and his eyes seemed to see each stride of the hunter, and at last he spoke:

"He's working along this side of the embankment. Now he's in the track that cuts through this copse. We're close to it here—see, through there, between the beech and the young oak. Hear his feet: stones, puddle, soft rut," he said rhythmically. "Caught his foot. He's following the path—going slower—walking, and trying to look both sides at once in the undergrowth."

A pause, and then he said, with a jerk:

"Take that coat off."

Amaryllis obeyed, and lay still.

Beside the rutted cart-track, a few yards from where they lay, was a pile of brushwood, cut and stacked for fuel. From this, with a cautious eye and ear on the bend where the track twisted out of sight in the direction of the high road, he took an armful of sticks and twigs and buttoned round it the Norfolk jacket. He tore grass in great handfuls and stuffed the ends of the sleeves, Amaryllis helping eagerly as she seized his purpose.

He next took the Dutchwoman's knife from the dummy's pocket and dragged the rude torso to the side of the woodstack furthest from the expected approach, pushing it out across the track, so that, buttons downward, with left arm extended beyond the head which was not there, the right doubled beneath the breast, and the thrice-perforated cap, with a bunch of grass beneath it, dropped within the bend of the supposed left elbow, and the non-existence of legs concealed by the wood-pile, it might well be mistaken, by one coming down the wheel-track from the road, for a man stricken or sleeping.

Behind them was a small, deep hollow, where the ancient stump of some great tree had rotted.

"Get down there," said Dick. "Don't stand, roll in and curl up."

And the last she saw of him as she obeyed, was the back of the black head and the blue shirt, rising erect some ten yards up the track from the wood-pile, making themselves small behind the largest tree-trunk in sight, and the gently swaying right hand poising in its palm Dutch Fridji's knife.

Then she obeyed orders, curled up in her musty lair, and prayed.

Heavily nearer came the footsteps—walking—walking—walking—until the girl feared she must cry out or faint. She bit through a lump of the handkerchief he

had tied round her neck for a stomacher—and then kissed it.

Suddenly came a hoarse voice, foul words uttered in furious exultation, and the feet were running—nearer—nearer—and once more—twice—the thumping note of the big revolver.

Oh! the end was coming. Her breast was squeezed in, and her head bursting. Hardly knowing what she did, she peered over the edge of the beastly, uncovered little grave, just in time to see the black brute, red-faced, in the cart-track; to see the blue arm swing, and a long glitter in the air between them; to hear a horrible sound and see what sent her back into her hole, with hands over eyes to shut out what was already inside.

And then Dick's voice, and his hand helping her out.

Standing up, she looked at him. In his face there was no blood under the brown, but his eyes were more content than she had seen them since just before she opened the letter from Melchard—a hundred years ago.

Her eyes asked him the question she could not put into words, and he nodded.

"You said I should, you know."

"You just had to, Dick," she answered.

He looked at her keenly.

"You're beat," he said. "Food's what you want; but 'The Coach and Horses' over there, where I left my car, is the only place. We must go a bit out of our way to keep out of sight of their damned house."

He went to the dummy to free the coat of its stuffing.

While he bent over, Amaryllis, fascinated yet repelled by what she could just perceive lying in the path, crept towards it—and wished she had not.

She was turning away when her eye was caught by a dull blue gleam from something in the grass beyond the body lying face downward in the deeply rutted track; and there grew in the dazed mind of the girl an impulse to see what it might be.

Averting her eyes from the dead body, she stepped delicately, as if fearing to wake it, to the other side of the way, and picked up the revolver which Ockley

had dropped in his fall.

Her heart gave a great pulse of delight. This was a thing which Dick needed, and Dick must have everything he desired.

With an exclamation of pleasure she turned to take it straight to him, forgetting the fearful thing in the road; seeing it but just in time to avoid stumbling.

At her feet was the back of the dead man's head, the face wedged into the wheel-rut, with the beard pushed up between the left cheek and the hardened edge of mud. The channel of the rut, where she could see down into it between ear and shoulder, seemed full of the blood which had dyed the shirt-collar and the shoulder of the coat.

And aimed at her eyes, like an accusing finger, there stuck out from the hairy neck the point of Dutch Fridji's knife.

An absurd sense of guilt, maudlin pity for mere death, and dread of the unknown, crowding in cruel rivalry to destroy her weakened self-control, sent her staggering to Dick over ground which seemed to rise and fall like the sea. For she was keeping hold on common sense by the thought that there was something that Dick wanted—what, she had forgotten—but she had it, and he must have it.

He had seen her bending over Ockley, and went to meet her.

Dimly she saw him, and stretched out her hands, lifting the pistol.

"It's for you," she said; and fainted, falling forward into his arms.



CHAPTER XIV.

PENNY PANSY.

Dick Bellamy lifted the girl and carried her to a spot where he could lay her down with head a little lower than heels; watched her until the colour of the face improved and the breath became more regular; and then made use of her insensibility to pay his last duty to the dead.

Without moving the body, he went through the pockets, finding nothing worth keeping except a few letters and a bunch of keys; for revolver cartridges there were none.

For a moment he regarded the grim dagger point, deciding to leave it where it was.

"If Melchard finds it," he thought, "he'll think it's something to do with his little Dutch trollop."

Returning to Amaryllis, he stood once more looking down at her.

He could not carry her in her present state two miles across the moor in the growing heat, and with only one of their five enemies safely dead, while the four others hung on his flank, cunning and desperate, if able to think and act.

And there was Fridji—she was surely herself again—either screaming or at liberty.

His own stomach, in spite of his few mouthfuls at "The Coach and Horses," reminded him that Amaryllis had not eaten during the last thirteen, or fourteen hours.

A little breeze had arisen, blowing from the south-east, and brought with it to his nostrils the smell of wood-smoke. He looked at the pile of cut wood.

"I ought to have known," he thought; and stooping, raised the girl, still unconscious, tied the jacket by the arms round her neck, and lifting her so that her waist was against his shoulder, set out to windward, following the wheel-tracks.

Ten minutes' steady walking brought him to a bend in the path which showed him the smoke he had been smelling, rising from the brick chimney of a squat stone cottage which, rather than to nestle among the woods, as well-behaved cottages should, seemed to shrink from the ragged timber which surrounded it.

Beside the door, on a battered kitchen chair, sat a woman, reading what Dick took for a newspaper. As he drew nearer she rose, and picked up a tin wash-basin full of corn; and to the "Coop, coop, coop," of her melancholy voice came clucking and scrambling chickens and hens in grand flutter of greed.

Her eyes were on them as she scattered the grain, and Dick could see her clearly enough to wish he had a man to deal with, before the sound of his steps rose above the clamour of the poultry, and the woman looked up.

If he had taken, at that moment, any interest in his own appearance, he would have expected her to scream; for the chicken-feeder raised her eyes to see, limping towards her, clad in muddy boots, torn grey trousers and blue cotton shirt with streaks of drying blood down the left breast, a tall, dark-haired man, carrying a woman hanging across his shoulder.

And on the man's left cheek was a bruised cut, swelled, and clotted over with dried blood, which had run down in a stream, flowing over the jaw and ending at the collar; and all the way the drying rivulet had clung to the dark stubble of a twenty-four hours' beard.

For the rest, sweat, dust, fasting and sleeplessness had made of this a face whose horror was but increased by the alertness of the eyes, which shone with so shocking a blueness that the woman, finding them unlike any eyes which she had seen before, called them to herself, "evil eyes—the eyes of a desperate man."

Being a person of some courage, she managed with an effort to keep her hold of the basin and to scatter the remaining grains among the fowls before addressing her terrific visitor.

"You're trespassin'," she said, with harsh self-possession. And from the grass she picked up her cheap magazine and dropped it into the basin which she had just slapped down on the bench by the door.

On the thin paper cover Dick read *The Penny Pansy*.

"It is not trespassing, madam," he replied in a voice whose ingratiating quality was devoid of affectation, "—it can't be trespassing for a man in great need to

come for help to the nearest house."

"I'm too poor to help the poorest," objected the woman, "and I don't like your luggage, sir." And she wondered why she had *sirred* a cut-throat looking ruffian such as this.

Dick Bellamy wondered why the woman, in this lonely place, spoke so differently from the landlord of "The Coach and Horses." But he remembered *The Penny Pansy*, and felt for an opening.

Her gaze reminded him of his blood.

"It is not, madam," he said impressively, "a corpse that I carry; though how long the lady will survive, unless you can furnish us with nourishment and shelter, I dare not conjecture. This blood which you see is my own, spent in her defence."

He sat down on a chopping-block not far from the door, sliding Amaryllis to his knees, and resting her head against his shoulder.

"You can't sit there all day nursing a great, grown girl, like she was a child," said the woman.

"That is indeed true," he replied. "And therefore I beg you to let us rest in your house until the young lady is fit to travel."

"It's easy to talk of travelling," she objected with sour insolence. "But 'tis my belief that, once let the hussy in, I'll never be rid of her."

"My desire to be gone," replied Dick, "by far outweighs any anxiety of yours, my good woman."

"Are you her husband?" asked the woman, impressed, but trying to keep the severity from fading out of her face.

"Not yet," replied Dick, assuming an expression of extreme solemnity. "About us two, madam, hangs a web of mystery. It is a story I should like to confide in you, for there is something in your face which reminds me of my old mother," and he brought a note of pathos into his voice, straight from the pages of "East Lynne," words and tone coming with an ease which surprised him.

"There's naught preventing," said the woman, expectantly.

"Except that the lady needs rest, I want a wash, and we both want food," said

Dick. "You just be as kind as you look, and I'll give you a pound for every half-hour we spend in your house, and, if there's time, a romance into the bargain. You know what's stranger than fiction, don't you, mother?"

"The truth, they do say. But I dunno," she answered, doubtfully.

"What has happened to me in the last twenty-four hours," said Dick, "would shame the most exciting serial in the *Millsborough Herald*."

"'Tis the *Courier* has the best," interrupted the woman eagerly.

"Mine will knock spots off the *Courier*—if we have time for it," said Dick, in the tone of dark suggestion.

"Bring her in," said the woman, curiosity prevailing. "I'll do my best for you both;" and Dick, rising with care not to disturb his now sleeping burden, carried it into the cottage.

The little house consisted of a large kitchen and two bedrooms opening from it. The woman, now almost hospitable, opened one of the inner doors.

"My son Tom's room," she said, with some pride. "He's away to Millsborough. Better put the lady in here. 'Tis a better bed than mine, and all clean and tidy for him against he comes on Monday."

She sighed heavily over some thought of her son, and watched her strange guest lay his strange load on the bed.

The idea that under this ill-fitting, already draggled skirt, and loose, ridiculous man's jacket were concealed the fine skin and well-tended person of a lady, filled her with expectation of romance. If the *Millsborough Herald* had taught her to despise the "low moral tone" of those who ride in carriages and know not hardship, the *Penny Pansy*, in its own inimitable manner, had compelled her to believe that they possessed a distinction which she could not define.

They were "dainty" in appearance, "delicate" in thought, and "very pale" in love or tragic circumstances.

But this one—if lady indeed she were—was pale with exhaustion, perhaps hunger, as any woman might be; and yet through it all there shone dimly something which reminded her of the romance she had drunk from the shallow and sluggish channel of machine-made fiction.

If this were a heroine, then the queer, persuasive man, bloody and blue-eyed, was the hero—and his kind she knew neither in *Penny Pansy's* country nor her own.

"Half a dozen eggs, please, laid to-day. I give half a crown apiece for eggs, if I like 'em," said Dick. "Got any brandy, whisky, or gin? And what's your name?"

"Brundage, sir."

"And the name of this place?"

"Monkswood Cottage, near Margetstowe."

"Well, then, Mrs. Brundage—about that brandy?"

"There is a drop of rum—for medicine, so to say," admitted Mrs. Brundage, with a cold simper.

"Good medicine too," he said. "Lady Adelina will take some in the eggs I'm going to beat up for her. For me, get bacon and eggs, tea, and bags of bread and butter. See, she's opening her eyes. I'll leave you to look after her."

Outside the cottage door, he examined the revolver Amaryllis had given him. Of its six cartridges, four had been discharged. But two might make all the difference; and, after all, he had only to get Amaryllis to the car, or the car to Amaryllis.

And as he walked round the cottage, watching the woods, reflection led him more and more to believe that he had shaken himself free of his enemies. All but the Woman and the Dago were more or less damaged; none, it was probable, knew in what direction Ockley had disappeared; fear of the evidence he held against them might now prompt them rather to flight than pursuit; and what, he asked himself, could that yellow-haired she-devil, even if the little Dago that had bolted were faithful to his fellows, do against him now?

Amaryllis should have her rest.

Passing her window, he heard her talking rapidly, her words broken by sobs which pained him, and snatches of laughter which hurt him more.

He met Mrs. Brundage at the door.

"She's feared of me—pushes me away," she whispered. "Highsterical, you may

call it. If you're Dick, sir, it's you she wants. I've got her in bed, but I don't promise she'll stay there."

He pushed past her, saw the rum-bottle and the eggs set out on the kitchen table, took a tumbler and spoon from the dresser, and broke the first egg into the glass.

"Sugar," he said, "and milk."

Mrs. Brundage gave him both, with a quickness which pleased him.

"Tell her Dick's coming," he said, and the woman went, leaving the door ajar.

As he beat the eggs to a froth, he could hear her awkward attempts to soothe the girl's distress.

When the mixture was ready, "I'm coming," he called. "Dick's coming to you, sure thing," and took it into the bedroom.

"I think," he said, standing over her, "that you're making *rather* a fool of yourself."

"I know I am. But I can't stop." Then, sitting up, with tears running down her face, she sobbed out: "Don't *you* be unkind to me too."

He sat down on the edge of the bed, put an arm round her shaking body, and held the tumbler towards her.

"Drink it up," he said; and the Brundage woman noted how adroitly he avoided the hand that would have pushed away the glass.

"I don't want it. I want you. I'm safe with you."

"It's both or neither. Drink it slowly. I'll stay to the last drop," he said, smiling down at her as she had never seen him smile before.

She obeyed, looking up at him between the mouthfuls, with something like adoration in her eyes.

When only a quarter of the mixture was left in the glass, she spoke:

"You're good to me," she said.

"Of course," he answered, and she laid her head on his shoulder and slept at once.

So for a while he held her; and the watcher saw the strength and judgment with which, a little later, he lowered the head to the pillow so that the change of position never brought a quiver to the closed eyelids; and, feeling romance as never before, she let a man play sick-nurse to a maiden in bed without one censorious thought, and became dimly aware for a moment in her drab life that love and modesty, strength and beauty, safety and trust, spring to meet each other out of the hidden root of things.

Dick laid the coverlet over the girl's shoulders, and walked out of the room with a silence of which the woman achieved only an indifferent imitation.

"And him with that bad limp, too," she said to herself afterwards, "and them thick boots!"

"Breakfast," said Dick, in that low tone of his which never whispered. "Leave her door open, and our voices will make her feel safe in her sleep. Give me a towel and soap. I'll wash at the pump while you make tea."

When he had washed, eaten many eggs and drunk much tea, Mrs. Brundage thought her turn had come.

"Lady Adeline——" she began, but Dick turned on her so sudden a stare that she stopped short. And no less suddenly he remembered.

The woman's softening had made him almost willing to trust her with a condensed version of the facts. But her "Adeline" reminded him that he was already committed to a safer course.

"Adelina," he said, correcting her, "the Lady Adelina, not Adeline. Her mother, you see, Mrs. Brundage, was an Italian lady of high birth, and her exalted family were very particular about the end of the name."

To gain time he finished his tea, and lighted his pipe—his first smoke since he had left St. Albans.

"The father is an Englishman of title, who has long set his heart on a great marriage for his daughter. For months, nay, years, the high-spirited Lady Adelina has resisted the idea of yoking herself with a man she dislikes and for whom she has no respect."

"Poor young lady," sighed Mrs. Brundage. The familiar tale was alive with reality for her. "Now I'll lay the father's a baronet," she said.

"You have great insight, Mrs. Brundage. But it is worse than that: he is a marquis. Well, just before I first met her, Adelina, worn out by her father's alternate cajolery and brutality, had yielded, almost promising to do as he wished. It was during the war——"

"That war!" exclaimed Mrs. Brundage. "It's got a deal to answer for. Now, there's Tom; it's changed his heart from cows and horses to motor-cars and airyplanes."

"It was in a hospital——" said Dick.

"Them hospitals!" she interrupted. "I know 'em. And very dangerous institootions I consider 'em."

"I see you do—so you will understand that part. When we had made the discovery that each was the only thing in the world to the other, and she had told her father, the Marquis of Ontario, that she would wed none but me, his anger was so terrible that I dared no longer leave her beneath his roof. There was nothing for it but——"

"An elopement!" burst from Mrs. Brundage.

Dick nodded.

"We did it—last night, in my car. But about four miles from Millsborough, we had an accident. You've seen my face, Mrs. Brundage, but you haven't seen my car. And we knew that the Marquis was not far behind us. So we dragged ourselves along the ditch into which we had fallen, and hid. At dawn we saw him go tearing by in his sumptuous sixteen-cylinder electric landaulette. After that——"

A crunching of gravel outside brought a not inconvenient interruption to this romance.

Dick was out of the kitchen like a flash, his right hand in the pocket of his jacket.

Mrs. Brundage heard a voice that was not his, and words of a language she had never heard before. Having no reason to fear anything worse than the Marquis of Ontario, she followed her hero with a stride as swift and almost as silent as his own.

Before she reached the corner, she heard his voice in sharp command, answered by a rapid flow of words in a tongue and voice strange to her.

She checked her advance suddenly and noisily, heard a second order jerked out, and showed herself.

"Abajo las manos," Dick had said—just in time, for Pépe el Lagarto's hands hung by his sides once more when Mrs. Brundage came round the corner and caught her first sight of him.

A small, dingy-faced man, with fear in the lines of his mouth, but a pathetic, dog-like trust in his eyes, stood looking up at the stern master who, it seemed, had caught him unawares.

Mrs. Brundage did not like the new-comer, nor the aspect of this meeting.

"Who is this man, Mr.—Mr. Dick?" she asked.

He turned upon her with surprise so well-feigned that she fully believed he had not heard her coming.

"He's my chauffeur, Mrs. Brundage," he said. "He is of Spanish blood, born in the Republic of La Plata. With the skill which is second nature to him he has tracked me to your house—to tell me that my car is already repaired, and that the Earl of Toronto—er—the Marquis of Ontario is sending out party after party to search the whole countryside for us. With your permission, Pépe el Lagarto will remain here until the Lady Adelina is able to proceed, when he will guide us to the place where the car is concealed."

Dick led the way back to the Brundage kitchen, where he made this strange servant sit down, and set before him half a tumbler of rum.

"I hope," he said magnificently, "that you will pardon my listening to a full account of his doings. It is in the interest of the Lady Adelina that I should know everything; and the conclusion of my narrative to you, Mrs. Brundage, must, I regret to say, be postponed."

He turned to Pépe, and spoke in the lazy Spanish of the Argentine.

"And now, you dog," he said, with manner as smooth as his words were harsh, "how dare you come fawning on me, after helping these filthy, misbegotten sons of Satan to kidnap a lady?"

Pépe writhed with discomfort and apprehension, even while his eyes continued to adore his idol over the rim of the glass from which he sipped his rum. And

this contradiction in expression interested Mrs. Brundage so much that she went quietly about her work, hoping by hard listening to steal some meaning from the soft words which came pouring out in exculpation.



CHAPTER XV.

THE LIZARD.

Pépe el Lagarto was pleading his innocence of the only thing which he counted sin, and asseverating his devotion to the only being he loved; and this, condensed, is the story to which Mrs. Brundage attached all meanings but the right one.

He had been in THEIR hands, oh! many months. He did what THEY would, so long as they paid him in coca-leaf to chew, a little cocaine when the leaves ran out, and enough food to live by.

THEY could get coca-leaf—but the Lizard could get it from no other. Nothing mattered but the leaves—and Dicco el Cojeante. Five years it was since Pépe had seen him; Pépe had taken to the sea once more to find him, perhaps, in England.

Oh, yes! Last night they had brought in a woman—a lady abducted. He would have put his knife in her, had THEY so bidden him—until he knew that she was El Cojeante's woman. Now, he would knife THEM, any or all, before El Cojeante's woman should lose a hair.

As he knew the sun at his rising, so surely had he known El Cojeante when he had struck his first blow at the doctor that was a black bull. He had run from the house lest El Cojeante should slay Pépe before knowing him.

Hidden as the Lizard they called him hides in winter, he had seen the black doctor in pursuit of El Cojeante escaping with his woman that was clad in Dutch Fridji's skirt and the loose coat of a man. And, since he knew that God and the Saints will take the side of the man whom none can outwit, Pépe crept back to the house.

Here Dick interrupted:

"You left your *compañero de grillos* for fear of the Black Bull!" he exclaimed.

Pépe smiled, shaking his head.

"It was for fear of that which came to el toro erizado," he answered. "Very wise was I, and prudent, for but three minutes since did I see him, and in his throat la navaja de la ramera Holandesa." He made a movement with his hand, and added: "I remembered the days when I and Dicco threw the knife."

He had gone back, he shamelessly continued, to learn how the land lay; for, should they be all dead, as he almost expected, for Pépe there would be pickings.

To find Dicco el Cojeante again, time was plenty, for la señorita con el pelo rojo must set the pace.

In the hall, Melchardo was not yet come back to his sense; that other that had fallen with him—Hebérito, the London man—was pouring water on Melchardo's head, while upstairs screamed la Holandesa.

And then came imperious clamour of the telephone. Pépe felt it was angry.

Boldly he pushed past the London man and went to the room of the instrument.

Through the machine spoke one Bayliss, teniente de Melchardo—chief of THOSE in Millsborough, having charge of the tooth-drawing—el negocio dental, that was a cloak to cover great traffic in cocaine, opium and hashish. And Pépe knew this Bayliss for a man, if less subtle, even more prompt and terrible in action than Melchardo himself. But when Pépe answered with a password of Melchard's, Bayliss replied with questions in a stream—what of the venture of yesterday? Had they found the new drug? Were they safe from pursuit?

And it was well for Pépe that this questioning was broken by the hand that tore the instrument from his fingers and pushed him aside. It was Melchardo, the man of sweet odours, weak upon his feet, but strong in his mind.

When Pépe would have sidled away, Melchardo bade him keep close. Driven desperate by his enemies, he must trust what friend was at hand. "Stand by lest I need thee," he had said. "For very soon there will be hell to pay, if I act not now and with vigour."

So Pépe el Lagarto sunned himself in the window, and listened. And he heard Melchardo put the whole cuadrilla de morfinistas under orders to draw a net around the man who had fled with the precious powder of the new drug and the girl who knew too much.

"For I tell you, Señor Dicco," he said, "that it is the web of a spider. He is the

great Araña that sits in the midst, to run out and to seize and to devour. It began in the Millsborough and Lowport sleeping-houses of the slant-eyed men of the sea, and spreads every day wider and wider its meshes and stays. Some day the web will cover the great towns and countries of the world, unless——"

"Unless a great Ticodromo come, Pépe. Tell thy tale quickly," said Dick.

Five parties had Melchard sent out from Millsborough; two cars, as if going to the fair and cricket match at Ecclesthorne, or the races at Timsdale-Horton, each with four men; and three motor-cycles with sidecars, two men apiece. And their five bases, as Pépe showed upon the table with bread-crumbs, were set at Gallowstree Dip, in the hollow half-way between "The Goat in Boots" and Ecclesthorne; again, hard by the railway-junction of Harthborough; thirdly, at the joining of the Ecclesthorne parish-road with the highway to London; fourthly, between this and Millsborough, at "The Coach and Horses" Inn; and fifth, by Margetstowe village, where the woodland track from Monkswood Cottage runs into the seaward road over against "The Goat in Boots."

"And so, you are caught," said Pépe, "in a cage, with horse road and rail road beyond the bars."

"And you heard all this, in the talk which Melchard made with his teniente through the telephone?" asked Dick.

"All this," replied Pépe, "is what I tell you, from what I hear, from what I know, and from what I have seen."

"Pépe, I have an automobile of great speed. It is over there at 'The Coach and Horses.' You must take us across the moor, I will creep in and get the car, while you keep the lady hidden. I will drive out, and——"

"It is too late, Dicco. For while Melchard talked and made commands, there was a sound from above of the breaking of wood and blows of a hammer, and the screaming of the woman was hushed. And before he had come to an end with the ordering, that Dutch Fury, set free by Hebéto, springs into the room of the telephone, with blood in her eyes, and half-naked. When she knew what he was about, she asked him in her sharp voice:

"'Have you told him first to find the man's car?'

"'What car? What man?' says Melchard.

"The devil that laid me out, and you fools too,' quoth Fridji. 'The man that knew who stole the girl; the man that knew where you'd taken her; the man who had her out of this house three hours after we fetched her in. He came—he *must* have come in a car, and by the London Road. And he must have left the car near by,' she cried, cursing Melchardo. 'Give me a little writing on a paper, with a signature which none can decipher, saying that the gentleman sends for his car which he left in keeping, when the master of "The Coach and Horses" put him on the way to "The Myrtles." And give me money, so that I pay him more than was promised. If that devil get to his car, he will hang us all. But I will myself drive it half-way hither,' said la Holandesa, 'and send it over the road's edge by the way.'"

And after these things, said Pépe, she went to clothe herself, Melchardo sat him down to write, and Hebéto, the London man, was set to cleaning and preparing for the road that automobile in which they had fetched la señorita roja from the south; and him, Pépe, they despatched scouting after Ocklee the Bull, to learn what might have been his luck in dealing with El Cojeante and the girl.

"And behind my teeth," he concluded, "I smiled, knowing well that I went to learn how thou hadst dealt with Ocklee."

"And how, Lagarto marrullero, shall we now deal with ourselves?" asked Dick. "Tell me that."

"Melchardo waits awhile for me and my news," murmured the Lizard thoughtfully, shifting his geographical bread-crumbs. "If I be too long away, he will move without my words to misguide him."

Then he set forth how, since Bayliss had taken his orders, there had elapsed full time for each one of the pickets to reach its post, though perhaps not yet for regular contact to have been established by the patrols betwixt point and point. But the Señorita must be waked at once and take the road with Dicco, moving towards the best, or weakest, bars of the cage; for, though the net was spread, the great spider himself was not yet amove down its spokes and round the fellow.

"Come soon," said Pépe, "and I will set you in the best way, and then back to send the Spider on the worst."

And under his soft, dog's eyes Pépe for the first time showed white, smiling teeth.

"Amigo de grillos," said Dick, in the voice which Pépe knew so well, but had never before heard unsteady, "she has not slept an hour since I thought her mind astray."

Then Pépe, fumbling at an inner pocket, spoke swiftly what wisdom was in him.

"Dicco must get gaiters, rough trousers, and a hat. La señorita must change the Dutchwoman's skirt for whatever this old dame can furnish. When I leave you, feed her always, a little at a time. Talk, make love, make laugh."

"And if the strength fail altogether?" asked Dick, for a moment humble before this wizened wisdom.

"Better the spur and the whip than the wolves should eat the mare," answered Pépe. And he drew a little box from his pocket. "It is the leaves," he said. "They are not evil like the drugs of shops and cities. If she flag and is without strength by the way, let her chew a little, whilst you fill her mind with other thoughts. Then will she endure till Dicco wins."

Dick turned to Mrs. Brundage, and, to her relief, spoke at last in English.

"Madam," he said, "the Marquis and his myrmidons must be hoodwinked. Talking of hoods and winking suggests a sun-bonnet——"

"Silly, old-fashioned things!" said the woman. "But mebbe I have one that I wore whilst Brundage was courtin'."

"And a plain blouse?" Dick continued. "And perhaps a darker skirt——"

"And hair in a plait down her back," cried the woman, greeting with a chuckle her first game of make-believe for many a long year; "your nobleman might pass his daughter twenty times like that, an' never would 'e know 'er."



CHAPTER XVI.

"THE GOAT IN BOOTS."

It was almost noon of Saturday, June the twenty-first, when a party of three halted in the shade of a few stunted hawthorns by the side of the sandy, half-made road which leads from Margetstowe village to the turnpike, which, branching from the main London Road fifteen miles to the south-west, runs north-eastward through Ecclesthorne-on-the-Moor to the sea at the mouth of the great estuary.

From this tree-clump could be seen, facing the junction of the sandy road with the metalled, the front and the swinging signboard of "The Goat in Boots." And here, that its two more ordinary-looking members might shed the oddity which they owed to the company of the third, the party was to separate.

For in Amaryllis, sleep, Dick's care and Mrs. Brundage's wardrobe had worked transformation. From the dust and mud on the thick little shoes, up over five visible inches of coarse grey stocking to clumsy amplitude of washed-out, pink-striped cotton skirt, and thence by severity of blue-linen blouse to the face lurking in the pale lavender of the quilted sun-bonnet, the eye met nothing which was not proper to the country-girl, dressed a little older, when the tail of hair swung to her body's movement, than her sixteen years required.

If the face was not so ruddy as a moorland girl's should be, and if the mark of the "smutty finger" beneath each eye suggested, out of Ireland, ill health—well, sickness and recovery are not restricted to the town, and the bright eyes, when the lids would lift, gave promise of returning health.

Dick matched her well.

With the cut cheek decently washed, the face shaved with Tom Brundage's worst razor, and a patch of flour congealing the blood of his wound, he looked very different from the ruffian who had disturbed, so short a while since, the lunch of the Brundage chickens. For his brown boots, brushed to the semblance of a shine, brown gaiters of the army cut, green cord riding-breeches which had delighted the heart of Tom Brundage until petrol prevailed over horseflesh and drove him into black; a striped waistcoat, of the old-fashioned waspish, horsey

favour, partly buttoned over a grey army shirt and loosely covered by his own Norfolk jacket, with a knotted bandanna in place of collar, made of him an odd, but wholly credible nondescript of the lower sporting world.

Men on the roads of that joyous Saturday might have asked was it whippets, horses, or the ring which best explained this lank, keen-eyed, humorous-lipped, uneven-gaited fellow; but none would have suspected a masquerade in the figure offered to their eyes with an assurance so entirely devoid of self-consciousness.

Yet to Amaryllis it was perhaps the raffish green imitation-velours Homburg hat which did most to alter Dick Bellamy's aspect; so that she would wait for a glance of his eyes to assure herself that this was indeed her wonderful friend and champion, and no new man nor changed spirit.

But Pépe, its one honest and unpretentious person, had made the whole trio bizarre and incredible.

For though, on one word from Dick, Amaryllis had given her credence and trust to the Lizard, she yet felt that he suited so ill with any English surroundings that his incongruity would show up any boggled stitch in their two disguises. So, while she nibbled the biscuit which Dick had taken from the paper in his pocket and ordered her to eat, and listened to the unintelligible valedictory advice which Pépe was ladling out in Spanish, she was longing to be alone with the gentleman who looked so impossible, and free from the company of the man who the very pricking of her thumbs told her was a criminal, in spite of the modest bearing and the uplifted gaze at his idol.

Did she also adore her Limping Dick, as Pépe his Cojeante? Was the one worship antagonistic to the other? Why then—but Amaryllis, like many another woman, was so good a logician that she knew when to halt on the road to an awkward conclusion.

Pépe at last swept off his hat in profound obeisance to "la señorita roja," took Dick's hand with reverence and his generous wad of notes without shame, and hurried back on his road to "The Myrtles."

She looked at Dick's face as his eyes followed the Lizard, and read in it an expression so strange and so mixed, that she turned again to take her own last sight of the man she was glad to be rid of.

Pépe had vanished utterly.

"Yes," said Dick, following her thought, and responsive even to the terms of her recent reflection, "he never would fit an English landscape till it swallowed him."

"'Amigo de grillos?'" said the girl. "Why do you call him that? *Amigo* must be *friend*. But *grillos*?"

"Irons—fettters," said Dick; and taking her by the arm, started in the direction of "The Goat in Boots," walking with a curiously swaggering gait which went far to mask his limp. "Amigos de grillos—fetter-pals. We were chained together for six months."

"In—in prison? Oh, Dick!" she cried, "I knew he was horrid."

"And me?"

"I know you aren't," she replied.

"I'm afraid he is, from your point of view," he replied. "But Pépe el Lagarto has one streak which interests me."

"Tell me," said Amaryllis.

And as they walked slowly towards the inn, he told her of Pépe and his coca-leaves; of the Peruvian Indians' use of them to resist hunger and fatigue; and of how the little man had given his all, which he could not replace, to help la señorita roja over the roughness of her way.

"I had to keep a little in a bit of paper to satisfy him," said Dick.

"Then he's kind to women, at least," said Amaryllis.

"When I met him, he was in for five years—murdering his wife."

"Why?"

"Found her in company he wasn't fond of," said Dick, "so he threw her out of window."

"And the—company?"

"Pépe slit its throat."

Amaryllis shuddered.

"No," resumed Dick, "you won't find any pretty Idylls of the King gadgets about Pépe. He gave you all his coca-leaves because he regarded you as El Cojeante's woman—that's all."

"Do you?" asked Amaryllis, and her colour for the first time matched her head-gear.

"For to-day—of course," he answered. "You're my daughter—and don't you forget it."

Amaryllis, if the word may be used of a sound so pleasant, giggled.

"Well, daddy dear," she replied, "I admit that your friend has a shiny streak running through his horridness. And I like him for worshipping you with his dog's eyes. And I shouldn't wonder if you often find those silver veins in queer places, dad."

She said it like a question but received no response.

"If I've caught on to Pépe's topography," he said, "the road to the right there runs on an easy downward grade for two miles, then dips sharply for another. At the lowest point—they call it Gallowstree Dip—there's another road, to the left, which runs straight to Harthborough Junction—the place we want. But at Gallowstree Dip, says Pépe, we shall find a motor-bike and side-car with two men ready to put our lights out on contact—if there aren't too many witnesses. So when we pass them we've got to be a larger party than two. So we start by going into the bar here, and you're going to swallow bread and cheese and beer, there's a good daughter."

Amaryllis nodded. "But, Dick," she said, "if they aren't at Gallowstree Dip?"

"We've got to make our plans as we go, and change 'em when we must. It'd seem incredible, wouldn't it—if it weren't for what you've seen and suffered since last night. England! And you and I as much cut off from Bobbies and Bow Street as if we were in Petrograd or Central New Guinea. Suppose we *could* find a village constable in a cottage—they'd kill him as gaily as they would you or me—but it isn't his at-home day, he's at Timsdale-Horton Races. When this gaff's over, the belated soothsayers will tell me: 'you ought to have roused the police and laid your case before them,' in one of the three great towns that I drove through last night. And what yarn was I to pitch? That there might be murder going to be done at a place called 'The Myrtles'? And what time had I to tell it in? And

where'd you be now, daughter, if I'd been two minutes later than I was?"

Ever so gently Amaryllis squeezed his arm against her side in gratitude, and then quivered a little, remembering the horror of Dutch Fridji and her knife—and where last she had seen it.

But Dick went on, as if he had noticed nothing, to tell her of the two letters which had barely yet, he supposed, reached Scotland Yard. He had no certainty, indeed, that the second, given to the landlord of "The Coach and Horses," had even been posted. Before nightfall, at the earliest, therefore, no help could be counted upon from the police.

"Either," said Dick, "we must break through the bars of Melchard's cage, or keep hidden inside it. The bosses of this mob, you see, won't give a damn how many of their people get strafed as long as they suppress us, and get back what I've got in my pocket."

They were now not fifty yards from the horse-trough in front of "The Goat in Boots."

A little way from the entrance, drawn up opposite to the stable-yard, stood a long, clumsy wagonette-brake with coats and green-carpet cricket-bags lying about its seats. Two horses were at the pole, seriously bowed over their nose-bags. A swingle-tree hung at the pole's end, and a second pair of reins was fast to the driver's seat, the four cheek-buckles lying crossed over the wheeler's backs.

"Fower-in-hand, and leaders in staable! Sick, likely, or more gradely stuff," said Dick, musing aloud.

Amaryllis, whose eyes were on the signboard, started as if a stranger had spoken at her side. She looked quickly in his face, and found it so altered in expression that she knew the words had come from his lips.

"Oh, Dick!" she whispered. "You're wonderful. But whatever shall I do? If I open my mouth, I shall give us away."

"Howd tha mouth shut, then, 'Minta, lass," he said. Then, lowering his tone, he added in his own language: "I'll account for you. Don't forget your name's Araminta. You've been ill, and the doctor's ordered open-air treatment."

As they reached the threshold, the roar of Millsborough dialect came to them through the windows of the bar-parlour.

Dick pointed to the bench by the door.

"Set there, lass, and Ah'll fetch t' grub," he said aloud. "'Tis bad air for 'ee in tap-room."

As if the world were his, he swung into the bar, where he found two yokels listening to the half-drunken lamentations of a middle-aged, plum-cheeked fellow in a shabby blue livery coatee with shabbier gilt buttons; and even while he was giving his order for a glass of mild, and a bit of bread and cheese on plate for daughter—who'd been main sick, and would likely throw her stomach if she sat in tap-room, for doctor said for her open-air treatment was best medicine—he was listening patiently to the man he guessed to be the driver of the cricketers' brake.

He took the glass and plate and a pat on the shoulder to 'Minta.

"You just make un go doan, lovey," he said. "More eaten, more stomick next time. Eat slow and steady, says Dr. Pape."

Back in the bar, he buried his nose in his tankard.

For the tenth time Plum-face summed up his woes.

"Boy and man, nineteen year Ah've tooled St. Asaph's Eleven to Ecclesthorne June Fixture. Four-in-'and's historical, like goose to Michaelmas. But to-day, Old Grudgers—ye know Grudger's Bait, far end o' Mill Street? To-day, old Grudge, 'e says, 'You hitch Fancy Blood near-lead,' and I says 'im back, 'If 'ee puts 'er 'long o' Tod Sloan, Fancy'll go dead lame afore 'T'Goat in Boots.'" And dead lame she stands in staable here, first time six month. Not offerin' lame, mind you, with a peck an' a limp when she keeps 'er mind on 'er wicked meanin', but sore up to the off fore pastern, and the hoof that hot it'd light a lucifer. Fancy's a female, she is, same as your wife or mine; and Tod, 'e just sours 'er blood, and there ye are. Ah tell 'ee, boys, Ned Blossom's shamed, 'e is, if he comes slatherin' into Ecclesthorne-on-the-Moor wi' two sweatin' wheelers in twentieth year o' the match."

By this time Dick had received from the tapster his second order, a tankard of old ale, laced with a surreptitious noggin of unsweetened gin.

"And what-like nature o' a nag may this Tod be?" he asked, speaking with so easy a familiarity, and holding the pewter so invitingly that Ned Blossom responded as to an old friend.

"Gradely bit o' stuff sure-ly," he replied. "And do love to fill his collar; but sulky-like he's been on t' road this day, wi' Fancy doin' nowt to share."

"Then leave Fancy in staable," said Dick, "and drive owd Tod unicorn into Ecclesthorne wi' style."

Ned Blossom chuckled foolishly, and took the tankard Dick was offering, handle free, to his fingers.

"Like t' owd flea-bitten mare used to stand bottom o' Church Hill out o' Water Street, waitin' for t' bus comin'. They'd take the bar offen 'er back, hitch it to pole, an' away she'd go, scratchin' and scramblin' up to moor, like cat on roof-tiles. Ha! ha!" laughed Ned, and took a pull from the pewter. "But, say, who be you, standin' drinks like an owd friend?"

"Forgotten Doncaster races, nineteen five, hast tha, Ned? Well, Ah'm pained in my choicest feelin's. Here Ah finds 'ee in misfortune, order the stuff tha needs, pay for it, give 'ee good counsel and call 'ee Ned, and 'tis not till ale's drownin' t' sadness of 'ee where it bides, that 'ee call to mind you've forgotten Sam Bunce."

"Sam'l—ay, Sam'l Ah remembers. 'Twas t' Bunce as came 'ard like. But nineteen five? Challacombe's Leger, that was. Ay, Bunce fits into it. This ale clears the wits wunnerful."

Dick was at the bar, money passing to the tapster.

"There's another, owd cock, where that came from," he said, turning to Blossom. "Mebbe the next pint'll make 'ee call to mind how Challacombe's win cleaned me out—and me bound to get south away to Coventry?"

"Ay," said Ned again, politely remembering all that he was told. "See'd 'ee off by t' train, I did."

"Good old Blossom you be," said Dick, laughing kindly, "sayin' nowt o' the two jimmies you lent to get me home—an' us both that full we forgot all about where I was to send the blunt! But it's not Sam Bunce'll forget what he owes a man, and Ah knew as Ah'd meet 'ee again."

And he pushed three one-pound notes into the fuddled Ned's hand, who saw no reason in denying a friend of this kind.

"Most gone out o' my head, the money," he muttered. "But Ah knew 'ee meant

paying."

Then, as he awkwardly separated the notes, puzzling over the third, "Bit of interest for the waitin'," said Dick. "Put 'em away, while I go and get that Tod Sloan hitched single to lead your pair."

"I'll never drive 'im," objected Ned mournfully. "Ah've been turned all ends up, wi' this 'ere 'appenin'. Tod, 'e'll turn an' laugh at me."

"'Tis easy, owd man, if you keep 'im canterin' from start."

"Tried 'im tandem once, they did—oh, Gawd!"

"What you needs, owd Ned, is a kip, e'en if 'ee can't sleep. Who's Captain of o' this St. Asaph's cricketin' lot?"

"Rev'runt Mallaby—Dixon Mallaby. Gradely chap. Champion bat 'e be, nobbut 'e's a parson."

"Then I'll drive 'em," said Dick, "and you get a lift o'er to Ecclesthorne later, an' tool 'em home. 'Long about that time you'll be rested, an' Tod'll be after his oats."

Blossom nodded, lifting his tankard and waving it on the way to his mouth, in feeble farewell.

As he went out Dick glanced sideways at Amaryllis. The sparkle in her eyes stopped him.

"Oh, daddy!" she murmured, "what a liar you are!"

"Cha-ampion!" said Dick, adding, as he left her: "Rubberneck!"

Already the cricketers were gathering about the rear of the brake, amongst them a gentleman.

To him Dick touched his hat.

"T' driver, sir, be o'ercome with near leader fallin' la-ame. He be an owd pal. Seems me tryin' t' buck 'im oop's gone wrong way down. So be you offers no objection, sir, I'll drive 'ee myself. Sam'l Bunce I'm called, and 'tis Ecclesthorne where us wants to go."

The Reverend Mr. Dixon Mallaby looked him up and down with good-humoured scrutiny.

"I can't object to being pulled out of a hole," he replied. "And I don't think I should enjoy driving Mr. Grudger's cattle myself."

"Then if ye'll bid landlord have Ned Blossom sent on t' Ecclesthorne when he be sober, I'll get t' three-cornered team hitched up."

And Dick went towards the stable, but turned back.

"Ought t' 'ave said, sir," he explained, "as I'll drive 'ee, so be as there's room for my daughter."

"The pretty girl on the bench there? Why, of course there's room. Does she want to see the match?"

"Doctor's orders she's to take all the fresh air there be, sir, and we're paying for't in shoe-leather. By same token, she looks after me too. Wouldn't let me out 'lone to-day, 'cos yesterday Ah went too free, an' got into a bit o' rough house."

"I see," said the clergyman. "That's a nasty cut on your cheek."

Dick laughed.

"One o' them others got a worse," he answered, and went in search of Tod Sloan.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE UNICORN.

When Sam Bunce returned, he had a straw in one corner of his mouth, and was leading a sturdy roadster, with whom he seemed already on terms of intimacy.

Mr. Dixon Mallaby, meantime, had introduced himself to Amaryllis, getting, for his pains, but the Araminta of the sun-bonnet; and Dick, when he and the ostler had harnessed Tod in his lonely distinction, went round to find her the centre of an admiring group competing, it seemed, for her company in the brake; the girl answering with "Na-ay!" "Na-ay, thank 'ee kindly," and "Thank 'ee, sir, Ah'll ask feyther," with a genuine flush on her face due to fear of speech rather than of men, which did much to heighten her attraction for these kindly labourers and mechanics.

"You be set on box 'long o' me," said Dick, and took her not too gently by the arm.

But his way was barred by a red-faced cricketer in strange flannels.

"'Tis not every Ecclesthorne fixture," he said, "as we gets a comely wench for maascot. Us be trustin' our hossflesh to you——"

"Hosses is Grudgers', an' t' lass is mine," interrupted Dick, smiling.

"But there be Parson Mallaby to make we mind our manners," objected Redface.

"T' cloth," said Dick, "is a good thing. And blood's a better," and so marched his daughter to the front of the brake.

As the last of the team were climbing to their seats, a motor-cycle with a side-car, coming from the north, pulled up behind them.

"Don't turn your head," whispered Dick on the box to Amaryllis beside him. "They'll pass us soon, if they're Melchard's men. I had to yank you up here, you little devil, or you'd have cooked the whole show by laughing. You were shaking like a jelly, and they thought you were afraid of me. You! With your 'Naays' and your 'Thank 'ee kindlys!'"

A tall man in motor-cycling overalls, goggles pushed up over his cap, sauntered leisurely past the brake from behind, on its off side. From the near-side box-seat Amaryllis saw him, and then looked down at the splash-board, shaking her head.

"Nay, daddy, na-ay!" she said in a clear drawl, imitating Dick's. "Always feared, Ah be, o' talkin', when there's a many men makin' simple jests. That were a gradely word o' yourn, 'Cloth be a fine thing, but blood's a better!'"

And she finished with a low, cooing chuckle.

Then, loud and clear, came the parson's voice.

"You can let 'em go now, Mr. Bunce," he said.

The stableman stood away from Tod's bridle, and the three horses put their necks into their collars like one.

A little chorus of approbation rose from the body of the brake; the man in the middle of the road jumped aside, cursing.

As they passed him, gathering pace, "That's one of 'em," muttered Dick.

"He'll go into 'The Goat in Boots' and hear all about us," said Amaryllis.

"I don't think he'll want to draw too much attention to himself," said Dick. "But if he does go in, Ned Blossom and the two hayseeds in the bar'll tell him all about Sam Bunce."

"Do you think he really believes in Bunce?" asked the girl.

"He believes already in three pounds, and the next drink'll make him believe in everything."

"You *are* clever," said Amaryllis, "and it's awfully funny."

"You," said Dick, "are astonishing."

"Why?" asked the girl.

"You laugh all the time, as if——"

"As if I weren't afraid? I'm not," she answered. "But it's not courage. It's you. I feel safe."

For a moment Dick was silent; then he said:

"My leader's a good little nag, isn't he?"

"Yes. He likes you."

"How d'you know?"

"He feels you through the lines. He's not used to being all alone out there, but he's only tried to look round once, and then all you did was to talk to him, and he said to himself: '*He's all right*'—waggled his head a little and broke into his jolly canter again."

"I'll show you what they can do, after that side-car has passed."

"Will they come after us?"

Two or three back-fire explosions answered her, and very soon the motor-cycle and side-car tore past the brake, alarming with its insolent speed even Dick's sober and industrious leader.

The machine was soon out of sight.

"Did they mean to scare poor Tod?" asked Amaryllis.

"He's only disgusted. No," said Dick. "All that fuss and stink is to get 'em to Gallowstree Dip before we pass it."

"But they don't know we're here," she objected.

"They don't know anything. If we turn off towards Harthborough Junction, or if anyone leaves the brake to walk that way, they'll follow."

"Wasn't there to be a picket at Harthborough itself?" asked the girl.

"Yes. But they haven't made contact with it yet, and don't even know whether it's arrived. If it hadn't and we went that way, we could nip into the first train and get clean away. But when this picket sees us driving straight on to Ecclesthorne, they'll sit down at the Dip to wait till we never come. I shall spring the Dip at such a pace that these flannelled fools'll yell like a school-treat, and the picket'll forget 'em."

"But why should they even suspect?"

"They're ordered to suspect everything. They've never seen either the man or the woman they're after. They see one woman and a lot of men on a beanfeast, and

she's got to pass on to the next picket to be accounted for."

"Then why didn't you make Mother Brundage dress me up as a boy?"

"Because like this you may be somebody else. In trousers, these blokes would shoot you on sight. My dear child," said Dick, "there are a good many men that could masquerade as women, but not one young woman in ten thousand can look anything but painfully ridiculous in a suit of dittoes."

Amaryllis was not quite sure whether or not to be offended, but remembered her hair, and was comforted.

The road now began to drop away in front of them so sharply that Tod had no work to do. A little further, and the slow trot, which gentle use of the foot-break had made possible, was reduced to a reluctant, pastern-racking walk, with slack traces and strained collar-chains for the wheelers; while the leader, too much at leisure, began to remember his loneliness.

And then, as they rounded an acute bend at the steepest point of the grade, Amaryllis saw below her, just beyond the bridge of grey stone from which their road began its ascent to the moor, a single ancient oak-tree, from the twisted trunk of which was stretched out across the by-road which followed the course of the bridged stream, that cruel, heavy arm, upon which in one day were hanged fifteen of Sir Thomas Wyatt's rebels in days popularly supposed merrier than ours.

Near the foot of this evil old tree, worthy of its huge bough, the girl saw the two men whose behaviour had offended Tod, pretending themselves occupied with some defect of side-car or cycle. By the time that Dick had brought his team within a hundred and fifty yards of the bottom, he could see that the interest of his two enemies had been diverted from their own vehicle to his: they stood erect with their backs to the oak, each hiding a hand in a right-side pocket.

Whether they had gathered matter of suspicion at "The Goat in Boots," whether they would dare, here in peaceful English country, so desperate an attempt as shooting him and Amaryllis as they passed the Dip, were questions Dick could not answer. But the goggles were down, masking the faces, while he and the girl, perched high on the box, made fine targets for a pair of Brownings.

He turned in his seat and spoke to his passengers, catching Dixon Mallaby's eye.

"Ah be goin' to show 'ee, sir," he said, "how three ornary hacks, rightly drove,

can take a dip an' a rise, even with a load like you gentlemen makes. Howd tight."

Then to Amaryllis he said, with paternal tenderness:

"Don't you be fallin' off now, my dear. And grab t' rail, not me, when they bump into their collars."

Simultaneously he lifted his foot from the break, uttered an exotic, mournful cry, and for the first time brought his long lash across his horses—Tod first, then the wheelers; and as the three shot down the remnant of the slope, he kept Tod's traces tight while the heavy load at their tails compelled the pair to run from it for their lives.

What he had foretold befell; the men in the body of the carriage broke into a boyish cheer of delight, which drowned for all his passengers but Amaryllis the words of that stream of polyglot invective, exhortation and endearment which the driver poured out over his cattle; a lost jeremiad, for Dick says he does not remember, and Amaryllis that, though she heard it all, there was much that she did not understand and a great deal more which nothing on earth will ever induce her to repeat.

As they rattled across the little stone bridge, Dick glanced to his left at the Hangman's Oak, the motor-cycle and the two men; saw foolish, innocent grins break through the suspicion on the two bad faces, and, jovially lifting his whip, waved them a salute.

In response, the two right hands came out of their pockets, forgetting for that moment what they left there.

The circling lash took each wheeler in turn, while the load still ran light behind them, and Tod, honest worker, answered relief with fresh effort.

By the time that the hill had reduced them to a straining walk, Gallowstree Dip was out of sight, and Dick let out his breath with a little hissing noise between the teeth. Amaryllis heard it and understood.

"Dad!" she said.

"Ay, lass?" he answered.

"Those two men," she said, lowering her voice and speaking in her natural

manner: "as we were coming down to the bridge they pushed up their goggles, and their faces were beastly—just as if they meant," she whispered, "to kill somebody."

Dick nodded.

"And then the men behind began cheering, and those two horrid faces grew quite silly and good-natured. And when you wagged your whip at them they grinned and waved their hands, and one of them shouted something meant to be jolly."

"It just means, lovey," he answered, "that they made up their minds it was a beano after all, and that they'd got wind up about nothing. The mongrel sportsman and the bashful wench in a sun-bonnet were after all, they thought, a genuine substitute for Ned Blossom."

"Did you play for that?" she asked.

"Oh, well!" he answered vaguely; then added: "Don't worry, my lass. 'Tis all well for a while."

He kept his horses on a steady strain until the long rise was topped, and then climbed down from his seat and let them breathe, tightening this and feeling that about their tackle, until each horse was tricked into believing itself the object of especial interest; a belief of which Amaryllis saw the effect in three pairs of swivelling ears. At last, having lighted a cigarette dug from a yellow packet which he must have bought, she was sure, at "The Goat in Boots," he climbed back to her with this unusual ornament hanging stickily from his under lip.

The team started again willingly as he drew the reins softly in through his fingers; but for a while he kept them walking.

Then he turned to Mr. Dixon Mallaby.

"Parson," he said, "Ah've Ned Blossom's repitation to consider. Ah'll take 'em along easy-like, leastways if you're not in a hurry. Then you gives me the word when us be nobbut half mile from tha pull-up, an' I'll let 'em out champion."

"You don't know Ecclesthorne, then?" said Dixon Mallaby.

"I dunno this ro'd," replied Dick. "If 'ee play match in Rectory field, Ah be to drive 'ee there, Ah reckon."

"They've got the Green in excellent shape again. The Ecclesthornians," said the

parson, "don't like the match outside."

All this and more Dick knew already; for he had ears as keen as his eyes, and words travel better to the coachman than from him.

"Then Ah'll drive 'ee to t' 'George,' sir," he said.

Twenty minutes later the St. Asaph's brake, wheelers at a swinging trot and the leader cantering in his best form, bowled through Ecclesthorne-on-the-Moor, and drew up with a clatter and a scrape before "The Royal George."



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SERANG.

The inn stood midway in one side of the village green, which was already surrounded with walking groups as well as stationary ranks awaiting patiently the opening of the game. For Ecclesthorne had a name in its county, owning two families of hereditary professionals, as well as a lord of the manor, who, before the war, had kept wicket in three Test Matches, while the workman's club from Millsborough, captained this year by Dixon Mallaby, a 'Varsity Blue, had already a quarter of a century's repute of being hard to beat. So from far and wide those who had not gone to Timsdale-Horton races came always on the third Saturday in June to the "Ecclesthorne Fixture."

As he brought his horses to a stand, Dick perceived that, while some notice was given to the oddity of his team, scarce a glance was bestowed on its unusual driver. The visiting eleven were the objects of interest to the straggling crowd in front of "The George."

When he had helped Amaryllis down from her perch, he lit a fresh gasper from the yellow packet, and methodically assisted the ostler to unhitch the horses; but just as the leader stepped free, a smart motor, coming from the south-west, hooted impatiently for space to reach the door of the inn.

The ostler, leaving Dick with his detached horses, hurried bandily to shift a farmer's gig, drawn up and abandoned in front of the porch.

Dick caught one glimpse of the car's driver, and took his wheelers by their bridles.

"Hey, lass!" he said. "Move tha legs a bit, now, an' lead Tod into staable."

By his tone she knew something evil was near, and obeyed with never a look round, but disappeared with Tod into the stable-yard, Dick following with his pair.

They found empty stalls, unbridled and haltered the horses without a word, and, just as Dick had found the few he must say to her, there was the ostler in the

doorway.

"You be more helpin' like," he said, "'n owd Ned Blossom. I thank 'ee kind, I do—and you, miss."

"Ah'll thank 'ee, owd hoss, to pass no word agen Ned Blossom. My friend 'e be."

Then, to the vast surprise of Bandy-legs, Dick pushed a half-crown into his hand, and added, pleasantly as you please:

"Give nags feed an' rub down. And, when Ned comes rolling along to trot 'em home, tell 'im Sam Bunce won't forget Town Moor and Challacombe's Leger."

Crossing the stable-yard with Amaryllis, "Don't walk like that—bit more flat-footed, but don't clown it," said Dick. "And don't turn your face towards the door of the inn—mind. Know why I made you lead Tod?"

The girl's face seemed shrunken, and shone white in the bluish shade of her bonnet.

"There was a car," she stammered softly. "I didn't look. Was it——"

"Looked like Melchard driving," answered Dick. "I'd half a mind to take you out into the lane at the back. But it's safest amongst the crowd. And I must know whether——"

The crowd had grown dense before the open gates of the stable-yard, and Dick's words were interrupted by the sudden outbreak of a quarrel in the heart of it.

To a running chorus of jeers, expostulation, and fierce incentives to retaliation, there came in sight, pushing his way through the crush, a creature whose appearance immediately struck Dick and Amaryllis as ominous of danger.

The man, although of middle height and erect carriage, had so vast a spread and depth of chest, development of the deltoid muscles so unusual, and length of arm so unnatural as to establish the effect at once of power and deformity; to which the yellow skin, high cheek-bones, small eyes, and the thin black moustaches, drooping long and perpendicular from each corner of the broken-toothed mouth, added an expression of cruelty so unmitigated that Amaryllis turned sick at the sight, closing her eyes in dreadful disgust; while the European leather and cloth costume of a chauffeur not only added horror to the outlandish figure, but gave Dick Bellamy almost the certainty that here was yet another accomplice of

Alban Melchard.

As the monster drew near, making his way savagely towards the stables, there thrust himself in the way Bob Woodfall, the good-natured champion of the village—six feet two inches and fourteen stone of bone and muscle, good cricket and five years' war record, dressed in country-made flannels, ready for his place in the Ecclesthorne team.

"Hey, man!" he cried good-naturedly. "Be no manner o' sense bargain' thro' decent throng like a blasty tank into half battalion o' lousy Jerrys."

Then, quite close, the Malay turned his face full on Amaryllis, and Dick saw that its right ear had a large gold ring hanging from a hole in the lobe—a hole that was stretched by the mere weight of the metal to three times the size of its thickness.

But on the left side of the head was no ring to match, for the reason that no ear was there to support it. In some unclean strife in Hong-Kong or Zanzibar it had been torn away, leaving, to mark its place, only the orifice in the head, staring in ghastly isolation most horrible of all.

Amaryllis saw the face again, this time in its full lopsided monstrosity, and turned to Dick, clutching him and hiding her eyes against his shoulder.

Hearing her gasp, a woman in the crowd cried out:

"Howd t' heathen! He flays t' lasses, and he'll curd t' milk."

"Gi' 'im a flap on jaw, Bob Woodfall," cried a youth. "One's all 'e'll take."

It was. Bob, perhaps, was too kindly to put his full weight into the blow, and got no chance for a second.

With a savage cry, between a grunt and a squeal, the Malay ran in, clutching with his great horny sailor's hands. Too quickly for any eye but Dick's to see how it was done, he had Bob Woodfall by the nape of the neck and the band of his trousers and lifted the long body high above the crowd at full-length of his terrible arms, brandishing it helpless, like some Mongolian Hercules a Norse Antaeus; took three steps to the stone wall of the stable-yard, and would have flung the village hero over it to break upon the cobble-stones, but for a gloved hand laid upon his shoulder, and a soft, high-pitched voice, saying: "*Taroh, plan plan, Mut-mut!*"

And the monster obeyed the voice and touch of his master, restoring Woodfall to his feet with a docility that made him, if possible, more hateful to the crowd than before.

"*Akau baleh*," continued Melchard. "*Dan nante sana*."

And Mut-mut, the crowd yielding passage, made his way to the car, and sat at the wheel.

Arrived at the gates of the stable-yard almost simultaneously with Melchard, was Dixon Mallaby; and Dick observed not only that there was acquaintance between them, but also that, while the parson endured recognition, Melchard sought it.

"I'm ashamed of that fellow of mine," he said. "Yet I cannot help being attached to the ruffian. He would die to serve me; but the ribaldry of an English crowd is too much for his temperament."

"If you don't want him to die without serving you, Mr. Melchard," replied the parson, "I should advise you to keep him in better control."

"Ah, well! I owe him so much already, you see. The strange fellow saved my life in the Persian Gulf. Serang—boat's swain, you know, to the Lascar crew. Sharks in the water—horrible!"

The parson thought that even in this the serang had done the world poor service.

Having delicately wiped his face with a ladylike handkerchief in memory of his danger and gratitude, Melchard tried again.

"I saw you arrive with your quaint team, sir," he said; "the unicorn, I mean, not the eleven."

But the parson allowed no outsider to poke fun at the St. Asaph's cricket club.

"Handled his horses in fine style, your driver. Why!" exclaimed Melchard, as if noticing Dick and Amaryllis with her head on his shoulder for the first time, "there he is—and pleasantly occupied. I mean the fellow with the girl in his arms, and the cut on his face. I wonder how he got it."

Amaryllis heard the voice and the words, and, to keep her breath from gasping and her body from trembling, she caught and ground between her teeth a wrinkle of Dick's coat.

Melchard, she felt, had taken a step towards her.

"I don't know how he got it," the clergyman was saying. "But something painful, I understand, happened to the other man. The girl is his daughter, recovering from an illness."

Melchard took another step towards the couple.

"Better let well alone, Mr. Melchard," said Dixon Mallaby sternly. "Your servant has already made trouble enough."

Throughout these few strained moments Dick had borne himself as a man concerned only with his daughter. But at this moment Dixon Mallaby caught a gleam from his eyes which assured him that the least familiarity or impertinence of Melchard's would be resented in a manner likely to divert the crowd's lingering anger from Mut-mut to his master. Much as he disliked Melchard and his indefinitely unpleasant reputation, he was not going to have his match spoiled by the beating and kicking to a jelly of a scented and dandified Millsborough dentist.

So, ignoring Melchard, he went up to Sam Bunce.

"I am afraid your daughter is hardly as strong as you thought, Mr. Bunce," he said.

Melchard, with a finicking air of nonchalance, stood where he was left, lighting a cigarette.

"'Tis nowt but she's frit with that flay-boggart of a Chinaman," said Dick, "wi'out it be she trembles lest 'er daddy gets fightin' agen. There, then, little lass," he said, stooping to her ear, and coaxing back courage, thought the parson, with a voice extraordinarily tender. "Way out o' t' crowd her vitals'll settle back to rights and she'll foot it another six mile singing."

"Then you won't see our match, Mr. Bunce?"

"'T' lass knows nowt o' cricket," replied Dick. "'Mornin' seemed like she relished going to t' fun and press o't. But now she's feared o' seein' that blasted ogre again. So, thankin' you, sir, for your lift and your good heart to us, we'll just foot it along o'er t' moor."

Dixon Mallaby shook hands with him; the girl, as she drew away from Sam

Bunce's arm, bobbed the parson a curtsey. But she never turned her face to him, and Mallaby, thoughtfully watching the pair down the road to the south-west, observed that she never once looked back; for even when, being almost indistinguishable among the moving crowd at the corner of the green, they were hailed by the ostler, toddling quickly from the yard, waving a handkerchief and crying: "Hey, Mr. Bunce, Mr. Sam'l Bunce!" it was only the man who turned his head, waving his hand as if in reply to a belated farewell.

The parson swung round in time to see Melchard snatch the handkerchief from the ostler's hand.

Feeling the clergyman's eyes upon him, he muttered: "Looks like one of mine," and ran the hem quickly through his fingers, prying into the corners.

At the third, he found a mark, and dropped the handkerchief on the stones.

"Of course not," he said, and laughed. "Stupid of me, when I hadn't been in the stables."

Dixon Mallaby picked it up.

"Tis t'yoong wumman's," objected Bandy-legs. "Dropped un inside, stablin' t' 'osses."

But the parson put the handkerchief in his pocket.

"I am acquainted with Miss Bunce," he said. "Perhaps I shall see them again."

With a feeling which he found unreasonable, that he had protected a good woman from a bad man, Mr. Dixon Mallaby went to the dressing-room in "The Royal George."

Out of Melchard's sight, he examined the handkerchief—a lady's, marked with the embroidered initials A.C., and it struck him, once more with a sense of unreason, not only that the beastly dentist had discovered that these letters did not stand for Araminta Bunce, but that he knew the names which they were here intended to represent.



CHAPTER XIX.

SAPPHIRE AND EMERALD.

"What is it?" asked Amaryllis, as Dick turned to a shout, waving his hand.

"I don't want to know what he wants, so I take his antics for good byes. Come on—let's get into the thick of this lot."

"Was he suspicious?" she asked, when a bend in the road had hidden "The Royal George" and even the village green.

"Melchard? Yes—on general principles. No more than that—unless——"

"There's that cut on your cheek, Dick," said Amaryllis.

"And there's the colour of your hair, la-ass," he answered, laughing.

"He never saw under the bonnet," and she whisked the pig-tail forward over her shoulder. "Look at that," she said.

"How did you make it that common brown?" he asked, astonished.

"Mother Brundage," said Amaryllis, "greased her hands from the frying-pan and rubbed it down hand over hand as if she were hoisting a sail. The Marquis of Ontario," she said, "would *know* I wasn't his daughter, with that-coloured hair."

"Then why did you go all to pieces," asked Dick, "at the sound of Melchard's voice?"

"It was that frightful man made me feel queer. Just as I was getting better, I heard Melchard, and I thought the best place for my aristocratic nose was on my daddy's shoulder. Dick!" she cried, looking up at his solemn face, "I really couldn't help feeling bad."

"Most girls 'd've fainted. You're clever as paint," he said, "you turn your two-spots into aces, and leave him in baulk every time. Poor, shaking kid! And I'd brandy in my pocket, and couldn't give it to you!" He pulled out his flask. "Have some—you'd better."

Amaryllis with a little tender wrinkle somewhere in her beauty, laughed in his face.

"Do I look," she asked, "as if I needed Dutch courage?"

Colour of skin and splendour of eye answered their own question.

"You *look* top-hole," he said. "But you've had a heavy call on your strength."

"What about you, then?" and she touched her left cheek, meaning his. "One like that," she said, "and I should have been in bed for a month—or dead."

"Pépe said I was to keep on feeding you," he continued, passing over, as he always did, she observed, her reference to himself, "and there's been no chance but that beer and cheese. I meant to stuff you again at 'The George.'"

On their left, in the very outskirts of Ecclesthorne, was a little stone house, roofed with stone slabs, and surrounded with gardens, bee-hives and flowers. Upon a wooden arch connecting its stone gate-posts was written "Cyclists' Rest. Tea, Minerals."

"Um!" said Dick. "'Minerals' always makes me think of museums, but it only means ginger-pop and wuss. Tea's the thing, if brandy isn't."

He pushed the gate open; the hinges screamed, and a young woman came to the door of the cottage. As they went towards her through hives and wallflowers,

"How the bees do bumble!" said Amaryllis.

"Pot o' fresh tea, miss," said Bunce to the round-faced, soft-eyed girl at the door. "And pikelets and parkin an' anything you've got to hand. We've nobbut ten minutes now forth to eat an' drink."

He put two half-crowns on the table.

"An' Ah'll never take change, my dear," he added, "so be 'tis ready in three."

In two and a half they were drinking it, Bunce-like, from the saucers; and Amaryllis once more in danger of the giggles.

"Ma lass and self, miss," said Bunce, between gulps, "be footin' it to Harthborough Junction. Bain't there a train, five summat wi' another five in it?"

"Five fifteen," said the girl. "Lunnon way."

"That'll be it. We're takin' 't easy-like o'er moor. Now, Ah do call to mind there be a track to left, some way down t' ro'd, as'll take 'ee gentle and pleasant 'tween two gradely hummocks down into Harthborough. But how far out o' Ecclesthorne that track takes off the pike, I can't bring to mind. 'Tis not a ro'd proper but indistink like an' wanderin'. So Ah be feared o' missin' it."

"T' owd Drovers' Track, tha meanst. 'Tis easy findin'," said the girl. "Thou turn'st off to left by two thorns wi' a white stone by root o' t' girt 'un. But they stand a long mile down t' road. Now, if 'ee likes to go through house an' cross t' paddock, Ah'll put 'ee in sheep path that'll take thee to Drovers' Track where un runs up 'tween t' rocks—Bull's Neck, they call it."

When they had finished their tea, and Dick, from the sweetstuff counter, had crammed into already burdened pockets two half-pound packets of chocolate, the girl led them to the further gate of her father's paddock, whence she indicated the highest point of the ridge over which "T' owd Drovers' Track" threaded its way.

"Howd eyes on t' lofty knob of 'un," she said, "and thou'lt not stray."

For two or three hundred yards the pair walked in silence; and now that terror had passed with the imminence of danger, and that no strange eyes surrounded her for which she must play a part not learned nor rehearsed, the terrible pressure which had brought Amaryllis so close to her companion was relaxed—not annihilated, but withdrawn to lurk in sky and air, instead of squeezing the very life and breath out of her physical body.

Dick, therefore, though not two feet from her side, seemed all at once a hundred miles away. The man whose arm had held her, and whose coat she had rubbed her face against, she now found herself too shy to touch or speak to. Yet she wished to hear his voice, and even more, longed to feel that he was really there—the same man, no other than she had found him.

She fixed her eyes upon him, hoping he would feel them and respond—help her somehow to bridge this silly gulf. But he strode on, at a pace which made her run lest she should fall behind.

His eyes were set straight forward, his head a little bent. No smoke came from the pipe in his mouth, and the whole expression of face and figure was of dogged endurance. A little trickle of blood had started afresh from the wound on his cheek. She wondered what had set it flowing again. Could it have been some

clumsiness of her own in her convulsive clinging to him?

A woman's compassion, more easily aroused by a cut finger than by a suffering mind, narrowed the chasm between them, until a small, soft voice bridged it.

"Dick!" she cried. "Oh, Dick."

But the stiff face remained rigid, so the frightened girl quickened her pace until she was well in front; then, turning, she saw that their lids covered two-thirds of the eye-balls, and that the mechanism of the man was driven by an impulse of which, if it were his at all, he was surely not conscious.

As he reached her side, she laid a hand on him, and, "Dick!" she cried again.

The man started, turning his face the wrong way.

The eyes did not open, but the jaw muscles relaxed, letting the cold pipe fall from his teeth. The blind effort which he made to catch it overbalanced the automaton.

He pitched forward, and would have fallen on his face, but for the shoulder which stopped his head, and the arms that clutched his reeling body.

Accurate instinct loosened her joints as the weight struck her, and she came slowly to her knees, sinking back until she sat upon her heels, so that the man received no shock. She had turned halfside-ways as she went down; and kneeling, held him across her, with the uninjured cheek strained upon her left shoulder, and his heels far away to her right.

She looked down into the face, where the eyes were now wholly covered.

The dark semi-circles under the closed lids and the deepened lines of the thin face moved in her compassion as tender as she felt for the bleeding bruise on the cheek. She remembered how he had nursed her, and given her, by his mere sympathy and control, that hour's wonderful sleep. She remembered him crawling, at the acme of her terror, through the slit of the window; saving her from the Dutch woman; turning his back while she dressed; leaping like a heaven-sent devil over the stair-rail; fighting Ockley with his fists—and refused to remember that same enemy brought utterly to an end of his enmity.

Her heart swelled, and beat heavily with the sense of ownership and the dread of losing what was her own; it was a fear more poignant than any other of the fears

which she had suffered in a long chain since she fell asleep in Randal Bellamy's study—only last night!

Was it death—death which she had seen once already to-day—was it that coming to her here against her heart? Or was it but with him as it had been with her in the Brundage bedroom—the awful need of sleep.

She bent her ear close over his lips, and heard the breath long, and regular.

She forgot his wasted features in the beauty of the long eyelashes touching his cheeks; and just because she could not see what the lids were hiding, she remembered her walk down through the wood below the Manor House, and that foolish phrase, "blue as a hummin-bird's weskit," which had then haunted her, till she found him playing with Gorgon in the road; and from that to her bewilderment twenty-four hours later, when he had called the dog Zola. She had reproved the enormity of the syncopated pun, but Dick had insisted that Zola fitted an animal whose expression was always either disgusted or disgusting.

She must not keep him here, so near the stone cottage, and the road. They might be seen.

He had offered her brandy. Carefully she felt his coat. The right outside pocket she could not reach, but there was a hard lump in it, pressing against her cramped knees.

She leaned over sideways, twisted her legs in front of her, and made a lap into which, by edging away from the heavy body, she let the head slide gently. She got the flask out, pulled the metal cup from its base, and into it poured a little brandy. With tender force she managed at last to send a trickle of the spirit into his mouth.

He choked, tried to swallow, coughed violently, and then opened his eyes.

"I told you," he said, "that you needed brandy, not to kill me with it. What's happened?"

"You were walking in your sleep," she began.

"Sleeping in my walk, perhaps," he admitted. "Bad enough, but very different."

His senses coming back to him, Dick felt a wet drop on his forehead, brushed it away, and glanced at the sky, but not, as Amaryllis expected, at her.

"Well," she said, "I was frightened."

"Why?"

"You dropped your pipe, tried to catch it, and fell on your face," explained Amaryllis.

Dick felt his nose and eyebrows. "No, I never!" he declared indignantly.

Amaryllis laughed shakily.

"You see, I'm softer than the ground. You fell on me." And she patted her left shoulder.

"Your fault, I'm afraid. Must have tipped you right over."

"No, I just subsided—quite neatly. And you never got a bump, Dick. But I was afraid—afraid, you know."

"I must be in rotten condition, going to pieces like that. Why, look at you—been through twice as much."

"Oh, no," she answered, snatching greedily at the opportunity of telling a little of what she had been thinking. "Did I drive two hundred and fifty miles in the dark, at fifty miles an hour? Did I climb and crawl, and fight, and nurse a squealing girl after carrying her for miles?"

"Three hundred yards," said Dick dryly. "And you must have been shamming to know anything about it."

"Mrs. Brundage told me," she answered, "that you came through the wood carrying me in your arms."

And so was he in hers—the reversal of their cases struck him like a soft, heavy blow on the heart.

And so much puzzled was Amaryllis by the strange intensity of his eyes lifted to hers that she found the gaze hard to endure, and moved uneasily.

"We ought not to stay here, Dick," she said.

He started scrambling to his feet, but Amaryllis was before him, and giving him a hand, helped him to rise with a pull of which the vigour surprised him.

"You're strong," he said, swaying unsteadily for a moment.

She flushed with pleasure at male praise.

"I'm awfully strong. I've felt perfectly safe, you see, ever since—since I was such a fool and you made me sleep and be sensible."

Dick looked about him, and caught sight of the stone roof of the cottage where the bees bumbled.

"I didn't get far before I crumpled," he said. "Let's get a move on."

As they walked with their eyes on the cleft knob of the ridge, he reverted to her last words.

"Not scared any more? Then what price Melchard?" he asked, "and malingering pig-tailed wenches that hide their faces and sob on their daddies' shoulders?"

"It was that frightful Chinaman, Dick. Yes, I was afraid then. I was afraid—afraid you'd——"

"Take him on? Nothin' doing," he answered. "I should've stood just a dog's chance against the village hero, my dear girl, and the Malay made just one bite of him. Next time that lopsided serang looms on the horizon, you won't see me for dust and small stones."

The tone, perhaps, more than the words in which the man of whom she could not help making a hero seemed to disparage himself, annoyed Miss Caldegard.

It was as if one good friend of hers had maligned another, and she could not quarrel with the traducer without falling out with the traduced.

"But it was Melchard's voice that made you take a lump of me between your teeth and bite a hole in my coat," he went on. "There's a hideous wound just under this." And he picked at two broken threads on his shoulder.

"That was just hate and disgust, not fear. And it's horrid to say I bit you, when you know I didn't. But I was afraid, Dick, that you'd have to do something to that huge dwarf-thing, and get hurt—and——"

"Well, I've told you I'll bolt if he shows his face," he repeated, more gently. But seeing her flush and frown angrily, "What's wrong, Amaryllis?" he asked, and drew nearer to her side as they walked.

But she kept the distance undiminished.

"I don't like the way you speak of yourself," she replied hotly. "It makes me feel angry—as if someone else had done it."

"Done what?"

"Lied about you—said you were afraid of a hideous freak out of a circus. You!"

The brown eyes blazed on him with the anger meant for his hypothetical slanderer. And Dick, between the joy with which her annexation of his honour filled him, and his weakened control, found himself on the edge of an explosion of feeling; but brought back common-sense and good-humour to them both with a touch of his antiseptic cynicism.

"Can you swim?" he asked.

"Yes," said the girl, round-eyed.

"If you couldn't, would you jump in after another fool that couldn't?"

"Another? Oh!" exclaimed the girl.

"Well, you would be, if you couldn't. But you can. Now, would you jump in?"

"No. I should run for a rope or something."

"That's me," said Dick. "Next time that crop-eared, chrome-coloured coolie shows against the sky-line, I run for a rope or something."

The wrinkles disappeared from her forehead, and once more Amaryllis slipped her hand through the bend of his arm. She did it as for friendship or support, but her thought was for him. His rest had been nothing, and at any moment that deadly sleep might seize him again. She made up her mind that next time, even should they have to finish their walking by night, his sleep should be at least as long as that he had given her.

"I'm a pig to be cross," she said. "But I'm only not cross now because you make me laugh with your ridiculous good temper. But, Dick——"

She had felt that, without her linked arm, his steps would already be wandering.

"Well?" he said.

"Next time it's too much for you, I'm going to let you sleep. You must."

He looked at his watch.

"It's a quarter to three," he said. "If we missed that train at five-fifteen, we should have to wait till ten for the next."

"And it'd be much safer," Amaryllis broke in, "to wait on the moor, than in a village or a station where people could see us."

"Yes. I'm not clear-headed enough now to see into Melchard's mind, but I can still calculate on what I know. If he didn't suspect us, he'll go the round of his pickets, beginning with Gallowstree Dip. If he did suspect, he'll come this way after us, and run down towards the London road and look across the moor, along the Drovers' Track from the hawthorns and the white stone. He won't see us—we are in a fold till we get a mile further at least. He'll go on towards the main road, but when he meets his picket that nobody like us two has passed, he'll come back and try the Drovers' Track."

"He didn't suspect," insisted the girl.

"We'll bank on that, then," said Dick, "—if we can find a bush or a ditch to hide in."

The faint path they were following here reached the lowest point of the depression which hid them from the road and from the cottage by whose back door they had left it, and soon began to rise.

The ascent, as they topped it, proved, however, to be concerned merely with crossing a spur, below which the path wound about the edge of a bowl-shaped hollow, rimmed and lined with dark-green, close-cropped grass; and at the bottom lay a tiny tarn.

So steep were the sides that a broad band of green was reflected to the eyes bent down upon the still water. And this circle of mirrored green, embracing a disc of the sky's azure, stared up at them like a pupil-less blue eye.

"Oh!" exclaimed Amaryllis, "it's a sapphire set in emerald!"

Down a winding path, vague as a wrinkle on a young face, and worn, said Amaryllis, by ghostly hoofs of departed sheep, they crept to the pool's edge.

They sat on a little irregular terrace, a few feet above the water, and Dick, taking

the cup from his flask, and having dipped, tasted, rinsed and filled again, passed it to Amaryllis.

"Good water," he said, watching her drink. Amaryllis smiled on him as she finished, and plunged into the ample pocket of Mrs. Brundage's skirt for her chocolate. She broke off a lump and gave him the cup to fill once more.

"It's lovely water," she said, munching; then poured out half the water he had given her. "But I'm going to spoil yours," she went on, and poured in brandy till the cup almost brimmed. "Just obey meekly for once."

"That's easy," said Dick.

"For brandy, or for me?" asked the girl.

But Dick was drinking.

"Now lie down along the ledge. Be quick. I can't enjoy my chocolate till you do."

He looked at her with heavy eyes.

"I must," he said. "The brandy's finished me."

Without rising, he drew up his legs to the terrace level, stretched them out, said: "Wake me, if the chocolate makes you sleepy," and rolled full length on his left side.

"Lift your head a little, and I'll spread a bit of my skirt under it. There's plenty of it," said Amaryllis, shifting towards him as she sat.

She got no answer. He was dead asleep.

Five minutes she gave him to sink deeper into the unknown, while she hovered above his dreams like a seagull over the course of a stream which has disappeared into a tunnel.

At last she lifted his head and drew a fold of her skirt beneath it; but was not yet content; for she knew the weariness of lying on the side when the unsupported neck and heavy head increase the pressure on the under shoulder. So once more, to slip her knee beneath the neck for a pillow, she raised the head—and there came to her heart and breath a flutter which seemed to make its attack through fingers and up the arms. She felt, with a difference, the strong, subtle, ineffable

thrill of a woman's early handlings of her earliest child.

In spite of her terror in the night, her danger of the early morning, the men fighting and the man dead; in spite of the excitement and risks of the afternoon, shaking the heart in relief only less than in encounter, and in spite of aching head and limbs, stiffening to cramp while she still sat and the man still slept, Amaryllis knew herself happier than ever in her life before.

Not rejoicing in the future—neither in hope nor in fear of what the sleeper might feel, what ask for, when danger was behind him and fighting once more a splendid thing belonging to newspapers and books; instinctively aware, perhaps, that his spirit had moved already half-way to meet hers, yet so far from asking, even of her own mind, whether Dick Bellamy loved her or no, that she did not even mentally formulate the idea of love to explain her own feelings, Amaryllis sat in blissful, unphilosophic enjoyment of service and protection.

Was she not at once his pillow and his defence? Was he not sleeping like a little child whose fever has abated? And had she not a dog's ears and a sailor's eyes for his enemies? And did she not know just where to lay her hand on the butt of Ockley's pistol, how precious were its two cartridge's, and how near, therefore, to use each with effect, she must let an enemy approach?

She was happy, then, and time was nothing, until the man's head moved on her numbed thigh, and a deep sigh came from his chest.

She leaned over him and lifted the lock of straight black hair which had fallen over the left eye, stroking it back as he would have brushed it, and murmuring, "Lie still, dear, lie still," in just such words and tones as some day she would use to a smaller man on a softer pillow.

But the instinct of the man of many wilds had told him that his hour's rest was over.

He sighed again, turned on his back, and opened his eyes.

He saw her face hanging over him—upside down, it seemed. Yet even inverted, and seen through the mists of sleep, that face conveyed something which he did not understand, something so strange that he caught his breath, gasping, and blundered to his feet.

The girl still sat, looking up at him.

"What is it?" he asked, sharply.

But Amaryllis had forgotten herself altogether, and did not know that he found his wonder in her face.

"What is what?" she asked, simply.

"Your face——" he began, and could find no more words.

"My face," she echoed, puzzled, and feeling blindly for a handkerchief. "It's all right, isn't it?"

"It's glorious—shining with happiness," he answered, his voice sounding like that of a man in pain.

"Weren't you glad," asked Amaryllis, "when you'd got me off to sleep, and when I woke up all alive again? I know it didn't make you look anything but stern and pre-occupied and business-like; I felt as if you were pleased, though. I'm different, and show things in my face, I suppose."

"But you were looking like that when I opened my eyes."

"Well?" said Amaryllis.

"You hadn't had time to know whether I was well or ill, strong or weak. And you looked as if it had been there a long time."

"What?" she asked again.

"The—the expression," said Dick, his tone as fierce as his words were lame.

Very sweetly, and with no taint of derision in the sweetness, Amaryllis laughed.

"The gloriousness? I'd been watching you all the time, you see, and I knew it was doing you lots of good—and—and I was proud of being useful, perhaps. So, of course I looked happy and shining."

"When did you take my head on your knees?" he asked, sternly.

But this time she understood every furrow of his frown.

"As soon as you were asleep," she answered.

He looked at his watch. It was four o'clock.

"And I never moved?" he asked.

"No."

"Nor you?"

"No, Dick."

"An hour and a quarter! My God!" he exclaimed, "you must be as stiff as a pious book. And I'm damned if you're not sitting there because you can't get up!"

"Oh, yes, I could. But give me a hand," she answered; and he pulled her to her feet.

She staggered, and he caught her by an elbow.

"One of them's as fast asleep as you were," she said. "It'll go off in a minute."

But for Dick Bellamy, caught at last on the ebb of his resistance, one elbow was not enough. So he seized the other, and by the pair held her off from him, looking into her eyes.

"Tell me what it meant," he said, "—your face."

"I've told you," she replied, with serious eyes.

"I saw it. It must have meant a great deal more than your words, or a great deal less than it looked. If you were taking a cheap pleasure in being charitable, your face is a liar, Amaryllis. If you find great happiness in being loved, *you* are."

She ignored the accusation, merely answering:

"I might."

But she was still so serious that Dick could not speak.

"It wasn't exactly that, though," she explained. "I want to be as truthful as my face—if you could read it right."

"Tell me, then."

"It was my half, I think, that made me so awfully contented."

"Your half? That means—if you mean anything at all—you mean, your half was loving me?"

She nodded, and spoke before he could answer the nod.

"Of course I might not have stayed contented long, if you hadn't been like that too. You are, aren't you?"

His hands had slipped up her arms to her shoulders, and it sent a pang of wild joy through her content to feel them trembling while they held her.

"Contented? No, by God, I'm not! *Contented's* as much as saying I could have enough of you. But I've loved you ever since I heard you calling Zola in that wonderful voice of yours. Before I even saw your face close, your 'Gorgon! Gorgon!' gave me a pain I was afraid of, because I wanted to be hurt again. It made me angry. You've been waking me up at four in the morning and never letting me sleep again. You've filled my head with pictures—a whole cinema of pictures; and my ears with sounds! Your dress on the stairs; your voice calling 'Dad! dad!' from the garden, and humming little tunes I'd never heard till you sang 'em, coming in with your arms full of leaves and flowers. Seems like months you've filled me, and it's only four days. No, I'm not contented, Amaryllis, but I'm damned happy."

Then his arms crossed each other round her body; and it seemed to Amaryllis that she sank away into space filled with an ecstasy; and that, after a while, which was not time, she was fetched back into time and to earth by hands so strong that they had brought the ecstasy with them also.

There were kisses, not all his.

Then, to focus her joy, she thrust it away from her; and, seeing Dick Bellamy's countenance, she remembered how he had spoken of what he had found, when he awoke, in hers.

His eyes shone upon her as she now knew she had always wished them to shine. Splendid eyes, she had called them in that part of herself where she had for a long time—quite two days—made pretence of deafness; eyes very blue and firm, but seldom, until now, to be long held.

"Dick," she said, "that's the first time—just what I wanted."

"What?" he asked.

"Your voice has spoken to me, your ears have heard me, your eyes have looked at me. But now, your eyes are listening to mine. Oh, Dick!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," he answered gravely, "it's great to be free."

"Tremendous!" said Amaryllis.

Her hands were looking for her handkerchief in the Brundage pocket. They encountered a comb, the half-packet of chocolate, a pair of white cotton gloves which raised a moment's hope, and Dick's pipe, which she had picked up as they started again on their way; but no handkerchief! And her cheeks were wet with half-dried tears, and Dick was coming nearer.

"Oh, please," she cried, "do lend me a hanky. You made me a bodice of one—in that beastly room with the woman—and you took it from a bundle of them, out of your coat pocket. I felt them there when I wore it. I left the one you gave me behind, and I've lost my own."

The pathetic-comical expression of a pretty woman in danger of using elementary means to dry her tears, made Dick Bellamy chuckle with laughter of a quality that Amaryllis had not heard from him before, while he chose the least rumpled handkerchief from his stock of four, and shook it open for her.

She took it, blessing him as women will bless a man for such relief; and, as she used it, there struck him, like a smack in his face, the memory of her hand and another handkerchief.

"I saw you use your own," he said, "on the box of that Noah's Ark of a wagonette. I remember your pretty fingers and action. I hoped nobody behind us would see that it was a lady blowing her nose. It was a little handkerchief—your own," he insisted. "When did you lose it?"

Amaryllis perceived that the question bore upon their safety, and puckered her forehead, thinking.

"I wiped my fingers with it, after I'd taken Tod Sloan's bridle off," she answered, "There was a sticky mess of hay and chaff on them from the bit, and I remember wiping it off with my handkerchief."

"Seen it since?" he asked.

"No," said the girl. "Does it matter? Even if I did drop it then, Melchard wouldn't go in there. He hadn't any horses."

"The ostler called after us, you remember. He was waving something white."

"Oh! You didn't tell me. And you'd given him half a crown!" said Amaryllis.

"Seemed a grateful sort of bloke, didn't he?" said Dick, ruefully.

"And wanted to give it back to me? Oh, Dick! Melchard was there, close by, talking to the handsome clergyman."

"Was it marked."

"An embroidery-stitched A.C. That's all," said Amaryllis.

"C doesn't stand for Bunce. Let's get out of this," said Dick Bellamy.



CHAPTER XX.

A ROPE OR SOMETHING.

As they reached the level of the moor and the Drovers' Track, to join which ancient road their path stretched on for yet a mile, they turned, moved by a common impulse, to look down on the green hollow which had been the nest of so great a happiness.

"Emerald, you said, Amaryllis?"

"And blue, Dick, from the sky."

When they had tramped a half-mile or more in silence which seemed to Amaryllis very close communion, Dick spoke; for already he was feeling the stones of the world beneath their feet.

"We put our money on the wrong horse, dear. They didn't suspect—they knew. And they're near us," he said.

"I don't care. If they kill me now, Dick, I don't care."

He agreed—nodding more sympathetically, she thought, than any man before him had ever nodded.

But after another silence, he said:

"And yet that makes it all the more necessary to come out top dog this time. Where d'you think they are?"

"If the Drovers' Track's good enough for a car," she answered, "I should guess—after all, it's all guessing, isn't it?—I should guess that they turned off the road at the hawthorns and the white stone, and drove straight on to Harthborough."

"They've had time to go and come back," said Dick. "If we had food with us, we might hide all night on the moor. But you'd be ill by the morning."

"Let's go on," said Amaryllis.

"You lead me to luck," he answered, "so what you say goes. A train's the safest

place for us, and, if Melchard's seen his picket there after driving right over this ground, he won't be expecting to find us on the way back."

"He may be between us and Harthborough now," said Amaryllis.

"If we can pass him, then," said Dick, "his Harthborough picket won't give us much trouble. Our other way is the London road. There we might run into Melchard plus his picket. The railway's at Harthborough, so Harthborough's got it."

"And here," said the girl, "is the Drovers' Track."

Before they knew it, they had stepped into a way wider and more clearly marked than the path which had brought them across the base of the triangle of which the apex was the white stone by the hawthorns they had never seen.

"It's a derelict Roman road," said Dick, as they walked along it towards the cleft in the ridge. "See the small paving stones—here—there—and you can feel 'em through the turf, here at the side. Most of this grass has come since the railways took the cattle and the goods wagons off the road. If the track is as good as this all the way——"

"What's that?" exclaimed Amaryllis, stopping and listening.

They were not more than three hundred yards from the point where the road began to rise from the broad, level space of the moor spreading on both sides of the old paved causeway in firm, close-nibbled grass, interspersed with tufts of ling and heather, varied by rarer clumps of gorse.

Not within a hundred yards in any direction could Dick find possible cover from eyes descending the Bull's Neck.

The pair stood motionless, their hearts in their ears.

What they heard was unmistakable.

"A motor," said Amaryllis. "It's coming down."

She laid a hand on his shoulder, lifting her face to him.

When he raised his own from it, it was to watch the point where the descending road took its last bend in the passage by which it had traversed the ridge: the point where the approaching car must appear.

With flushed face and unflinching eyes, Amaryllis stood beside her lover, her right hand still lying light on his shoulder, her sun-bonnet fallen back, and the beauty of hair and features open to the coming enemy.

As the blue car pushed its nose round the corner, and, turning, made straight for the lower plateau, she glanced at Dick's face once more; to see there an impersonal serenity which she might have found inhuman, had she been a mere spectator of the drama which was coming. Being, however, one of its persons, she felt herself enwrapped, and uplifted from fear by the consciousness that a calm mind and a swift brain were supporting each other in her service.

In her soul she cried already, not *Nous les aurons*, but *Il les a*.

"They'll see us," said Dick. "When I say 'run!' make for that gorse-bush. I'll be behind, overdoing my limp. When I say 'down!' fall—sprained ankle. I try to pull you up. You grip your ankle and yell. They'll be out of the car and after us. When they're close, I shall bolt across the road. Yell out 'don't leave me.' They won't touch you—they're after me—I've got the stuff. When they're well away, get back to the car. Get in. Can you drive her?"

"Yes, it's a Seely-Thompson."

"Get her round, head to the rise, ready to pick me up. Got it?"

"Yes," said Amaryllis.

From the car came a queer animal cry. The machine shot suddenly forward.

Deceived by the immobility of the waiting pair, the driver had increased his pace.

"Run!" said Dick, and Amaryllis leapt the ditch at the roadside and ran in the direction he had given. He followed clumsily, exaggerating his lameness.

The car shot by them, as they ran obliquely in the opposite direction, so adding, before the driver could pull up, a hundred yards to their start.

It was, therefore, not until Amaryllis was at the rise of the ridge that they heard behind them the two pairs of feet in pursuit.

"Down!" said Dick, close behind her; and with a well simulated shriek of pain, the girl fell in a heap.

"Oh, my foot!" she cried.

Dick's chief fear was that shooting should begin too soon.

But he heard Melchard's high voice shouting angrily to Mut-mut in his own tongue.

"Jagun pakai snapong. Brenkali akau mow pukul sama prempuan."

And Dick smiled, turning his head in time to see Mut-mut tuck away his revolver.

He leaned over Amaryllis, with pretence of trying to pull her to her feet.

"All right. It works. He's telling Crop-ear not to shoot, 'fear of hitting you."

Amaryllis pushed his hands away, clutched her ankle and moaned aloud.

Dick turned from her and, at a better pace than before, hobbled across the road, pursued by entreaties from Amaryllis so agonized and lifelike as almost to deceive the very author of the scheme.

As he began, with increased appearance of lameness to labour up the slope, he once more heard Melchard's voice:

"Jagun pakai snapong, kalau dea ta mow lepas. Kita mow dapat."

Labouring still more, Dick glanced behind him and saw the two pursuers straining every nerve to overtake him, and for the moment giving no thought to Amaryllis.

Something more Melchard said, but this time Dick could not catch the order. Mut-mut, however, interpreted, by altering his course and running along the foot of the ridge towards a place where the ascent appeared less steep. By this, it seemed, he intended to cut across Dick's line of flight, and to drive him back upon Melchard.

Melchard, meantime, was toiling up the slope in Dick's footsteps with a determination unexpected in a man of his appearance and mode of life.

On the other side of the ancient causeway, at the very foot of the slope, Amaryllis, full of courage and calculation, but with a heart beating painfully until her moment for action should come.

This, she had resolved, must be the moment when she should lose sight of the last runner; and by turning her head sideways, though never raising it, she could see that Dick had the same idea; for he had so directed his flight that he and Melchard were soon hidden from her, while the lumbering Mut-mut, wasting huge force, it seemed, upon each short stride, pounding along the lower ground, vanished only when, reaching his chosen line of ascent, he began to mount the hill.

Then Amaryllis rose, lifted the voluminous skirt, tucked the hem into the waistband, and ran, with long flashes of grey stocking, for the abandoned car.

Dick, still leading his enemies on, saw her in one of his calculating looks behind him. And his heart leapt into his throat for pride of the woman that could listen to, comprehend and interpret orders—and carry them out with a stride like that.

He prolonged his backward look, and Melchard, below him, observed that it was directed over his head, and turned his eyes in the same direction.

He saw the girl running, pulled a weapon from his hip and tried a long shot.

The crack of the Browning had hardly reached her ears before Amaryllis was in the driving-seat. But not for a flicker did she turn her eyes from the business of the moment.

Melchard, with his left hand on his hip and the barrel of the automatic resting on the upturned elbow close to his chin, was on the point of firing again at the very moment when Mut-mut, having reached the top of the ridge, was running back to meet Dick, and Dick, coming down the slope at the best of his prodigious though uneven stride, was within two paces of Melchard's back.

At the sound of his rushing approach, and in the very act of firing, Melchard started. The shot went wide, and the man turned himself and his weapon on the enemy that was nearer even than he guessed.

In the very moment of wheeling about, he received a rugger hand-off on his right jaw, which launched him many yards, sideways down the slope, to land and turn literally heels over head as he fell.

His pistol fell more slowly and further, after describing a wavering arc over his head.

And then Dick Bellamy ran; ran as he had not run since he broke the tape in a

certain sprint of four hundred metres at Buenos Ayres, in forty nine and a quarter seconds. But that was when his legs were an equal pair.

Amaryllis saw it all; Mut-mut on the sky-line of the ridge, hesitating; Melchard and his pistol in eccentric parabolas; Dick, with a wisp of black hair over his wounded cheek, "flying," she called it, down the last of the slope, and crossing the level ground to her and the car; a wild man running, she thought, with the pace of a racehorse, and the movement, not of a runaway, but of a winner. "And, oh!" she would say to him afterwards, "your funny eyes! How they blazed!"

Within four strides of the car.

"Let her rip," he grunted, and taking the low door of the tonneau in his stride, landed on the back seat.

The car rushed forward.

Dick looked round him. Melchard was on his feet, bent and searching the long grass and scrub of the lower slope.

"The beast's got some guts," muttered Dick.

Melchard stood erect and began to run towards them, slowly and painfully.

"He's found his gun," said Dick.

A raised arm and a sharp crack proved his words.

"Throw in the top speed," said Dick. "We *must* go through the Bull's Neck. No cover the other way."

He looked up at the ridge. Mut-mut was not there nor anywhere in sight.



CHAPTER XXI.

THE BAAG-NOUK.

The car rushed at the slope, and the shoulder of the cutting hid it from Melchard the fraction of a second before his next shot was heard.

Amaryllis took the double bend of the little cañon with an assurance which satisfied Dick of her ability.

The sprint had exhausted his reserve of nervous force, for the moment slender; and he lay back in the ample seat of the tonneau scarcely more than half-conscious.

The road straightening before her and still climbing, Amaryllis glanced at him over her shoulder.

"There's some brandy left," she shouted, her eyes again on her work, "in your left pocket. Finish it."

Her voice roused him; with an effort he found and unscrewed the flask.

He had hardly drained it before sight came back to his eyes and he remembered the danger ahead.

Mut-mut!

They had reached a strip of road level and straight, some two hundred yards in length, which crossed the breadth of the ridge, on its way to a descent as steep as the climb already accomplished. But even this, the highest part of their road, ran in a cutting, or natural cleft, in the spine of the ridge; and rocks and bushes, with a few stunted trees, rose in jumbled terraces on both sides of the car.

Cover was there for a hundred Mut-muts; and for Dick Bellamy one was more than enough, while he could not see him.

With his heart in his mouth and Ockley's gun in his hand, he sat waiting.

But Amaryllis, in the false belief that both enemies were behind her, and well taught in the handling of a car, was not going to begin an unknown descent at

full speed. About half-way across the level, she slackened the pace, turning her face a little to the left, as if to speak to the man behind her.

And in that moment, with the words in his mouth to bid her quicken, not relax the speed, Dick saw the bestial one-eared Malay, erect upon a boulder, not more than three feet on the off-side distant from the car.

The brute was on the point of leaping down upon them.

The girl saw Dick's revolver go up, turned, and saw its target.

The horrors of the morning, coming to a climax in this shock like a nightmare's crisis, seemed to stop her heart. With instinctive memory of her instructor's, "If you're taken bad, miss, throw out your clutch, jam on your breaks and faint comfortable," she stopped the car and lost consciousness.

In the same moment Dick fired.

The bullet was too late to stop that gorilla-like spring, and Mut-mut, with a glitter of steel flashing in one of his outspread palms, launched himself upon them, landing, like some huge and horrible cat of dreams, on all fours in the body of the car.

His left ribs were pressed against Dick's knees, his right hand tearing at and ripping the cloth and leather of the car's side-linings as he struggled to rise.

What was fastened in that right hand Dick had seen, and with Ockley's last bullet he blew out Mut-mut's brains.

Before even freeing himself from the weight of the corpse, he felt for its hip-pocket, and pushed what he found into his own belt.

Then, cursing himself for having finished the brandy, he searched the locker under the cushion of the seat and found, amongst a confusion of odds and ends, a sealed bottle of whisky and a corkscrew.

"Robbie Burns, Three Star, All-malt, Pre-War, Liqueur Highland Whisky," said the label, gay with pseudo-tartan colours, which, in happier hours, would have scared him worse than the words.

When he had stretched Amaryllis, still unconscious, in the road, with a cushion under her head and two beneath her feet, he let her lie awhile. Then, encouraged by the faint colour creeping back to her cheeks, he sat beside her in the road and

lifted her shoulders in his left arm, coaxing her to life and forcing between her pale lips burning drops of "Robbie Burns."

So that, when her eyes came open, and a little sense into her ears, this was the kind of thing that she heard:

"Oh, yes, but you must! It's three stars, and there's only a pair of twins in your eyes. Proof strength, and yours isn't, you darling! Drink, will you, you wicked girl? I tell you, it's all-malt, and not a jim-jam to the cask. That's the way, my beauty! Now another! It's Pre-War—fitting prize for Our Brave Women Who Showed The Tommies How To Fight!"

"How silly you are, Dick, dear!" she said at last, wiping her lips. "And what perfectly beastly brandy!"

Dick tasted the stuff, and frankly spat it out.

"I suppose it might be worse, seeing its called whisky, and allowing for the label," he said. "Young woman, I'm going to kiss you somethin' crool in a minute. 'Course I'm silly! What was it you did, when I was only taking a snooze?"

"Cried," she answered.

"And I laugh to see you all right again."

But Amaryllis was looking about her.

"Is it gone, that awful thing?" she asked, whispering.

"Gone for good," said Dick.

"And, oh! the car? How did you ever stop it?"

"You stopped it, you wonder-child. And there's a great deal more 'how' about that."

"Then—then it's the same thing as last time?" she said, her face paling once more.

"The same thing," admitted Dick. "It was him or us, you know. And there's not much egoism in saying we're better worth keeping, is there?"

Though she shuddered again and bore a grave face, he could see that she was

relieved.

Rising with the help of his hand, she tried to smooth her rumpled feathers, and said:

"Hadn't we better go on?"

"I've got to move something from the car first," he replied, with ambiguity merely euphemistic. "You stand here and keep a look-out towards Harthborough."

"All right," she answered, understanding very well what he had to do. She turned away, and then, with an effort, her face still averted, "Can't I help you, Dick?" she asked.

"Yes—by sitting on that stone and not turning round till I let you."

And he went back to the car, taking the "Robbie Burns" with him.

In his shaken and exhausted condition, the task of dragging that revolting corpse from the car was not easy. Heavy he had known the body would be, but when he had opened the door on the off-side, and would have pulled the dead thing out by the heels, he was surprised to find that he could not move it. On a second effort the slight yielding of the mass was accompanied by a sound of rending and he remembered Mut-mut's right hand, armed with a weapon of unspeakable cruelty, which only once before in his life had he seen—the Mahratta baag-nouk, or Tiger's Claw.

He went round to the car's-near side, and there found, as he had expected, the dead right hand anchored to the lining-cushions by what was, he supposed, a unique specimen, made to the fancy of the creature that wore it; for, in addition to the leather strap across the back of the hand, two rings were welded to the instrument, through which to pass the second and third fingers, thus keeping in position the four short, razor-edged steel claws hidden in the palm.

Dick loosened the buckle of the strap, and drew the hand, already cold, from the rings; picked the baag-nouk from the cushion, wrapped it in a greasy cloth out of the tool-box, and hid it under the seat.

The thought of that gruesome weapon, more frightful than the unsheathed claws of the royalest Bengal tiger, hanging over the head of his chosen among women, stung Dick Bellamy to very unceremonious removal of the body, which, after

rifling it of a handful of cartridges, he flung by the roadside; and then, lest Amaryllis should see the awful head again, even in death, he covered the whole corpse with an overcoat of Melchard's from the car.

The engine had run down. As he cranked it up, Dick was seized by a sudden savage desire to have in his hands the man who had brought all his outrage, suffering and terror to the girl whose uncovered head and patient back he could see waiting for him down the road.

A fierce rage, such as he had seldom felt, and never since boyhood, flooded his body with a dry heat, and stimulated his intelligence.

For with these thoughts of the evil Melchard came sudden insight into the man's purpose at the foot of the Bull's Neck, and his probable action at the present moment.

"He was shooting to drive us into Mut-mut's arms, and to make us believe our danger was all behind us," he reasoned. "And it's a white elephant to a dead rat he's trudging up this road now to find what Mut-mut's left of us. Perhaps he's heard the two shots, and me cranking up."

Not daring to call Amaryllis, he trusted her precise obedience to his orders, and sank, almost as swiftly as Pépe into the landscape.

Crouching, crawling, worming himself on his belly from tree-stump to boulder he mounted some ten feet above the road on the side away from the car, and then, invisible from the road level, continued his course until he had retraced about fifty yards of the way they had travelled.

Then he stopped, lying prone where two rocks, standing so little apart that they seemed long years ago to have formed a single mass, gave him view of the road's whole width.

He laid one ear against the rock, and over the other a hand.

After a minute's waiting, footsteps; three more, and a weary figure came in sight where the level road began.

The joy he felt kept him patient until Melchard, unmistakable, was right beneath him.

"Hi! Melchard!" he cried.

Melchard started, stopped, and looked anxiously round.

"Never heard the voice before? You'll hear it often, and lots of it, soon, Melchard. Pull out your gun."

The man in the road made no attempt to obey. From Mut-mut's revolver Dick sent a bullet which threw up the dust at Melchard's feet.

"Two inches to the right of your feet."

He fired again. Again the little puff of dust.

"An inch and a half to the left of your feet," he sang out cheerfully. "The next'll be half-way between and three feet higher. Put down your gun."

Melchard produced his automatic and dropped it.

"Kick it away from you."

Melchard obeyed, and his weapon lay three yards out of reach.

"Move an inch, and I'll put a hole in your slimy heart."

Melchard stood, still game enough to control in some measure the trembling which had seized him.

Then Dick raised his voice.

"Miss Caldegard!" he shouted.

"I'm coming," came the clear voice in reply, and a patter of light feet.

Dick could just see the car, and Amaryllis when she reached it.

"Where are you?" she called, bewildered.

"Keep straight on. You see a thing something like a man, standing in the road, don't you?"

"Yes," answered Amaryllis.

"Near it you will find an automatic pistol, on the ground. Pick it up, please, and go back to your seat," shouted Dick.

Amaryllis obeyed him. But, after going a little way, she called back to him and

instinctively she imitated his formality in presence of the unclean.

"Mr. Bellamy!" she cried. "Please—not this one."

To this allusion Melchard had no clue. But there was in her tone something which turned the blood cold in him.

The invisible Dick, however, answered in a laughing voice so joyous that Amaryllis was vaguely distressed.

"Rather not," he replied. "I've something much better for this guy."

With intense pleasure, while his observation-slit gave him sight of her, he watched the girl returning to her post.

Then he shot a fresh order at the prisoner.

"Turn round," he said.

Melchard obeyed.

"If you move a foot or lift a hand before I speak again, it's a bullet between the shoulders."

Judging this to be the position most demoralizing, Dick descended with more haste than precaution. Melchard, his entrails shaking, stood, to all appearance, firm as a rock. When Dick tapped his shoulder, he turned, showing a face white and drawn.

"The man Bunce!" he exclaimed.

"Silly liar!" said Dick. "You knew who I was the moment you saw my cheek—guessed I was the man who was queering your game. I have queered it, and I'm going to queer you. Walk in front of me, and don't forget, that, if I have to disappoint myself by killing you, I shan't lose any sleep about it."

Melchard walked silent and erect, with the unseen pistol-barrel behind him.

Dick could see even in the shoulders before him the ripple of fear controlled, but not conquered.

And the sight brought, not indeed compassion, but a separated measure of respect.

When they had almost reached the car, he called a halt.

"I shan't keep on threatening you," he said "You're down and out. Understand, once for all, that, on the least movement, I shoot to kill."

He pointed to the coat spread over what had been Mut-mut.

"That's yours," he said. "Put it on."

The man was reeking with sweat, exhausted and in mortal fear. A chill might endanger the success of Dick's design.

Melchard, guessing well what it covered, lifted the fawn-coloured overcoat with resolution; but the earless side of that frightful head, with another and bloody hole making a pair of dead eyes to stare up at him, was too much for the shaken nerve, and Alban Melchard collapsed on his face in the road.

Dick turned him over, lifted an eyelid, and, convinced that the man was unconscious, fetched from the car his bottle of the strange device, and poured a stream from its neck into Melchard's half-open mouth.

For some moment's after, he was afraid that the fit of choked coughing his rough remedy had caused would compel him to leave a second corpse by the roadside.

When it was over, however, it appeared that the stimulant had been partly assimilated, for Melchard was able to stand. When he had got his arms into the overcoat, Dick led him to the car.

From the locker under the seat he produced a thick tumbler.

"Get in," he said, and half-filled the glass from the bottle.

Melchard lay back exhausted in the near-side corner, examining with dull eyes the havoc made by Mut-mut's claw.

"Drink that," said Dick.

Melchard shook his head.

"I hate spirits," he objected feebly. "That's his stuff—Mut-mut's."

"You'll hate it worse soon," was all the answer he got; and drank, gasping between gulps.

Knowing that the man had not a kick left in him, Dick ventured, rather than fetch Amaryllis into sight of the uncovered corpse, to mount the front seat and drive the car to the place where she sat waiting.

When she was beside him, he asked if she were fit to drive.

"Yes," she answered. "But I nearly went to sleep waiting for you, Dick."

"I don't think either of us is fit to drive her to town," he said, looking at his watch. "I'm pretty tough, but I'm nearly all in. How you've stuck it as you have, I can't understand. So we'll have a shot at that five-fifteen. We've about seven miles to go. Thirty m.p.h.—that's fourteen minutes. Bar hold-ups, that's good enough. It's just five to five now, but I must fix up my passenger."

Amaryllis looked round at Melchard.

"What are you going to do with him?" she asked, turning back upon Dick a face of disgust.

"Take him up to town," said Dick.

"How beastly!" said Amaryllis.

"Doped, my child—most royally doped—with a kindly poison that he loathes."

He left her and took his seat beside the prisoner. Amaryllis, not a little vexed by the addition to their party, started the car.

As they glided down the wide bends of the descent, Dick plied the wretched Melchard with dose after dose of throat-rasping spirit. After the second half-tumbler the man wept, sobbing out entreaties for mercy. And Amaryllis felt a wave of cold fear run down her spine when she heard the voice and words of her lover's reply—words not meant for her hearing she knew for the voice was so low that it was only the precision of the speaker's passion which carried them, against the wind, to her ears.

"Pity! Pity on a filthy creature that never felt it—not even for his own filthy servants! Pity for a lickspittle parasite that battens on the passions and vices of hopeless gaol-birds, abandoned women, jaded pleasure-hunters and terrified neurasthenics! Pity on a speculator calculating huge revenues from the festering putrefaction of human disease! I haven't hit you yet, because your flesh is foul to me—but—drink that down, or, by God! I'll smash every bone in your face."

A gasp, a spasmodic sound of gulping, another gasp—and silence.

Two-thirds of the bottle's contents was down the man's throat. Dick poured the remnant into his flask and sat watching the effects.

Satisfied at last that he had induced complete alcoholic coma, he touched Amaryllis on the shoulder.

"Stop her as soon as you can," he said. "I'll drive now."

When they were off again, she asked, in a voice none too steady, what he had been doing to the wretched man behind her.

"Made him absolutely blind—blotto," he answered.

"You sounded rather dreadful, Dick," she said; adding, after a hesitation, "Cruel—almost."

His face was set on the road ahead of him, and his profile, she thought, though not definitely vindictive in expression, was hard as stone.

"Cruel?" he asked.

"You said awful things in a very dreadful voice."

"The awful thoughts I had account for the voice, beloved," he explained. "They couldn't be said to him. I thought of his hands touching you—his voice speaking to you—you, young as an angel, as beautiful as the goddess that floated in upon the world in a mother-of-pearl dinghy! As clever as that other one with the fireman's tin hat, as game as Jimmy Wilde, and as kind as Heaven. Spoke to *you*—touched you—looked at you—blasphemy, profanation and sacrilege! And barged into your bedroom, when—. My God! woman," cried poor Dick, as if a flame came from the marble lips of him, "I could have watched him through an hour of rack and thumbscrew, when I thought of you up in that room of his. It's the cruelty I haven't done that's my claim to the next vacancy in halos. Cruel? Just for pouring down him a few tumblerfuls of a mixture of arrack and spud-spirit that he'd bought for his damned Caliban! And I only did that because there weren't any handcuffs handy."

Uttered in a voice wonderfully soft, yet vibrating with a quality which thrilled him like some tone of a celestial violin, her answering question reached him through the rush of their speed.

"Do you love me like that?" she asked.

To the short nod of his white silhouette he added curtly:

"Be quiet, please. I'm driving."

She chuckled softly to herself, thinking how well already she began to understand his ways—ways so odd and dear, she told herself, that never, she was sure, would she tire of them.



CHAPTER XXII.

LORD LABRADOR.

The Roman causeway ran into the macadam high road from Harthborough to Timsdale-Horton almost on the level, with still a slight fall towards Harthborough, the smoke of whose chimneys was already visible.

Half a mile ahead of them was a knot of men, gathered about what might have been a wheelbarrow. A quarter of a mile further,

"Three men," said Dick.

"Motor-cycle and side-car," said Amaryllis. "Is it another picket?"

Instead of answering, Dick replied with a command:

"Hold tight. Don't turn to look at 'em. You're talking to me by the yard as we go by. We go right through. Shan't give 'em an inch."

The car darted forward. The road ran between stone dykes, bordering pasture and arable enclosures. The pace, close upon fifty miles an hour, took them up to and past the suspected group so swiftly that it was impossible to note the faces of the men who formed it while their movements of recoil and surprise might have been due to the unusual speed alone.

But a little later, Amaryllis, turning in her seat, thought she saw a small cloud of dust start up from the road; and Dick, on the assumption of a pursuit almost as swift as his flight, found himself involved in the solution of complex chances.

The road he followed, as he had been able to determine from the higher ground, led directly to the railway station in the centre of Harthborough. It was now five minutes past five o'clock—ten minutes before the train's scheduled time of departure; which, allowing two minutes for reaching the station, would mean eight minutes to spend on the platform, even if the train were up to time.

Eight minutes for the men with the side-car to reach the station and——

And what?

Even the intoxicated Melchard, should it come to gun-play on platform or in railway carriage, would be no protection to Amaryllis. If the picket had been able to distinguish their leader in his car as it flashed by them, they must have guessed him a prisoner, and, as such, the probable King's evidence to hang them.

For his satellites, Melchard was safer dead than captive.

Just ahead the road branched. Resolved to shorten his time of waiting, and hoping to mislead the chase, Dick took the right line of the fork, which bent to hide him, if only for a moment, from the side-car.

"The station's down the other road," said Amaryllis.

"Yes," said Dick. "Don't want more than three minutes there before the train pulls out."

He slowed suddenly, having seen his expected by-road a little way ahead.

"I'm turning back to the left here," he explained. "Look back as I swing, and see if they're in sight."

"Not a sign," said Amaryllis.

But as she spoke they heard the detonations of a back-fire, and pictured, though they could not see, Melchard's avengers plunging away southward, past the end of the lane into which Dick had turned.

This lane between two rows of blunt cottage-fronts soon proved itself not merely a refuge, but an avenue.

At eleven minutes past five Dick Bellamy stopped Melchard's car outside the booking-office of somnolent Harthborough's dead-alive station—the junction of the single-line track to Whitebay and its bathing machines with the double-track branch of the G.N.R. from York to Caterscliff.

A hopeless porter languished against the hot bricks of the doorway. Dick came round between him and Melchard, peering down upon that sordid wreck of smartness. He turned to Amaryllis, who had followed him.

"Pore old guv'nor!" he said tenderly; and Amaryllis with difficulty restrained her surprise at his change from the local dialect to that of the London cab-rank. "They 'aven't arf filled 'im up proper this time." Then, to the porter, despondently interested in this queer company, "Hi, chum! Give us a 'and," he said, pulling

from his pocket a confusion of silver, and crumpled Treasury notes. "Is the London trine up yet?"

"Signalled, she be," said the porter, peering at Melchard.

"Keep yer eyes off wot's no blinkin' good to 'em" said Dick. Then, lowering his voice to oily confidence, he went on: "It's young Lord Labrador—Marquis of Toronto's 'opeful. Put 'im through the mill, they 'ave, at yer three-legged race meetin' at Timsdale-'Orton. Made me larf shockin', it did. 'E's got to meet 'is lovin' pa, ten o'clock a.m. ter-morrer mornin', an' I said as I'd see 'im through, and get 'm a wash an' brush up. I train a bit for 'im—the young un, yer know."

"Well, 'tain't noah business o' mine," said the porter.

"Ow much to make it yourn, sonny?"

"Ah doan't rightly know."

"Won't be less'n a dollar, mate—see?"

The porter saw.

Dick thrust notes into his hand.

"Get us three firsts to King's Crawss, and 'ave a label ready to smudge on the winder, w'ile me an' my girl gets 'im through to the platform, nice and cushy."

Supported on each side, with flaccid legs just able to move in turn, Melchard was guided to a bench some way down the platform, and seated between two bolstering forms to which the contact was disgusting.

Fortunately they had the up-platform to themselves.

The train was late, and the long minutes held each more of anxiety than the last.

The porter came with the tickets.

"Eere's 'opeless 'Arry," said Dick, going to meet him.

"Wi't'yoong spark in thot trim," said the porter, pocketing a tip of weight to gratify without astounding, "Ah'd'a' pushed onto Lunnon wi' 'im in t'car."

"Not if you'd borrered it, Mr. 'Opeless. She belongs to a Mr. Mills o' Melborough—Na-ow! *Melchard* o' Millsborough. 'E's one o' them there painful dentisters."

A sound like a smothered sneeze, followed by a syncopated gurgle, coming from behind him, warned Dick to tone down the comic relief.

"You get the car run into cover, and keep an eye on 'er till that there Pluck-'em-W'ile-yer-Wait comes a sorrowing arter 'er. Tell 'im my address is No. 5, John Street, London, and I'll settle for the bit o' damage. There's no need to bring 'is young lordship in. There's plenty o' wailin' an' gnashin' comin' to 'im, any'ow."

In a sad-coloured notebook, with a stump of dirty pencil, the porter solemnly noted that classic address.

"An' that's more trouble for *you*, so 'ere's a few more bits o' wot we takes it for."

Four minutes late, the train rumbled in.

With less difficulty than it had taken to extract him from the car, Dick and the porter got Melchard into the corner of a first-class compartment of the last carriage on the train—behind the guard's van even, being the London "slip," the porter told them as he slapped his "engaged" label on the window.

The guard was on the point of waving his flag when the staccato rush of a motorcycle sounded hideously outside the little station.

"Get in," said Dick to Amaryllis.

The guard called to the porter:

"Can't keep 'er. Five minutes behind already," and let his green signal flutter.

Dick followed Amaryllis and closed the door.

And even as the engine made its first slow movement, there came a rush of heavy feet on the wooden flooring of the booking-office, and two men in motor-cycling rig made a determined dash at the train.

The station-master, eager for unpleasing duty, emerged shouting:

"Stand back!"

But the porter would not see nor hear him, and opened the door of the compartment immediately in front of that which his label had reserved. The runners scrambled in.

Dick had been careful not to show his face until the door—the next, it seemed—

was banged shut. But a rapid glance at that very moment showed him that it was indeed from the next compartment that came the half-crown which the porter caught as it fell.

Dick settled back into his seat with the consciousness that the partition against which he leaned was poor protection from a revolver-bullet.



CHAPTER XXIII.

FALLING OUT.

"Is it they?" asked Amaryllis

"Two to one on," he answered.

"Next compartment?"

"Yes."

"Did they see us get in?"

"No."

"Then how can they know?"

"They saw the car outside, and the porter shutting this door. If they hadn't, they'd have bundled in right opposite the entrance, instead of running down the train," reasoned Dick.

"Will they try to come in here, then?" she asked.

"There's no corridor," said Dick.

"But outside? There was a murder—I read about it——"

"Take it easy, little wonder," he answered, with a smile which made of his patronage a tribute. "I haven't got this far to crack in the last lap. I'm thinking out a pretty story for the *Sunday Magazine*; so no murders, please. They make me nervous. We're all right for a bit—next station's fifteen miles ahead. They're getting their wind next door, and talking it over."

He rose, and lifting Melchard's legs, made him lie at full length along the seat farthest from the engine and the motor-cyclists. Next, he drew down the little corner-blinds of each window, leaving the door-blinds up; then sat down again resuming his attitude of abstraction.

In the silence which followed Amaryllis watched him until confidence crept into

her unawares, and she found herself becoming sleepily interested in smaller matters than life and death. She did not believe any longer that anyone could prevail against "Limping Dick."

She smiled to herself over the strange figure he cut, forgetting her own.

His bulging pockets amused her into trying to remember all the things he had stowed away in them.

The newest seemed to be an oily piece of cotton rag, sticking out from the side pocket of his Norfolk jacket, which looked already, since she had seen it first, three years older.

At last she spoke.

"Is the little plot finished?" she asked.

"Very nearly," he replied

"And is it decorous in episode, cheerful in tone, and forcible in moral tendency?"

"All these it is, and more."

"Then—please, sir, I have a question to ask."

"Ask, maiden," said Dick.

"I want to know why you keep that filthy cloth in your pocket."

"And why this sudden curiosity about a trifle?" His hand felt the thing as if he had forgotten it.

"Because," said Amaryllis, "I can't possibly sit closer to you if you don't throw it away."

Dick rose, taking the bundle carefully from his pocket.

"It's a curio—a relic. I'll show it you some day," he said, laying it in a corner of the rack.

"Not now?"

"Not now."

And then there came over his face an expression of mixed humour and triumph.

"By the bloomin' idol made of mud!" he cried, "you've given me the climax. It makes the story more moral than ever."

And he murmured, as if only for himself: "Which side, O Bud! Which side?"

A little later he put up both windows.

"It'll be awfully hot," said Amaryllis.

"Let's be absolutely silent for a bit," said Dick. "With our ears to the partition, we might hear something."

With intense concentration, they listened for several minutes.

"It's no good," said Dick at last. "Talking, talking all the time, but the train makes too much row, and the padding's too thick."

"I heard something," said the girl. "Not words—but the different tones of two voices, arguing. One wants to do something, and the other doesn't. He's afraid, I think."

"M'm!" grunted Dick.

"The brave one's here—with his back to me. He's strong and heavy, I think, because his voice is growly, and he sits back hard now and then, and I can feel the partition bulge a little. And then—he keeps fiddling with something that clicks."

"Clicks? How? Like the hammer of an empty gun?" asked Dick, puzzled.

The girl leaned forward and touched the spring lock of the carriage door.

"No. Heavier than a pistol. Clicky and thumpy, like this lock if you pull it and let go."

Dick's face beamed with satisfaction.

"Don't touch it—I know," he said. "I suppose you'll be wanting half the proceeds, and your name as part author."

"What on earth d'you mean, Dick?"

"Collaboration. You've completed the plot."

He changed his seat to face her from the opposite corner; looked at his watch,

and thereafter gazed steadily from the window with down-bent eyes for so long that Amaryllis grew bored and nervous.

"Two minutes to do a mile," he said at last, having again looked at his watch. "It's fifteen minutes since we left Harthborough—seven miles and a half. That's another seven and a half to go—Todsmoor's the station, I think. They'll try it on within five minutes, or give it up. What did you do with that snoring beast's automatic?"

Amaryllis thrust her hand deep into the Brundage pocket, rummaging.

"What an awful pouch!" he exclaimed.

"It is a bottomless pit, certainly. But it's much discreeter than yours are, Dick. They bulge so interestingly, and make you an awfuller sight than all the rest of your funny things together," she replied, laughing at him.

Successful at last, she produced the Browning pistol which Melchard had surrendered on the Roman road. "But it bumped horribly when I walked—and it *would* always knock the same place on my knee. Oh, Dick, shall we ever get into clothes that'll feel nice again?"

"To-night, damsel, shalt thou sleep in fine linen, and to-morrow, so it please you, shalt fare homeward in thy father's chariot, leaving in that progress a ravaged Marshall and Snelgrove, an eviscerated Lewis, and the house of Harrod but a warehouse of mourning."

Softly he let down both windows, fearing glass little less than bullets.

"Sit there," he said, pointing to the corner opposite to Melchard's head; and, when she was seated, gave her back the pistol.

"If anything comes, cover it with that."

"But, Dick—," she faltered, "I know I'm silly, but I—I don't want to kill anybody. I'm afraid."

"P'r'aps they'll funk it. But I've an idea they're more afraid of him—if they know we've got him—than of us." He glanced at Melchard, and then out of the window.

The train was running on an embankment with steep, grassy sides—not a house nor a highway in sight.

"This side would be safer to fall from," said Dick. "On yours it's the down-line rails. Tails up, dear! In three minutes it'll be over or off. Don't shoot—only show you're heeled, and look fierce."

He reached for the oily cloth in the rack. Catching her fascinated eyes fixed on him:

"Watch the window, will you," he snapped; and a sting of indignation at being so addressed gave Amaryllis the stimulant she needed.

It should be obedience now, but a royal exhibition of displeasure afterwards!

So, with the mouth and eyes of a goddess incensed, Amaryllis watched, in lofty silence, her rectangle of sunlight.

But from the preparations of Dick Bellamy dignity was altogether absent.

From the dirty cloth he unwrapped Mut-mut's baag-nouk, slipped his right hand into its straps and rings, and sank to his knees on the floor of the carriage, facing the door and its open, unblinded window.

Leaning to his right, he lifted the corner blind away, bringing his left cheek against the glass; and from this spy-hole kept that eye on the point where the door of the next compartment should just show itself, were it opened at right-angles to the train in letting a man creep out upon the footboard.

And then, as he waited, came a dreadful thought: the door on this side of the compartment, the train running on the left-hand track, was hinged, of course, upon its forward jamb, and must therefore be passed, by one creeping from the direction of the engine, before it could be opened so as to give entrance. On the other side the position was reversed.

Might not this advantage of the door defended only by the girl have been noted by the men on the other side of that partition?

And she? Her back was to the engine and her corner blind pulled down. She would see nothing till her door began to open; and even had she nerve for killing, she could not shoot; for, in pity of her white hands, he had fixed the safety-catch of Melchard's gun.

He pictured the moment's wavering, and a struggle, ending, perhaps, in a double fall from the train.

While still his eye was steady at the loophole, his mind reached the decision to change his dispositions. But before he could move to rise the black, upright line of the enemy's door swung slowly into his field of vision. His position at the window gave him a bare inch to see it in, but the sight lifted his fighting soul into the heaven of certain success.

Still watching, he saw that the door's edge remained steady, fixed, he argued, by the hand of the man that watched his companion, too low for Dick's line of sight, handing himself along by the brass rail, nearer and nearer.

While that door was held, Amaryllis was safe.

Dick sank back upon his haunches, bowing his bare head to bring it below the level of the open window.

There followed a stillness of waiting—stillness wrapped in the roar of the train.

A brushing sound on the door's window-ledge!

Throwing his head backwards, Dick saw, without raising his head, thick, dirty fingers on the split sill.

Lightly he touched them with his left hand. A head came in sight, rising diagonally across the frame it entered; and as it rose, so rose Dick's right hand, showing the steel blades of the Tiger's Claw.

The white face was jerked backward, the black-nailed fingers lost hold, and with a choked scream the whole body fell outward from the train, describing a curve towards the rear which just carried it free of the ballast, to land sideways on the turf of the slope, and roll.

The bank was high and steep, and the body was still rolling, when Dick turned his head to the sound of a door closing. His remaining enemy had shut himself in.

"Got 'em both," he said, facing Amaryllis, and dropping his greasy parcel once more in the rack.

"What's happened? Oh, that horrid scream!" she said, shaking.

"Your brave villain's taken a toss, darling," said Dick, sitting with an arm round her. "And the white-livered accomplice is dithering with funk in there." And he thumped the cushion of the partition. "We shall pull up at Todsmoor in a few

minutes. Let's compose ourselves. You must be asleep in your corner——"

He broke off, eyeing her face keenly; then finished his sentence tenderly with an "if you please, my dear."

The girl blushed gloriously.

"I hurt its tender feelings, didn't I, when I barked?"

"Yes—for a moment. But it—it made me so angry, Dick, that I forgot to be frightened. You're so clever! I believe you did it on purpose for that." And, when he smiled at her, "I won't forgive you, then," she murmured. "I'll just say thank you instead."

She kissed him.

There came a groan and a heavy sigh from Melchard.

"No, he's not awake, nor near it," said Dick, when he had examined his patient. "But I'd better give him another dose. There's going to be fun at Todsmoor, and I don't want any Millsborough back-talk mixed up with it. Look out of that window while I physic him. It's not nice to watch."

It was nasty enough to hear, thought Amaryllis.

By the time it was over the train was slowing down. Before it stopped Dick was out on the platform, and in two strides had caught the guard.

"There's been an accident. Man fell out of this carriage—next to mine," he said, in a low voice, speaking now in the assured tones of a gentleman accustomed to obedience. "Don't make a fuss. Fetch the station-master."

The bearded autocrat hesitated, eyeing this strange figure with the "officer's swank," as he called it afterwards.

"I advise you to hurry," said Dick, his eyes opening a little wider.

The autocrat took the advice, and returned with another.

Dick was standing with his hand on the door of the compartment with one traveller—the remaining motor-cyclist.

"Look here, station-master," he said, beginning before the man could open his mouth; "I don't want to leave you with a nasty job like this on your hands,

without telling you what I know. I am Major Richard Bellamy of the R.A.F. Never mind my clothes. Take it I've been celebrating. At Harthborough I got into the next compartment with a lady, and a man I have befriended. I am looking after him. He'll be all right to-morrow. Just as we left—the train had actually started—two fellows in overalls jumped into *this* compartment. Half-way between this and Harthborough we heard a row going on—the lady and I. It got worse and worse, and I looked out of the window just in time to see one of the pair fall out backwards."

Here Dick looked at his watch.

"Twelve minutes ago, it was. I took the time then. He hit the grass bank and rolled. Shouldn't wonder if he's all right. Probably alive, anyhow."

"Why didn't you pull the communication cord?" asked the station-master, pompously stern.

Now Dick had forgotten the communication cord. But it would have been impossible for him to forget a few things he had once learned about railways.

He glanced at the guard, and found uneasiness in his eye.

"It's a slip carriage," he said, smiling, tolerantly superior. "Was the connection made?" he asked, looking hard in the guard's face.

The man flushed an awkward red. "No," he said. "'Tain't worth the trouble for the little bit of a journey before we slip her."

"H'm!" said the station-master.

"Just so," said Dick, simultaneously. "So perhaps it'd be just as well for me not to have thought of the communication cord, eh?"

The station-master said nothing. But the guard looked as if there were gratitude in him somewhere.

"If the poor beggar's alive, he'll have gained by our not stopping, because he'll get a doctor and a stretcher all the quicker," Dick went on. "Now, I advise you to hold the fellow in this compartment here for your local police. Look at him. He's sat there like that ever since we ran in here. You can see he was in no hurry to give information concerning what had happened to his friend."

The station-master turned to the guard.

"Did you see anything?" he asked.

"No. But I heard a door bang. I looked out, but I heard nothing. The gentleman's quite right, though, about the two chaps scrambling in as we pulled out of Harthborough."

The station-master turned to Dick with a face diffidently serious.

"I'm afraid you ought to wait here, sir," he said.

"I know I ought not. Duty's duty, and you can't keep me, my good fellow," replied Dick, dredging the breast pocket of his coat and producing and opening his cigarette-case. "Here's my card. The address will always find me."

The station-master looked at the card, hesitating still, and turning it about in his fingers.

"I can uncouple the through carriage," he said.

"And I can move my party to another," Dick blandly retorted. "And you'll only inconvenience everybody up the line that meant to use it. See here, man; I'm witness of what was possibly an accident. I give you the information, and add my private opinion that it was something worse than an accident. That's all. It's up to you to put your police on the job, not to disturb a traveller that wasn't even in the man's compartment. Ask this fellow here, who was in it. Most likely he's got no ticket, running it fine as they did at Harthborough. That'll give you reason enough to make him miss the train while one of your men's fetching a constable. And the constable won't let him out of sight till you've found the other man, alive or dead. But he won't object to waiting, unless he wants to rouse suspicion. Now I do object." And here Dick laughed. "Why," he went on, "with your way of doing things, they'd have to arrest a hundred witnesses every time a lorry ran into a lamp-post."

And he stood by, lighting his pipe, while the station-master attempted to extract information from the man in overalls.

He proved docile enough; mumbled a halting tale of dozing in his corner when his friend, leaning from the window, had been launched from the train by the sudden opening of the door. Supposed it hadn't been properly latched; his friend had been fooling with the lock a few minutes before. No, there'd been no words—not to say quarrel; they'd talked a bit—nothing more. Oh, yes, of course he'd get out and wait over, and do his bit to help 'em find his chum—poor, silly

blighter!

The man cast one sly side-glance at Dick, and thought he was not being watched.

But Dick saw, and gathered from that one flash of the eye that this was Pépe's "Hebérto, the London man," and that 'Erb was not even yet sure whether this was or was not the wild man who had leapt upon him from the stairs in the hall at "The Myrtles," eight or nine hours ago.

As the train ran out of Todsmoor, "I shouldn't wonder," said Dick comfortably to Amaryllis, "if that's the last fence, and a straight run home for us."

But there was fear as well as disgust in the glance which Amaryllis threw at the gross slumber of their prisoner.

She had felt his power stretched over half a county, and who should fix its limit for her?

But she merely said:

"What time do we get to King's Cross, Dick?"

"Ten-thirty—on paper; but we're twenty minutes late already."

"Then—what'm I going to do then? Eleven o'clock, and me so tired!"

"You'll be all right. I'll see that you are," said Dick.

Apparently satisfied by this pledge, Amaryllis had almost fallen asleep in her corner, now the furthest from Melchard, when Dick said:

"What you want to-night, my prize-packet, is a fairy godmother."

"She would save lots of trouble," admitted Amaryllis.

"And all you've got is that mildewed chaperon, snoring there."

Amaryllis shuddered.

"I don't know even yet," she said, "why you brought it—a thing you might have left tied in a bundle by the roadside. He's only been dangerous and disgusting. And you said——"

"Said it wasn't to take it out of him that I did it. Did I? If I did, it's right."

There was a silence.

"I suppose you could guess," said Dick, breaking it.

"Was it because you thought of the harm that he does, making drugs and selling them to sad people and bad people, Dick?"

"That might have been a good reason. It's not my line, though—if I'm on oath."

"Oh, but you're not, Dick. You needn't say anything unless you want to tell me."

"I do. That reason wasn't mine. I don't feel like that about people in the lump. And now they say *the* people is free and democratic—doing things, you know, off its own bat, when it hasn't a cat's notion of cricket—now I think, as far as I think about the lump at all, that it'd better have a fair run at its own game. Result may be anything; might be a new and a good one. But I simply hate seeing the old professional groundsman pretending that the new mob of boys likes cricket, and sweating himself all for nothing.

"As for the drug business, it cures in the end by killing, and grandmotherly legislation belongs to dear old tyranny; and I'm not at all sure, if five-eighths of the people said that the rest mustn't kill pigs to eat 'em, that you and I would be wrong to have an illicit rasher when we could get it. Anyhow, the immoral remnant of the nation doesn't trouble my dreams. It rubs itself out in the end. So, you see, it wasn't the dope evil that made me bind him in the chains of tangle-foot and force his putrid company on an angel. Guess again."

"I'm too tired," said Amaryllis "to have a guess left in me. Tell me."

"My dear," he answered, "the cherry's always been bigger than the bunch to me. You are just the greatest, and the roundest and the reddest, and the sweetest cherry on the big tree. And the cherry nearest to you——"

"My dad?" she asked, interrupting with a catch of the breath.

He nodded.

"Yes," he said. "It was for him I took the dope from that scented ape—because he'd have been hurt if it'd got loose to ravage the world. And when I got the chance I just pouched the ape too for the same reason—so that the man that cursed you shall not only feel that his patent curse hasn't done any damage, but has even helped to chain up a lot of rival plagues. These men of science are like

benevolent Jupiters: Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday colloquing with Vulcan to forge heavier and sharper thunderbolts; Thursday, Friday and Saturday conferring anxiously with all Olympus as to how they shall be blunted and lightened, lest they hurt poor mortal fools too much.

"This chap Melchard, properly handled, will give the show away, and the League of Nations or some other comic crowd'll corral the lot."

"What lot?" asked Amaryllis.

"The crew your father told us about. My dear, I wanted to please you by pleasing him. To do it I had to let you run a shade more risk and endure a lot more discomfort. Was that—was it——"

For once Dick Bellamy could not find his words. Yet his eyes, it seemed to Amaryllis, were hardened—stabbing hers with steel points barbed with curiosity.

She knew what he meant, and said so.

"Of course it was nothing against me—against love," she answered. "It was just the hook, dear, that's going to hold this fish for ever."

When they had expressed the inexpressible and explained the obvious, he returned to that fish-hook phrase of hers.

"What made you put it like that, young woman?" he asked.

"Your eyes, Dick. For a moment you were afraid, wondering whether I should toe the line exactly. Your eyes got hard. They stabbed right into me, and they had a sort of backward wings, like fish-hooks—father's got a horrid arrow like that—won't come out again without tearing. Yours won't ever, Dick."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"KUK-KUK-KUK-KATIE."

Soft, even light filled the wide entrance hall of No. — Park Lane.

The single, expressionless footman appeared almost hopeful, knowing his release was near; for the time was only twenty minutes short of midnight.

The road between the front door and the park railings was almost as peaceful as the houses on its one side, and the grass and trees on the other. Hardly a hoof on the wood, and but a rare motor rushing, at intervals, with soft, apologetic speed over the thoroughfare from north to south.

But there came at last a taxi—Charles, in spite of thick door and perfect roadway, recognised its venal characteristics—a taxi which hesitated, stopped, started again, and came to rest at the very door of No. —.

Though his ears could scarce believe it on that Saturday night, when there was not within earshot any function or reception going on, there came feet up those splendid, shallow steps—feet which seemed to halt, and even vacillate beneath a swaying body.

The mere suspicion was shocking; but even worse, to that cultivated ear, was the clamour of the bell which followed.

But when, having opened the door, Charles examined the ringer, he was astounded, not to say appalled.

The man, though his eyes were heavy and his voice that of one driving himself to the limit of his strength, was certainly not intoxicated; for in that matter, Charles the footman knew and trusted the nicety of his own judgment. But the condition of the dress, the cut cheek-bone, the puffy eye above it, the dirty hands with raw knuckles, and the pockets grotesquely bulging, made a picture so painfully in contrast with the house and its quarter, that the footman's face lost its habitual expression of restrained good-humour under a mask of severity altogether tragic.

For a moment he hesitated: to ask this scarecrow his business would concede

him the right to exist; and the ruffian's undamaged eye and his assured carriage were plain warning against any concession whatsoever.

The visitor, therefore, spoke first, even as if he had been respectable.

"I want to see Mr. Bruffin," he said.

"Not at home," replied Charles, trying to boom like a butler.

"Then I'll wait till he comes," said Dick Bellamy, taking a step forward in spite of the door and the footman's hand upon it.

"Impossible to see Mr. Bruffin to-night—sir," said Charles. "I'm afraid I must ask you to step outside."

His vision of what might be in those bloated pockets was only a little less alarming than the reality.

But Dick felt he had only a drop or so of physical energy left; and so, lest they should trickle from him, he used them now.

And Charles, lifted most disconcertingly by the slack of his breeches and the stiffness of his resisting neck, was shifted quickly and painfully to the doorstep, to hear the door close upon him before he could turn to face it.

The house was new, even to its owners. Its rebuilding and exquisite refitting had been a marvel for the magpie chorus of the occasional column. The public already knew more of his new house than George Bruffin could ever forget.

But Dick, who never read more of a newspaper than he must, knew only its address and the day when George and his wife should go into residence. This, he had remembered, was the first day of their second week, and, even if George had already learned his way to his own study, Dick must find means to reach him more expeditious than geographical exploration.

He looked about him, and his eye fell upon a thing of which George had told him with pride almost boyish; a framework of shell-cases, graduated from the slender treble of a shortened soizante-quinze to the deepest base of a full-length monster from some growling siege-gun.

For George had done his portion of fighting and had collected this material for a dinner gong, on which one might play with padded stick anything from the "Devil's Tattoo" to "Caller Herrin" or the "Wedding March."

From the doorstep, the frantic Charles, with eyes rolling, saw the taxi. What was in it he could not see, for the chauffeur stood blocking the open window, watching, it appeared, whatever the cab might contain—wild Bolsheviks with bombs, perhaps, or soft litters of pedigree pups.

From Apsley House to Marble Arch, he felt, was never a policeman. He could have embraced the hoariest of specials.

The service entrance was too far round. Before he could reach it all might be over.

So, forgetting the bell, he turned and beat, with fists none too hard, upon the door that was anything but soft. And cursed, as he had never cursed man before, the architect whose enlightened scheme had found no place for a knocker.

And with his first blow there burst out in the hall the wild, indecorous strains of "Kuk-kuk kuk-Katie," pealing out louder and ever louder as the musician found confidence.

With his left hand supporting half his tired weight on the frame of these bells, translated by some twentieth-century Tubal Cain to a music so strangely different from the first they had uttered, Dick was absorbed in his rendering of such bars of the vulgar melody as he could remember, when he heard, far behind him, a slow, unimpassioned voice.

"What's all this hell's delight?" it asked.

A confused chorus of protesting explanation, interwoven with the yapping cries and hysterical laughter of women, was all his answer.

In a fresh surge of enthusiasm "Katie" drowned it.

Then George Bruffin shouted—almost, the servants felt, as if he might some day lose his temper.

"How did this freak minstrel get in?" he roared.

"Don't know, sir."

"Who was on duty here?"

"Charles, sir," chimed the chorus.

"Where is he?"

The music died in a last tinkling "Kuk-kuk." And then, as the minstrel swung round to face his audience, the whole company heard the beating on the great door.

"That," said Dick with a wave of his baton towards it, "is Charles."

While George stared heavily at the intruder's battle-worn visage, the second footman flung open the door.

With a face livid and distorted by passion, Charles made a rush at his enemy—to be brought up short by the sight of his master, wringing the rascal's hand and patting his disgraceful shoulder.

"You silly goat," were all the words George could find for his laughter.

"I had to see you," said Dick. "And I do."

"Why couldn't you have me fetched decently?"

The chorus had vanished; they two were alone, with Charles, abashed.

"Your man wanted to put me out. I'm all in, George, so I just put him out, and rang the bells for you." He sighed wearily, and added: "Anyhow, it worked."

George turned a heavy face on the footman, but Dick spoke first.

"Charles is a damned good servant," he said. "I know what I look like. He was in the right, so I had to evict."

"What's your trouble, Dick?" asked George, speaking, thought the servant, as if this Dick were the first of all Dicks and all men.

"I've got a girl in a cab out there. She's worse beat than I am, George. I want you and Liz to look after her till to-morrow."

Bruffin turned to his servant.

"Lady Elizabeth is in my study," he said. "Ask her to come to me here." Then, to Dick, "Sit down," he went on, and disappeared, to return quickly with a tumbler in his hand.

With half-closed eyes, Dick continued as if the other man had never left him.

"She's mounting guard," he said, "with the shuvver to help, over our catch—the

worst blackguard unhung."

A handsome woman of some thirty years, with masses of darkest hair cunningly disposed, neck and shoulders beautiful beyond criticism, and dressed in a peignoir of delicate simplicity, came to her husband with a rush smooth as the full-sailed speed of a three-masted schooner.

Charles, with recovered dignity, followed in her wake.

"George! What is it, George?" she exclaimed, before she had even time to get her eyes focused upon his companion.

"That," answered George, with a derisive gesture.

"Why, it's—oh, *Dick!*" she cried.

With her long, slender hands on his shoulders, she peered close and eagerly into the battered countenance.

"Oh, Dickie dear, whatever have they been doing to its good old face?" she demanded, with tenderness for the one, and anger for the many mingling in her voice.

"Nothing to what they got from him, Betsy—unless I'm an ass. But he'll tell us when that whisky's worked in his veins a bit. He's got a lady out there, waiting. Shall I fetch her in—or you?"

Dick half rose from his chair. But Lady Elizabeth Bruffin pushed him back into it.

"I will, of course," she said, and made for the front door so quickly that Charles only just had it open in time.

As he told the butler before he slept that night, "It'd've done your kind heart good, Mr. Baldwin, to see how they were eating 'im with their eyes. His word law, you know, and do what he wanted, almost before he could say what it was, and it might be an hour before he could tell 'em why. And the terrible object he was—but with something strong and compelling, one might say, underneath."

He was thinking, perhaps of the hand which had lifted him over the threshold.

Charles had followed his mistress to the taxi.

The driver, turning on her approach, stood back, touching his cap; amazed by

this condescension of jewels and silk to beauty ill-clothed, draggled, dirty and exhausted.

Suddenly Lady Elizabeth remembered that she did not know even the girl's name.

"Open the door, please," she said to the driver. And then, to Amaryllis, "My dear, you're to come in," and stretched her hands out with a motion so inviting that the girl laid her own in them, taking all their support to rise and get out on the pavement.

"Take my arm. Poor little thing, you're tired to death," said Lady Elizabeth, with what the girl called a coo in her voice.

"You don't even know my name——" began Amaryllis.

"I know something better—you're Dick Bellamy's friend. That is a passport and an introduction, my dear."

Charles followed them up the steps. On the third his mistress stopped and turned. Charles halted on the second step.

"There's a man in the taxi?" said Lady Elizabeth interrogatively.

"Yes," replied the girl. "We're keeping him. He's drunk."

"Charles," said Lady Elizabeth, "assist the driver in keeping the person inside from getting out."

"Yes, my lady," said Charles; and, feeling that haply he was mixing in great matters, he went back to the cab and stood sentry very loftily over its further exit.

When they were inside, Lady Elizabeth shut the big door.

"George!" she said; and Bruffin took his eyes from Dick, to see his wife leading towards them a pale-faced, tear-smudged girl, with a battered sun-bonnet flung back on her shoulders and a great halo of untidy red hair topping a graceful, weary figure habited in clothes which, in their present state, would have disgraced the woman they had come from.

George took a step forward, and Dick half rose in courtesy.

"This is Miss ——" said Lady Elizabeth, and stuck.

"Oh, Liz!" cried Dick. "Beginning an introduction, when you haven't been introduced yourself! Lady Elizabeth Bruffin, you have on your arm Miss Caldegard, daughter of the eminent Professor Caldegard. George, you behold the same. Miss Caldegard, Lady Elizabeth Bruffin, and her husband, Mr. George Bruffin. He is famous for immeasurable wealth which he can't use and a few brains which he uses in all sorts of queer ways, and hasn't yet spent."

He limped towards the two women.

"Liz, dear," he went on, "please put her to bed. She's had the deuce and all of a day. She'll tell you, only don't let her talk too much."

Lady Elizabeth nodded.

"Would you like to go to bed now, dear?" she asked.

A smile, radiant on the tired face, illuminated Amaryllis.

"Oh, please, yes. I can see it—all white!" she answered.

And without a word from any of the four, the women left the men standing in the hall.

It was empty when Lady Elizabeth returned. She found George in his study.

Her eyes shone with a kind of maternal satisfaction, but she looked at her husband without speaking.

"How's the young woman?" he asked. "She looked about done in."

"She's had a bath. Suzanne's done her hair. She's in bed, so sleepy that I left Suzanne with her to keep her from spilling her bouillon and toast before she's finished it. Oh, George, she's a ripper—perfectly lovely, without all those horrid clothes."

George took his cigar from his mouth.

"I shouldn't wonder," he said.

Lady Elizabeth ignored the interruption.

"And I *believe* she's Dick's," she went on. "Who is this Professor Caldegard?"

"Scientific—coal-tar—big bug of the first magnitude," answered Bruffin. "Some day he'll synthesize albumen, and then all the farmers'll go into the workhouse."

"But are they—what sort of people are they? It's *Dick*, George."

"You've seen the girl, Betsy."

"Yes," admitted Lady Elizabeth.

"And when you catch Dick Bellamy making a break over a man, a horse, a dog or a woman, Bet, p'r'aps you'll let me know."

Lady Elizabeth sighed contentedly, as if he had removed the last doubt from a happy mind.

"That's quite true," she said. Then she looked round the room. "Is he in your bath-room, or in bed, or where? You oughtn't to leave him alone."

"He's left me," replied George. "Wouldn't stay a moment after he knew Miss Caldegard was in your clutches. He's gone off with his intoxicated captive. He's made a conquest of Charles by pitching him out of the house, and the taxi-man would help him do murders."

"Is he coming back to bed here?"

"Didn't ask."

"Oh, George, why not?"

"He'll come if he wants to."

"Didn't he tell you where he was taking his prisoner?"

"Only said, 'Must get a move on. Got a man to be hanged,' and went."

"Then it's Scotland Yard," said Lady Elizabeth.

"I don't think that's where they turn 'em off, Betsy, but perhaps you know best."

"I do, this time. Have a car out at once and drive there. Somebody's got to look after him. And, if you get on the track of the father, tell him about Amaryllis _____"

"Amaryllis!" echoed George, reflectively weighing the word.

"And bring him along too, if he wants to have just a peep at her."

George nodded and rang the bell.

CHAPTER XXV.

WAITERS.

Dick Bellamy's two letters, the one posted in York, the other in the country letter-box by the landlord of "The Coach and Horses," had been read at New Scotland Yard at about eight o'clock in the evening.

The first note had contained merely the information that Alban Melchard was the man of whom Dick was going in pursuit, and Melchard's address, found that evening in the letter received by Amaryllis; the second, the few particulars concerning Melchard which he had gathered from the landlord.

Superintendent Finucane, of the Criminal Investigation Department, had immediately put himself in telephonic communication with the chief constables of Millsborough and the County.

To the Government, this fresh proof of the Opiate Ring's influence and power, and of its ramification even wider than had hitherto been ascertained, was matter of the first importance.

Sir Charles Colombe had lost sight of the abducted girl in the theft of the drug and its formula; while the Secretary of State, Sir Charles's political chief, had suspicion so strong of liaison between certain European leaders of Bolshevism and the Opiate Ring, that the Drug, the Lost Lady, and even the Deleterious Drugs' Control Bill itself, had become secondary factors in the greatest struggle of the day.

To net a Millsborough gallimaufry of decadents, criminals, and potential rebels had become in a few hours his absorbing desire. And in this short time he had almost frayed the smooth edges of the Permanent Under Secretary's official decorum.

Randal Bellamy, with his affection for the girl, and his absorbing love of his younger brother, had as much interest in the affair as any other concerned. But he alone of them all had been really welcome at New Scotland Yard; for, whatever he may have felt, he had shown there on his first visit that Saturday—at about three o'clock in the afternoon—a face as smiling and unwrinkled as his

excellent white waistcoat. And there was a refreshing serenity in the offer that he made to the commissioner himself, of laying him ten pounds to one on his brother Richard's success in any *shikar* that he undertook.

This wager, made in the superintendent's room, had so much pleased that official, to-day more oppressed by his superiors than by his work, that he had actually invited Sir Randal to give him a call after dinner. The others were merely expected.

"After dinner" is an elastic appointment, and Randal stretched it as late as Caldegard's impatience would endure.

At a quarter past eleven the father could bear suspense no longer, and forced his friend to go with him to the Castle where, between the Embankment and Parliament Street, Argus and Briareus dwell together in awful co-operation.

As they walked down Whitehall, the father remembered that this was a lover at his side.

"I don't see how you manage to bear it with all that *sang froid*, Bellamy," he said. "Another day of it'll drive me mad."

"I'm banking on Dick," said Randal.

"He's all you say, no doubt. But if you feel all you've told me for my girl, it's almost as terrible for you as for me. And your brother can't do the impossible, tracking without trace. *Vestigia nulla!*" And the father groaned, looking twenty years older than he had seemed twenty-four hours ago. "I watch every young woman in the street, half hoping she'll turn her face and show me Amaryllis. And all the time I know it's impossible."

Then, again, "God, man!" he broke out, "these things don't happen in civilised communities. I suffer like the damned, without the satisfaction of believing in my hell."

A few minutes later, as they turned out of Parliament Street, "You do take it easy for a lover, Randal," he repeated. "I don't understand you."

At the moment Randal made no reply, but, as they waited for the lift, "Perhaps I ought to tell you," he said, "that I'm no longer in the running. I'm afraid it pained her kind heart, saying no to me."

"When was that?" asked the father, speaking more like his ordinary self.

"The last time we spoke of it was about an hour before we missed her. After that I think she went into my study to be alone, and possibly, as a woman will, shed a few tears over the matter; and then, perhaps, fell asleep, and was caught unawares—but it's no use guessing."

The lift came down, and the escorting constable sidled up and entered it after them.

As they left it, the discreet guide keeping well ahead in the gloomy corridor, Caldegard whispered:

"Then it's even worse for you than I thought, Randal. You're a good man, and I'm an ill-tempered old one."

"We shall have news, and her, soon—and something else," said Randal.

"What?" asked Caldegard.

"I thought you'd forgotten it! Ambrotox, of course. I'll tell her, Caldegard. I once heard a man tell his wife, after she'd been chattering to him for twenty minutes, that he'd forgotten to light his pipe all the time she'd been talking. She said it was the best compliment she'd ever had. I shall tell Amaryllis how you forgot Ambrotox."

Superintendent Finucane felt his spirits rise at the sight of the urbane barrister, and received even the dishevelled person of the lost lady's father with a measure of cordiality. He showed his visitors Dick's two scrawled messages, and explained how he had acted upon their information.

Caldegard complained: Dick should have telegraphed, should have gone himself to the police in the neighbourhood.

"From what I have heard of him, Mr. Richard Bellamy is the kind that seizes on a big chance, and doesn't lose it by running after smaller ones," said Finucane. "If he has played against time and wins, they call him a genius."

"*Will* he succeed?" asked Caldegard.

"I am inclined to think he will bring your daughter back," replied Finucane. "But I don't advise you to be too hopeful about the drug."

"Oh, damn the drug!" interjected Caldegard.

"He has appreciated his job," explained the superintendent. "He's not after side issues. He isn't even out to catch a man who's committed a crime—only to prevent a crime being committed."

"Has he prevented it—tell me that?" cried Caldegard.

And, as if in answer, the bell of Finucane's telephone jarred the nerves of all three men.

While he listened to the one-sided interview between the superintendent and the instrument on his table, Caldegard's control was in danger of breaking down altogether.

"Hold the line," said Finucane at last. "Dr. Caldegard, can you describe the dress Miss Caldegard was wearing when she disappeared?"

"I dined in town," began the father, his face like white paper.

"My brother and I," said Randal, "dined with Miss Caldegard. She wore a dinner-gown—silk—darkish green, which showed, when she moved, the crimson threads it was interwoven with."

"And her shoes?" asked Finucane.

Bellamy shook his head; it was Caldegard, now steady as a rock, who answered:

"With that frock, my daughter always wore green-bronze shoes and green stockings."

Finucane turned again to the telephone. After saying that Miss Caldegard had worn green silk shot with red, and green evening slippers, he listened for a time which kept his guests in torture of suspense. Then, "I'm here all night. But scrape the county with a tooth-comb," he said, and hung up the receiver. Swinging his chair round, he faced the two men, and spoke with gravity.

"Millsborough got my information about eight-thirty p.m. By nine every available man was out on the hunt, to round up all Melchard's places, and to go through all the riverside dens and harbour slums. The county police, horse and foot, under the chief constable, were all over the place. Martingale—that's the man I've just been talking to—rushed a strong party of the Millsborough force out to 'The Myrtles' in cars. House deserted, except a fellow lying in bed,

groaning. In the back kitchen a woman's frock had been burned. Unconsumed fragments were found—green silk shot with red. Upstairs, in a bedroom, pair of lady's shoes—shiny green leather."

Caldegard rose from his seat, opened his mouth to speak, and sat down again.

In relation to merely normal death the abandoned garment carries an intimate cruelty which will unexpectedly break down control proof against direct attack.

But to hear, in these surroundings, of his daughter's little green shoes, and to remember how, the first time she had worn them, she had flourished at him from her low chair that pretty foot and reckless green stocking, and to catch himself now foolishly wondering where the green stockings themselves would be found, brought poor Caldegard to an embittered weakness which he fought only in vague desire neither to break into cursing nor decline upon weak tears.

The great man of science had not attracted the superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Department; but the father grunting savagely: "Oh, damn the drug!" was another man. And Finucane, by no means himself convinced that the worst must be argued from these fragments of evidence, yet found himself at a loss for encouraging words. Pity, however, forced him to the effort, and he would have spoken, had not Randal Bellamy touched him on the arm.

"Not now," he said. "You can't wash that picture from his mind. There'll be more news coming."

With a tap on the door, it came.

To the superintendent's consent there entered a police sergeant.

"There's a gentleman wishes to see you, sir. Says he can't keep awake another ten minutes. Has important evidence, and a person he wishes to introduce to you. Name o' Bellamy."

"Oh, hell!" said Randal, in a voice like his brother's, "fetch him up."

The sergeant took no notice, but kept his gaze on the superintendent. Finucane's eyes twinkled. "Fetch him up," he said.

"To save time, sir, he's standing outside."

"Fetch him in," said Finucane.

The sergeant moved himself three inches.

"Superintendent Finucane will see you, sir," he said; and made room for the entrance of Dick Bellamy, holding by the arm, and both supporting and guiding the wavering steps of Alban Melchard.



CHAPTER XXVI.

PRISONER AND ESCORT.

Dick presented to the expectant three the same disreputable and truculent aspect which had so deeply offended Charles of Mayfair—an aspect so extraordinary as to strike speechless for a moment even the three so deeply interested in his advent.

"That chair with arms," said Dick to the sergeant, "or he'll fall off."

The sergeant brought it, and Dick pushed the still tipsy wretch, a bundle of false elegance deflowered, into its embrace.

Then Randal, with beaming face, caught his brother by the shoulders.

"You grisly scallywag!" he cried.

Finucane had risen, turning his own chair for the new-comer.

"Sit down, sir," he said.

And Dick, seeing only those who addressed him, dropped into the seat.

"Don't hurry yourself, Mr. Bellamy. What'll you have?" asked Finucane. "Brandy—whisky?"

"Tea," interrupted Dick. "A potful—and awfully strong."

"See to that, will you, sergeant?" said Finucane.

The man left the room, and Dick spoke again.

"There are things I must tell you before I slack off." Then, a little more alert, he looked round him, and for the first time saw Caldegard glowering at him across the table with fierce curiosity.

"I didn't see you, sir," he said, his heart warming to the old man's piteous face, "or I'd have told you before I spoke to anyone else that Miss Caldegard is perfectly well, though she's a bit done up."

"Where is she?" asked the father, new lines of joy making havoc of a mask scored by inelastic sorrow.

"In bed, I think. Asleep, I hope. If you'll let me get a few bits of information off my chest for the police, I'll tell you all about it—how I found her, how brave and clever she's been—lots of things."

Then the bright spark came into the tired eyes again, as they searched the face of the father of Amaryllis—the spark which Amaryllis says, comes always just before he says something nice.

But Caldegard spoke first.

"You've had a devilish bad time of it, my boy," he said.

"Nothing to what you've been through, sir. It's hell, I know, when one can't do anything."

Caldegard stretched his hand across the table. Dick turned from his grasp to see Randal pouring terrific black tea into a thick white cup.

When he had swallowed three burning gulps of it, he began:

"That's Melchard," he said, pointing. "This bundle of letters I took off him. Amongst them you'll find useful information. Read 'em now, superintendent. You'll find there's a flat in Bayswater, where two or three of his crowd in the illicit drug traffic are expecting him to-morrow morning. That's the important one—the thick mauve paper."

And he drank more tea, while Finucane ran eager eyes over the letter.

"Good God!" he said, rising. "Go on with your tea, Mr. Bellamy—not your story. Back in three minutes."

He pushed an electric button, and almost ran from the room.

"You see, sir," said Dick to Caldegard, "as we were coming home in the train from our little day out, poor Miss Caldegard was so tired that she said I must find her a fairy godmother directly we reached town. So I took her straight to the only lady of that rank whom I know. I dare say you know her too—it's Lady Elizabeth Bruffin. George Bruffin's an old friend of mine—Mexico—and his wife's a connoisseur in pumpkins and rat-traps."

Since all London that season was talking of the two Bruffins, and every newspaper, in direct ratio to the badness of its paper and print, was scavenging for paragraphs, true or false, concerning the "palatial home" in Park Lane, neither Caldegard nor Randal Bellamy could conceal round-eyed astonishment.

"But Amaryllis? Did she look—well, anything like——"

"Like me?" asked Dick, grinning all over the better side of his twisted face. "Well, sir, she hasn't been knocked about, you know. But her rig did her certainly less justice than mine does me. Nothing on earth could make her look like a tough, and the sun-bonnet certainly had an——"

But Finucane was with them again.

"Excuse me behaving like Harlequin in the pantomime, gentlemen," he said. "Now, Mr. Bellamy."

"Can you take advice?" asked Dick.

"From you, Mr. Bellamy," said Finucane, "who wouldn't?"

"I'm so sleepy that if I don't give it now, I may forget it. Properly handled, that dirty thing in the chair there will give his show away. Keep him to-night as a drunk and disorderly. Better have a doctor to him. I tasted the stuff. Tomorrow I'll swear a dozen charges against him—burglary, abduction, instigation to murder, attempts to kill; and when he hears 'em read over, he'll be putty in your fingers."

"Thanks," said Finucane.

"Next: ring up the police and the station-master at Todsmoor. Tell 'em to keep tight hold of the man who fell out of the train between Harthborough and Todsmoor at five-forty p.m. and of the bloke that was with him, suspected of throwing him out."

Finucane paid his guest the compliment of obeying without question.

As he hung up the receiver,

"The man's in hospital, all right," he said, "broken collar-bone. I was just in time to prevent them from letting the other go. They're to hold him on a charge of throwing his pal out."

"I did that," said Dick. "At least, I scared the bird off his perch."

Again Finucane rang.

"And I'll send this one," he said, "to his nest."

When Melchard had been removed, Dick gave his three listeners a rapid and, as their faces and exclamatory comment testified, a vivid sketch of his adventure from his detection of the perfume which pervaded the alcove in Randal's study and the corroboration of his suspicions given by Melchard's attempted alibi in the letter to Amaryllis, to the time when his train pulled out of Todsmoor station; and, in the course of his narrative, he laid on the table, each at its historic point, his *pièces de conviction*.

Having told how Amaryllis had fainted at the sight of Ockley with the knife-point protruding from the back of his neck, he extracted the Webley from his overcrowded pocket.

"That," he said, "is the man's gun, which Miss Caldegard found for me."

Later, he produced Mut-mut's baag-nouk, laying it, talons upward, beside the Webley.

"That was strapped to his hand. I gave him the first of my two shots before he jumped, the second I put through his head as he lay scrabbling in the car."

At this point there entered the room a stout, bearded man with careworn face and irritable expression. Finucane rose respectfully, but the new-comer made a motion waiving ceremony, sat in the nearest chair, and became one of the audience.

Dick, never observing the addition, continued his tale in a voice monotonous with fatigue.

In their turn he added to the display the Malay's revolver, with which he had captured Melchard, and Melchard's automatic.

And, after telling them how he had forced his prisoner to drink,

"I couldn't bring the bottle—no room," he said, patting his shrinking pocket. "The tangle-foot all went down the pussyfoot's neck, so I left 'Robbie Burns' in the car. By the way, don't forget to ring up about that car. Old Mut-mut cut the cushions to ribbons; that bit of evidence might save my neck."

Finucane smiled pleasantly.

"You seem to have left a trail of coroner's inquests behind you," he said.

"All in the day's work," said Dick. "But not, thank God! in to-night's."

And when he had carried his audience past Todsmoor station,

"That's all," he said. "Can't I go home to bed now, superintendent?"

But the bearded stranger intervened.

"One of your clever young officers, I presume," he said to Finucane.

"I wish to God he were, Sir Gregory," replied the superintendent.

"A clever, and, I gather, somewhat high-handed amateur. The young lady, I hope, is safe."

"She is, Sir Gregory—thanks entirely to the extraordinary rapidity of Mr. Richard Bellamy's intuition and action," said Finucane, speaking with unruffled respect, which yet did not hide, nor was intended to hide, a note of reproof. "Without him the Department would have been too late for the show. As it is, we are acting effectively—on information supplied by Mr. Bellamy."

Now Dick stood in no awe of potentates, and he liked his superintendent.

"It was my luck to be on the spot," he said. "There's nothing more in it."

"Pardon me if I differ from you, Mr. Bellamy," said Sir Gregory. "There is this more in it: if the police had been given your opportunities they would not have limited their action to the rescue of this unfortunate young lady, but would have devoted themselves also to the recovery of what is, for the country—I might almost say for the world—of vastly greater importance. You are possibly aware that a sample of a new drug of great potentiality for good and ill was the object of the outrage which led to the abduction."

The great man's beard and the great man's manner annoyed Dick Bellamy, stimulating him even through his shroud of somnolence.

He rubbed his eyes and yawned; then looked up at Sir Gregory.

"I don't know who you are, my good man," he said, "nor why you come barging into this. What more d'you want? Your Napoleon of crime is in the oubliette, two

of his dastard accomplices are in clink at Todsmoor, three more are being tracked to their doom in Bayswater, two are dead——"

Here Dick produced from inner pockets a small white packet and an envelope.

"And these," he concluded, "are the dope and the book-o'-the-words."

Both Finucane and Sir Gregory started forward as if to take possession, but Dick drew back.

"No," he said, "I didn't go looting for my country's sake, nor the world's. I just happened to pick up two little things belonging to a friend of mine." And, turning, he put the Ambrotox and the formula into Caldegard's hand, smiling his crooked smile.

"That's the lot," he murmured, and laid his head on his arms, folded upon the table.

An uncomfortable pause was broken by the entrance of a constable with a card.

"Gentleman wishes to know if Mr. Richard Bellamy is here," he said to the superintendent.

But Dick did not move.

His brother bent over him.

"The boy's fast asleep," he said.

Finucane passed the card to Randal.

"George Bruffin," he read out. "Better ask him up, superintendent, if you don't mind."

Sir Gregory had been feeling himself pushed aside. He had taken the sow, it seemed, by the wrong ear. And now, the great Bruffin and his millions!

George came in, ponderous and unsmiling; picked out the superintendent at once, and thanked him gruffly for admission to the "sanctum"; a word which George chose to please him—and succeeded.

Sir Gregory pressing himself forward, Finucane was obliged to mumble an introduction.

George replied vaguely, saying, "Oh, ah—yes, of course!"

And then, his eye falling on Randal, he came alive.

"You're Dick's big brother," he said.

"I can't help that," responded Randal, holding out his hand.

"Some people do have all the luck," said George. Then, looking down at the sleeper, he continued: "My car's outside. My wife's waiting till I bring him. You'd better come with us, Sir Randal, and help us tuck him up in bed."

Sir Gregory tried again.

"Game to the last!" he said, joining the group; "but not, I suppose, very robust. Evidently a case of complete nervous exhaustion."

Caldegard had spoken little since Dick's entrance. He now rose as if shot from his chair by a spring, and spoke with a vigour that reminded Randal of their youth.

"Five hundred miles—driving your own car in the dark! Climb the side of a house. Break in—save one woman from being knifed by another. Fight five armed men with your fists and boots. Knock out four of them. Run a mile, dragging a girl—from a man chasing you, and shooting at you with a revolver. Kill a murderer with a murderess's dagger. Nurse a girl with an attack of hysteria. Drive a coach, humbug a woman, a parson, a railway porter, a guard and a station-master. Kill a man armed with that steel-clawed thing there, steal a car, knock a man off a train, and bring home the exhausted woman alive and your chief enemy drunk and a prisoner—do all that without sleep for thirty-six hours, Sir Gregory; then, if you can drop off to sleep like that, instead of having your head packed in ice and babbling pink spiders and blue monkeys, you may call your constitution cast-iron. All exhaustion is nervous, Sir Gregory, and the man who can stand the biggest dose of it is the strongest man."

"Oh, from that point of view—yes—of course," bleated the bearded politician.

But George covered his final discomfiture.

"I wish you'd tell me your name, sir," he said to Caldegard.

Caldegard told him.

"Thought so," exclaimed George, almost with enthusiasm. "We have the immense pleasure of looking after Miss Caldegard. My wife won't be happy unless you come round with me and feast your eyes on what she says is the prettiest sight in London—Miss Caldegard asleep."

This time the father's countenance did him justice.

Finucane told his wife that night that he had at last seen an old man perfectly happy.

The potentate saw that flash of glory, and put himself "on-side."

He went round to Caldegard, and saying, "Let me congratulate you," took the hand offered him, and went out.

"Nothing in this meeting became him like——" began Randal.

But Caldegard cut him short.

"He meant it, Randal," he said.

"Exactly. Requiescat. Let's see if we can get this neurasthenic down to the car without waking him."



CHAPTER XXVII.

AN INTERIM REPORT.

Though maid to a lady accounted very fine, Suzanne, in presence of beauty unadorned, was a simple and kind-hearted enthusiast in her art. Before lunch-time next day she had done so well for Amaryllis out of Lady Elizabeth Bruffin's wardrobe, that she declared, with conviction to fill up the gap in evidence, "*que mademoiselle n'a jamais pu paraitre plus seduisante, plus pimpante qu'aujourd'hui.*"

"How can she know that?" asked Amaryllis laughing.

"Because nothing possible could be, you pretty creature," said Lady Elizabeth, glowing with pleasure in the success of her nursing and in the quality of Dick Bellamy's conquest.

She had, indeed, good reason: eleven hours' sleep, with redundant happiness and bodily health as elastic as a child's, had made Amaryllis scarcely more delightful to her new friends' eyes than to her own. For on this Sunday morning she looked into her glass for the first time through a man's eyes.

In spite of her beauty, however, and of her joy in the man who was to see and praise it, there was yet in her heart a pricking as of conscience.

In the night there had come to her, for the first time since Dick had saved her from the Dutchwoman and her knife, the memory of Randal Bellamy; of his kindness, of his favour with her father and of his love for herself.

She did not now feel as she had felt in his study before she fell asleep; she did not even define the feeling which had then made her tears flow; and she understood, with the memory of Dick's kisses on her face, that Randal was not wounded as Dick would have been in losing her.

She had not wronged Randal, nor had she any sense of wrong-doing; for to love Dick was a natural thing to do—and a wise thing. It was even a praiseworthy deed: for that this wonderful Dick of all men should go without any smallest thing which he desired, would have been wicked indeed.

The sting was this: Randal did not yet know that she was Dick's, nor Dick that Randal would have had her his own. And she believed that it would hurt Randal less in the end to learn the tremendous news from her mouth than from her father's, Dick's or Lady Elizabeth's; and from Lady Elizabeth she knew she could not keep it long, having a suspicion, even, that she knew it already.

She must see Randal before Dick should come to her. She must tell Randal the most wonderful and most inevitable thing of that terrible and glorious yesterday. And Randal must decide whether Dick was to know what Randal had asked and offered. And if Dick was to know, Randal must decide by whom, and when.

If Randal wished it hidden, she could never tell it—not even to Dick.

For Amaryllis, even before she had "put her hair up," had learned to hate the woman who tries to hide her nakedness with a belt of scalps.

As these thoughts ran through her head, Amaryllis frowned between her eyebrows.

"A fly in the ointment, after all?" asked Lady Elizabeth, smiling so that one knew there was none in hers.

"Only something I remembered. I want——"

"Won't ask, shan't have," said Lady Elizabeth.

"Will Sir Randal Bellamy be here to lunch?" asked the girl.

"I hope so, my dear. He's with Dick—or was—sitting on the bed to keep him down till the doctor came. He's like a hen with one chick over that brother of his."

And Lady Elizabeth Bruffin laughed.

"I think it's—it's beautiful," said Amaryllis, with a shade of indignation in her voice.

"Yes—quite. That's why I laughed."

"I know," replied the girl, unwrinkling her forehead. "I often want to laugh for that." And then, after a moment's pause, she added: "Please, I want to speak to Sir Randal for a moment, before lunch."

"You shall. Heroines must have things made smooth for them, mustn't they, at

the end of the book?"

And she took the girl, fresh from Suzanne's finishing touches, to George's study.

"George won't be coming in for half an hour, dear," she said. "There are heaps of papers and books, but no looking-glass. So you'll be able to forget your pretty self for a few minutes."

And off went the fairy godmother—to meet Sir Randal Bellamy on the stairs.

"But you're staying to lunch," she expostulated.

"If you say so, of course I am," said Randal.

"I've left Amaryllis in George's study. She wants you to see I have looked after her as well as if she'd been at home with her father and you."

She passed him, but turned two steps above.

"I wish you'd seen Dr. Caldegard looking at her fast asleep in bed last night," she said in a low voice, very tender. "It was a picture—the kind one keeps."

"Yes," said Randal. "I was in the other room, you know, looking at mine."

And he went down the stair, wondering how a woman he had seen last night for the first time had managed to get that sentimental speech out of him.

Amaryllis rose as he entered, and almost ran to meet him.

"Oh, Randal!" she cried.

He had known his gentle doom on the Friday; and her "Randal," *tout court*, sealed it, for never had she used his name so to him before. It came now, he knew, not in his own right, but through Dick.

In a single emotion, he was sorry and glad—more glad, he told himself, than sorry. For the sadness seemed to have been with him a long time, while the joy was new.

A little while she babbled of the trouble and pain she had given them.

"You and poor dad! If only I could have yelled out in time!"

"To get a knife in you, my dear—no, it's been all just right. Why, we should never have got the Dope of the Gods back, without you."

And when she laughed, he told her how her father had growled: "Oh, damn the Ambrotox!" and how he had lectured the potentate on nervous exhaustion.

But when a little silence fell between them, Amaryllis took a deep breath and plunged, saying in a half-stifled voice, "I want to tell you something."

"Tell away, child," he replied, smiling benignantly on her, though his heart beat heavily, telling him her tale beforehand.

"It's—it's Dick," she said, and broke down.

"Dick?" he responded. "Of course it's Dick—and Dick it is going to be; Dick for breakfast, Dick for lunch, and Dick for dinner."

"Yes," said Amaryllis, tears running at last, but voice steady. "Dick for ever, I think. It feels like that, Randal dear."

"If it depends on him it will be," said Dick's brother.

"If it depends on me, it shall be," answered the girl.

"Then what's the dear silly child crying for?" he asked.

"I—I don't know," she replied weakly.

"That's a dear silly little lie—you know as well as I do. Although you've been perfectly honest with me, you have a dear silly feeling that the things which have happened so suddenly have been unfair to me. When I spoke to you last, my dear, you were surer than ever that you'd never want me. You didn't know why you were surer than ever—because you were afraid to look and see. Young women all, I suppose, have a moment when they *won't* look into that dear silly cupboard. But I looked at the blind door of it, and I—well, I guessed what was inside."

The tears would not stop. There was no sobbing nor convulsion of throat or breath. They just ran out in tribute to the man's goodness.

But Randal explained them with a difference.

"The tears from your left eye come tumbling out over the edge of the well of your kindness for me," he said. "You would like me to have everything I want. But you know that Dick must have everything that you are. So there it is. But the tears out of your dear silly right eye are silly sham jewels, sparkling with dear

injured vanity. You're afraid I shall somehow think you played a crooked little game with me. I don't."

The silly little handkerchief was getting the best of it.

"When you've quite turned that silly tap off," he went on, "I'll tell you something else."

He got up and walked away from her, looked at two prints which he did not see, lit a cigarette which he could not taste, and came back to a pale-faced, dry-eyed Amaryllis—a girl with a smile on her face that was a woman's smile.

"Tell me that other thing," she said.

"I don't suppose that it'll be altogether news to you, any more than yours was to me. But it's this: For a good long time I resisted you—just and only because the more I admired you, the more I couldn't help thinking that Dick ought to have his chance—what I knew was one of the great chances. Then I got weak, and last Wednesday I tried to grab mine, before he'd even had a look in. I felt mean—and I couldn't stop myself. That afternoon he came, and—well, as it turned out, saved me from the agonies of gout. I always get it, when I've done anything off colour."

"You!" said Amaryllis. "D'you know what he told me, the day we drove to Oxford?"

"Some silly yarn."

"A dear story, not a bit silly. He said he daren't admire a gun or a book or a horse of yours, for fear you'd force it on him. Said it was a mercy of Providence that your size and shape permitted him to admire your coats and trousers."

"Well," asked Randal, "doesn't he deserve the best of everything?"

"Oh, yes!" declared the girl eagerly.

"This time," said Bellamy, "he's getting it. And it's God's truth, my dear, that it makes me unspeakably happy."

Amaryllis put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him.

And then George came in with *The Sunday Telegram*.

"Raid on a West-End Flat!" he grumbled. "Nice, respectable lot you are, getting

me mixed up with a thing like this!" And he read out:

"'In consequence of information which has come into the hands of the police ——' and all the usual jabber. And the placards are screaming 'Secret Dope Factories' all over this moral city. 'World-wide Organisation to be Broken Up.' 'Five Leaders Arrested.' They'll be getting me and Betsy into the witness-box."

"Come off it, George," said Dick from the doorway. "You and Liz aren't going to get boomed in this stunt. Put your money into pars about your yacht and your stables, if the 'Palatial Home' gadget's wearing thin."

His smile was almost straight again, Amaryllis thought, and there was little sign upon him of what he had been through, except the patch of black plaster on his left cheek, and the accentuated limp with which he came across the room to her.

"Oh, Dick!" she exclaimed. "What a lovely coat!"

"That's just what I was going to say about you," he answered, taking her hand. "We look a bit different, don't we?"

"Sent me in a cab, as if I were his valet," said Randal, "to fetch his newest and purplest raiment from his beastly little flat."

"Nothing like it," said George, "to take the taste of savagery out of the mouth. If the proletariat would only dress for dinner every night, we shouldn't have any labour troubles. The Nationalisation of the Dinner-jacket would be death to the Agitator. They say Abe Grinnel is drafting a bill to make it illegal."

Lady Elizabeth came in with Caldegard. Amaryllis soon had her father at one end of the room in a subdued conversation of which the hostess had little difficulty in guessing the subject. The two brothers, she observed, had come together at the other end, and were looking out of the window across the park. She took George discreetly away from his own room.

Of yesterday Randal and Dick had already talked much that morning; but of that adventure which he accounted the greatest, Dick had said nothing.

"Amaryllis has told me," said Randal.

"I'm glad," said Dick. "It didn't come easy to start the subject. I'm not used to it yet."

"Neither of you could have done better," said the elder brother. "I congratulate

you, dear boy. And I want to give you—to make you a present of a thing that isn't mine—couldn't have been mine, anyhow. But, all the same, I give it you."

"Thanks," replied the younger. "But what the devil d'you mean?"

Randal looked at him.

"You don't mean—you——" began Dick, and stopped short, shocked by conviction.

"Yes, I do. And I don't think I should ever have let you know it, Dick, but that it doesn't seem comfortable for a girl to carry about with her even a little thing like that which she can't speak of to her husband. So now you know. And there is a way of giving even what one could not withhold. She's perfect, Dick."

"Like the giver," said his brother.

And it was to Randal also that he owed the few minutes which he was able to get alone with Amaryllis before lunch.

He went up to Caldegard.

"Have you heard Bruffin describe Dick's solo on the dinner-bells—last night, you know? Well come and see if he's in the hall now," he said, and dragged the old man away.

Left alone together,

"It's like a dream," said Amaryllis; and, "Which!" asked Dick.

"Yesterday," said the girl, peering at his calm face.

"It's this that's like dreaming, to me," he answered. "When you're awake you make things happen. When you're asleep, things have the best of it—make you follow their lead. Yesterday, Amaryllis, I was some bloke, because I was useful to you. If I'd had time to think, I'd have thought very strong beer of myself. But now I'm—oh, a giddy little stranger that's taken the wrong turning and got in among the Birds of Paradise."

And he touched gingerly the sleeve of her frock,

"Lady Elizabeth's," she said. "You score. Dick. You've got your own, and they fit."

"Do I fit?" asked Dick.

"You don't really mean you feel strange and lost in *this* dream, do you?" she asked a little anxiously.

"I don't mean I feel strange in civilised life. That's only a variation on savagery—a mere matter of degree—and I like it well enough. I can talk the language, dear child, when I'm in the country. But you are my new life, and I'm—well, dazzled, let's call it. Yesterday I had to fetch you home and see that you didn't get hurt. Now, I've got to make you happier every day for the next fifty odd years. It's a tall order, and there's lots to do. I ought to begin."

"You began when you found me crying in Randal's study, Dick."

"Oh, it's easy to make people less wretched," he objected. "That's why yesterday was, on the whole, a success. But—are you happy?"

"Awfully! Oh, just awfully!" murmured Amaryllis.

"There it is!" sighed Dick, with the humour which she knew already for the natural shell of some wise little kernel. "And I've got to give you, as you give me, the keen edge of appetite for all the world and for all the people that play about in it. The stuff's all there, but——"

"Why, Dick, it's the same thing, after all, as yesterday. You saved me from beasts and from fear and from myself. You made me laugh, and you made me love—even made me love Tod, and poor Pépe, and the bees, and the round-faced girl in the cottage they bumbled round; and 'Opeful 'Arry; and you brought me home to a fairy godmother. If you could do all that in a day, Dick, just think what a lot of laughing and loving you'll be able to dig out of fifty years. And I won't let you off. Wake up, Dick. There's no dreaming about it all."

So they woke up together.

At the lunch-table, Amaryllis looked round her, and felt the last of her troubles was over.

Randal showed, she thought, a face more serene and contented than she had ever before seen him wear.

During the earlier part of the meal the talk went to and fro over the track of what George rashly called the *Amarylliad*.

Randal told him the word was falsely constructed, *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Aeneid* being, he said, syncopated adjectival forms derived from their respective substantive stems.

"Ours," said George, "has been a rag-time Dunciad."

And when the coffee and George's elbows were on the table, and four of his irresistible cigars alight:

"And us," he said, "not to get one little puff out of it all!"

"Advertisement," said Randal, "is the false dawn of fame. You, Mr. Bruffin, do not, I believe, need it, and will certainly not get it out of the Dope Drama. Miss Caldegard and my brother, who are likely to get a great deal, will hate it."

Amaryllis flushed a little at the coupling of names, but faced it bravely.

Her father drew a crumpled newspaper from his pocket.

"'Mysterious Murders near Millsborough,'" he read out. "'Injured Man in Empty House. Bearded Man Stabbed in Lonely Wood. Dead Chinaman on Deserted Roman Road. Abandoned Automobile.'"

"Inquests!" said George.

"Horrid!" said Amaryllis.

"Rescued Damsel!" said Lady Elizabeth.

"Scientist's Daughter Abducted!" cackled Caldegard.

"Lightning Pursuit by Gallant Airman!" boomed George.

"Dope Gang Baffled!" chuckled Randal. "And we understand that the interesting heroine will shortly reward——"

Lady Elizabeth shot a keen glance at Amaryllis and Amaryllis answered it boldly.

"Oh, of course!" she said.

George, having caught the look, seized upon the words.

"I wish to propose the health," he said, himself raising his glass, "of Miss Caldegard, coupling it with that of my ancient friend and fellow-filibuster,

Limping Dick."

When four on their feet had toasteded the two sitting, Randal spoke seriously.

"The inquests are likely to begin about Wednesday next," he said. "If you two children get yourselves neatly married on Monday, you will be pursued by *subp[oe]nas* to the Isle of Wight, say, and able to show up and get your evidence begun at least at the second sitting, about a week later. There'll be a paragraph or two before that, and by the time the evidence is reported, you'll be a settled married couple, and the romance will have evaporated."

"Oh, Randal!" said the girl reproachfully.

"Evaporated from the print and paper, dear child," he explained paternally. "Take my advice, and you'll just about break the hearts of the reporters."

"Amaryllis and I," said Lady Elizabeth, rising, "will withdraw and hold counsel. An interim report will be issued at tea."

THE END.

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