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Title: The Ghost Breaker
A Novel Based Upon the Play

Author: Charles Goddard
Paul Dickey

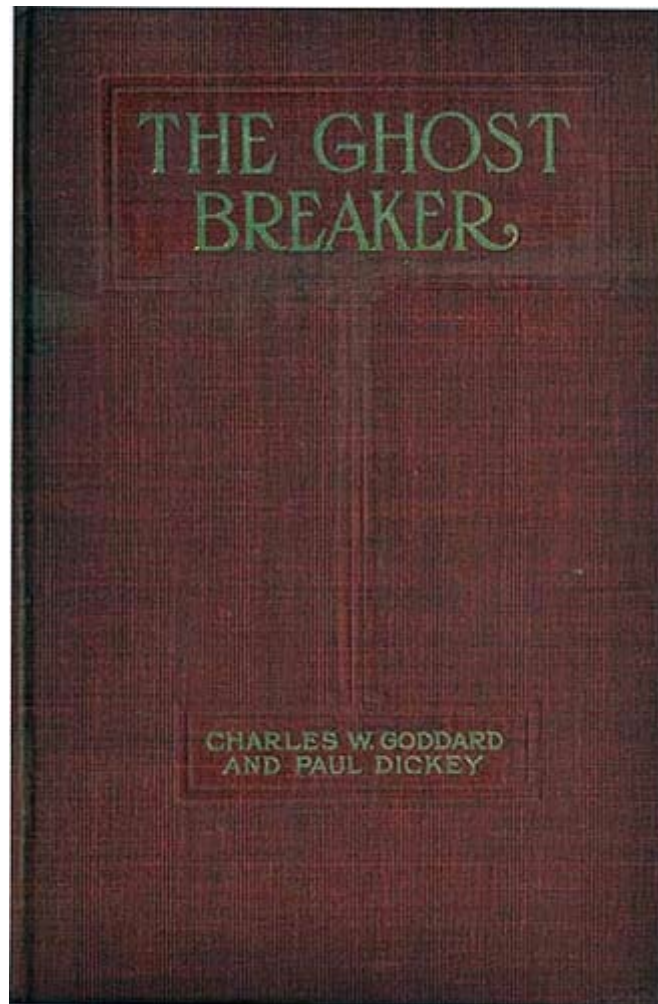
Release Date: June 14, 2008 [EBook #25781]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ISO-8859-1

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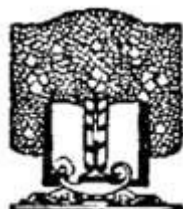
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THE GHOST BREAKER

A NOVEL BASED
UPON THE PLAY

By
CHARLES GODDARD
AND
PAUL DICKEY



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NEW YORK 1915

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I

JARVIS OF KENTUCKY

Down the winding roadway came the thunder of hoofbeats!

As the two horsemen approached through the deepening twilight a sobbing negro woman peered timidly through the doorway of the old Southern manor house. There was a call from within.

"Put out this light, Mandy," were the words of the weak voice. "Hurry, Mandy. Maybe it's the Marcums coming back."

"Yas, Cunnel; yassir." She obediently retreated, and the dim light within was suddenly extinguished.

The two riders turned in from the thoroughfare, speeding past the half-swung gate up the drive toward the broad portico. The foremost slid from his saddle before his horse had come to a stop.

"Hold her, Rusty!" And then he leaped up the steps, to dash into the dark entry.

"Who is it? Stop!"

There was no weakness of spirit in the tremulous tones from the room within.

"Dad! dad! I've come!"

"Oh, my boy! You're just in time," and the speech ended in a sigh which sent a thrill of horror through the newcomer. "Just ... in ... time!"

"Lawd be praised, Marse Warren," sobbed the negress, as she sank to her knees before the table, where she fumbled with the lamp.

"Light the lamp ... why, it's Mandy!" and the young man ran a nervous hand across his forehead as the wick caught the flame. "Dad! What's the trouble? Where's mother? Why were the lights all out?"

In the corner of the room, on an antique "settle," was stretched the form of old Colonel Jarvis of Meadow Green.

"It's the end, Warren. I stood off Yankee charges and artillery, but a sneaking hound from the hills has put the finish on it all—and sent it in a bullet through my back, without giving me the chance to fight back, as the Yanks did."

Warren Jarvis dropped to his knees beside his father. His pleasant, youthful face was drawn to mummy-like wanness. His eyes glowed with curious intensity, as they devoured the beloved features of the old man. The rays from the oil lamp cast a melancholy glow over the furniture of a bygone society, in this characteristic parlor of an old Southern mansion. But their effect upon the ghastly features of Colonel Henderson Jarvis presaged only too well the tragedy which was to come.

The aged man raised a weak arm, to encircle the shoulders of his son. His eyes closed in exhaustion, and for a full moment the lips moved without the emanation of a word.

Warren Jarvis turned toward the panic-stricken Mandy.

"Quick! What is the trouble? Where is mother? Speak up, Mandy.... I've come all the way from New York in answer to father's telegram. What's the trouble?"

Mandy became more disconsolate, and, with the hysterical sorrow of a Southern family servant, the more incapable of expression.

"Warren ... Warren, my boy!" were the words which at last came from the white lips of his father. "I am going to leave you soon.... I kept up until you arrived, for I must give the honor of the family into your keeping, before it is all over.... Are you prepared to take it up where I stand now?"

The young man nodded. He beckoned to the servant woman, with an eloquent pantomimic command, to bring his sire a drink. The girl silently obeyed, leaving the room for the moment.

"Father, I've come back from the East to do anything, everything. Tell me—what happened, and where is mother? I am frantic!" His shoulders shook as though from a chill. His face was close to his father's, as the colonel's gray eyes opened upon him.

"Your mother passed away last night—it was too much for her poor weak, aching heart, Warren," and his voice sank again to a whisper, as he added, "Your first duty will be to lay us away together, and then to avenge this double murder."

Warren Jarvis lost his worldly-wise self-control, acquired through the adventurous years since he had journeyed forth from the quaint old Kentucky home. A sob broke from his lips, and his face sank on the arm of the old aristocrat,—he was instinctively boyish in his grief, returning once more to the shelter of that paternal shoulder.

Mandy had returned with a glass of stimulant, which she held to the colonel's lips. The draught refreshed him immensely. He gently patted the shoulders of his son, and continued with firmer tones:

"There, Warren boy, pull yourself together. The doctor will be along in his buggy soon. He dressed my wound, two days ago, and he sat with your dear mother ever since she received the shock of the shooting. I sent the Marlowe girls back to their house just an hour ago to rest, because they were worn out.... Everyone has been good and tried to help, but it is no use.... Leave us alone, Mandy."

The woman stepped unsteadily through the door, her hands covering her twitching face. There she bumped into a fat, coal-black darky, he who had accompanied the son on the long ride. She drew him into the shelter of the corridor, leaving father and son together for the final confidences.

"But, father, it was all so sudden? Are you comfortable now? Where is your wound?"

Warren rose more upright on his knees. He now observed the swathings about the elder's breast, beneath the crumpled soft shirt. He caressed the shattered frame with affectionate simplicity.

"I must speak quickly, Warren, for although I suffer no more pain, Dr. Grayson told me the truth—my strength is going every hour. Your mother had been in poor health, and I had ridden down to the village to see the doctor, for a tonic for her. On the way

out again, I passed Henley's poolroom, where the cheap gamblers are still running their crooked betting on the Louisville and Lexington races. Jim Marcum crossed from the front of the saloon, and I had to rein in quickly to keep from running him down. He looked up at me, with his hand on his hip. "Trying the same old trick on me that you did with my brother Ed?" he called. I had nothing to say to Jim Marcum—you know, Warren, that old feud was over these thirty years, as far as I was concerned. I looked him in the eye, and he dropped his gaze, like a wolf which daren't stare back at you. Then I rode on. As I turned the corner, past the little church, I heard a shot and tumbled forward in the saddle."

Warren's hands clenched until the nails cut his palms.

"The cowardly hound!" he muttered.

"Just as my father was shot by Marcum's father, right after the War—in the back, Warren. The horse knew enough to stop, and I rolled down to the ground. Dr. Grayson ran down the street, carried me into the church vestibule, and dressed my back. They wanted to keep me in the parson's house—but I told them to bring me on home, for I wanted to be near your mother. It was a mistake ... a grave mistake. For when they brought me back in the doctor's buggy and called her to the portico, she fainted, and never regained consciousness. That's all, Warren. The end came last night for her—to-night I will join her."

He opened his eyes with ghastly intensity of expression. Then, to the surprise of the younger man, he half raised himself on his elbow.

"Warren!" and the tones were almost shrill, "you must *get* Jim Marcum if it's the last act of your life. He broke the feud law when he killed a woman, as he did with the death of your mother. My dying command is that you end this old fight between our families: he is the last of his line, and you the last of yours. The feud began nearly eighty years ago. It is a different world then in that old Kentucky. I have tried to live upright, God-fearing, and had supposed that time would efface the old hatred. At least I ignored it. But Jim Marcum never forgot that your Uncle Warren had killed his father in that stand-up battle in the old tobacco warehouse; it is the curse of the Blue Grass State, this feud law. But you must carry out the vengeance, Warren. When you scotch that snake, there will be no more."

"Didn't they try to get Marcum, dad?" asked Warren slowly, trying to realize it all.

"No. He disappeared—helped by some of those touts and gamblers. They say he has gone to the mountains. But you follow him, after ... after I...." He sank back again, groaning. "God bless you, boy. When you end this bitter debt, you will have done everything in the world I ever wanted,—what a fine son you have been through all the years!"

Warren rose to his feet, and with hands clasped tensely behind him walked to the window. He heard a sound of buggy wheels and the trotting of a horse; it neared the house.

"It must be the doctor, dad. I'm glad he is here again." He turned about to look at the clear-cut face. He was horror-stricken: the eyes were closed, the hand had dropped limply, and already the fine firm mouth had opened weakly, with a piteous weakness. He rushed forward, dropping again by the side of the couch.

A step behind him did not interrupt the soft pleadings of the tearful voice.

"Dad, dad! Won't you speak to me? You *must* hold out. The doctor has come. Dad, old daddie mine. Speak! Speak!"

The eyes opened, but there was no expression in them. The mouth closed convulsively, and as he leaned close he heard the last message: "God bless you, boy!... Take ... care ... of ... yourself."

Warren's face was buried on the bosom as it ceased to breathe. A kindly touch on his shoulder brought him to a knowledge of the doctor's presence.

"It's so good that you arrived in time, Warren," was the soft-voiced comment. "Your father passed away happy, I know—he had held himself to this life by a marvelous will-power until you came. Steady yourself now."

The doctor knelt by the couch and, with the manly tenderness of an old family friend, crossed the tired patrician hands above that valiant heart.

Warren Jarvis answered not. He walked toward the window again. He peered out into the great, black, miserable, lonely void stretching away toward the southeast. In those distant hills, beyond his vision but familiar as the landmarks of his boyhood, he knew the cowardly assassin of his parents was exulting over the cruel success.

Not a tear came to his relief. His pleasant face hardened to the rigidity of a stone image. The sinews of his athletic frame thrilled with a new emotion—the feud hatred inherited through generations of Kentucky fighters. He would have gladly given his own life for the sublime pleasure of throttling with his bare hands the scoundrel who had wiped out all that was fine and sweet in his life.

Behind him the doctor gave whispered orders to Mandy and two tearful women neighbors who had quietly slipped into the house. Warren did not notice them in his abstraction; they respected his suffering by leaving the room without a greeting.

As he stood there the soft spring breeze fluttered the curtains of the broad parlor windows, bearing in the fragrance of the vines on the portico outside. It was all so silent and different from the brilliant social life he had left behind in New York. Warren's whole life seemed to flit past him, as he stood there now, with the impersonality of a kaleidoscope.

He remembered the early years on this beautiful Blue Grass estate of his father's ... the romantic boyhood of the South, enlivened by horseback rides, hunting trips, boating, fishing—those elemental country sports so sadly lacking in the life of the city youth, ... the faithful, admiring negro servants to whom young "Marse Warren" had been a veritable Sir Galahad—the flower of the neighborhood chivalry. Indeed, in this portion of the States still glows the tradition of the ancient knighthood: the gallantry to women, the reverence for family honor, the bravery in men, the loyalty to neighborhood, commonwealth, and nation,—in verity, the spirit of ideal citizenship.

Warren saw once more the gentle face of his mother, as she worked in her old-fashioned garden of rosemary, hollyhocks, larkspur, iris, rue, ... heard the soft dialect of quaint old ladies gossiping on the broad, shaded portico ... listened again to the laughter of neighboring judges, colonels, majors—his father's old cronies—as they good-naturedly wrangled and bantered over the battles of the War, the merits of their respective thoroughbreds, or the correct manner in which to concoct that nectarian classic of the Southland, the mint julep!

To Warren's retrospection came the vision of his departure for the famous college in the East, the joyful vacation times, and finally his decision to seek adventure far, far to the south—in Brazil, Guatemala, Panama, where he had developed his own executive caliber as a commander of men, in the great construction work on the Big Ditch.... Then came the sorrowful day when he had returned from his travels, to behold the ravages of time on his mother's aging face and his father's stooping shoulders. Even the servants were changed, and it had been to keep a closer bond with the dear old estate that he had taken faithful Rusty Snow as his manservant when he went on to New York again to pursue his profession.

Warren's mind burrowed in the memories of the feudism of the countryside, the sole blot on its simple yet aristocratic modes. He remembered the fragmentary stories of the ancient Marcum-Jarvis quarrel ... this had cost the lives of men for three generations, in an equity of vengeful settlement based strictly on the Mosaic law of "an eye for an eye—a tooth for a tooth." The Marcum family fortunes had been dissipated, those of the Jarvis clan ascending—yet still the feud continued, until the men of both families had paid for the bitterness with their lives. Now his father had been the last Jarvis to go—after a lull of many years.

The sweetness of the old memories was swept by the maelstrom of hate which surged through his heart. As a boy he hardly knew the meaning of the word—the grim looks of the kinsmen, the tear-stained face of his mother, had been little explanation—little had been said. But *now* the iron of vengeance had entered his soul; and he turned about suddenly, facing the body of the colonel.

Advancing toward the settle, he knelt by the body, even as a knight of old, to take his vows. He raised his clenched right hand.

"Father! I swear by my love for you and my mother that I will wipe out the Marcums, cost what it may. I will devote my life to settling the score Jim Marcum has made. I swear it to you, father!"

It seemed to him as though a faint smile of approbation flitted across the face despite the seal of the Great Calm. Even as he knelt there, his quick brain began to lay the plans—and then ... then he remembered what he must see upstairs! His brief moments in the old home had been so absorbed by the dying words of his sire, by the engulfing flame of hate which had burned away all the sweetness of the environment, that he had selfishly forgotten everything but his own grief.

He staggered to his feet and walked slowly from the room.

Outside the door, on an old-fashioned chair in the long corridor running from portico to kitchen, he found faithful Rusty, sobbing with his face in his hands.

"Oh, Marse Warren! Oh, Marse Warren!"

"Rusty, call Mandy," was the simple answer.

Rusty hastened to obey. The woman was assisting the two neighbors in some preparations on the floor above. She came down the stairs tremulously, catching his outstretched hand and kissing it impetuously.

"Where is *she*, Mandy?" he asked, in a stifled voice.

Mandy spoke not, but ascended the stairway, as Warren followed with bowed head. Each broad step seemed steeper than the one below. At last he raised his eyes before

the doorway of his parents' bedroom. Mandy stepped aside.

Within, on a little mahogany sewing-table, burned a dozen candles in his great-grandmother's Colonial candelabra. He turned unsteadily to the right, and saw her!

"O mother, mother!..."

That was all.

II

THE BLIND PURSUIT

The sad days immediately following the double funeral were so filled with visits from relatives and old friends, legal transactions necessary for the transfer of the estate of the old colonel, a successful tobacco factor in his time, and a hundred and one other engrossments, that in the months afterward they were hazy as an unpleasant dream.

With the newly acquired calm which surprised him, Warren Jarvis left no stone unturned to ascertain, with quiet inquiries, the location of Jim Marcum.

There was no clew. The man had mounted a horse on the day of the shooting, to disappear down the dusty Kentucky road, leaving the village far behind and ignoring the possible escape by railroad. His simplicity was cunning, for the blue hills offered more avenues of disappearance than the iron roadbed of the local transportation.

Equally cunning, however, was his determined pursuer. Warren Jarvis, after burying his parents, and making the conventional round of respectful ceremonies, started again for his neglected business in New York. Here he planned to adjust his affairs, then to return to the mountain country, by a roundabout route, to begin his man-hunt, *incognito* and unsuspected.

"I'll cover every mountain trail, every valley path until I find Jim Marcum," he confided to Major Selby, his father's closest friend, as they stood on the train platform waiting for the final minute of departure. "When it happens I will let you know, Major. Until that time, good-by, and God bless you."

The train had come, and unaccompanied by Rusty Snow this time, Jarvis clambered up the steps to wave to the old Kentuckian. As the major turned away, he stroked his snowy mustache with a shrewd twinkle in his blue eyes, to soliloquize:

"I calculate the boy will make his father proud. The old feud blood runs in the Jarvis veins, and even the North can't spoil him. I wonder why Rusty didn't go along—that darky will be broken-hearted to be left behind on the old place."

But Rusty knew very well why he had been left behind!

And with all his jolly laughter, plump complacency, and characteristic African simplicity, Rusty Snow possessed an inherent faculty of subtle concentration which

had served the family of Jarvis since the days when he had been a slave pickanninny.

A week or more he spent in the peaceful Southern hamlet of Meadow Green, imbibing gin and ginger "pop" in the saloons frequented by those walking bureaus of information, the negro barbers. He consorted with darky jockeys and horse-trainers—this was the center of the great thoroughbred breeding district—and everywhere he went, with glistening smiles, laughing eyes, and infectious amiability, he bore one query in his mind. Where was Jim Marcum?

The query seemed unanswerable.

Rusty confided his failure to Major Selby, who in turn sent a letter to Warren Jarvis at his New York club. There the latter was hastening his preparations for the great *trek* through the mountains. Warren had closed his office, where, profiting by his experiences in South and Central America, he had maintained a successful exporting agency: all his affairs were in hand, and that hand closed. All his outstanding investments had been hypothecated, with shrewd advantage. At last he was ready, certain that should he lose his life in the vengeful venture, his kinsfolk would be taken care of, without legal complications: with all his inherited romanticism, Jarvis of Kentucky was a man of astuteness.

He was sitting in the grill of his club, brooding over a solitary glass, unmindful of the friendly chatter of the members about him, when a uniformed page brought him a yellow envelope. He tore open the telegram, sensing important news. It was only from Meadow Green that he received his club mail. And it was from Louisville that the message came. It was simple, and yet it left him bewildered.

"WARREN JARVIS,
Export Club, N.Y.

Coming with Marcum. Buy supplies.

RUSTY."

At first Warren smiled, then he swore, as only a chivalrous Southron can! Why should Rusty be coming with Marcum? He could not have arrested or imprisoned him. What were the supplies? Evidently this was some attempt at code which was beyond his ability to guess.

He spent the night and the next day in a perplexed mood.

A wire sent to Major Selby, inquiring as to the whereabouts of the negro, brought back the simple reply, "Missing—no one knows."

Toward evening, after much perturbation, Warren decided upon a measure of preparedness for whatever might happen. He had given up his bachelor quarters on Madison Avenue two mornings previous, in expectation of the long trip through Kentucky. One night he had spent at his club. Yet, if Marcum were coming to New York, it were best to be located in some place where he could cover his own identity without attracting attention. Such a place would naturally be a large hotel. Accordingly he registered at the Hotel Belmont under an alias. This was close to the Grand Central Station—handy for a quick departure from town, if such were necessary.

Jarvis packed two suitcases with his modest needs for the Southern trip, and donned his evening clothes for dinner at the club. Several telephone calls convinced him that Rusty had not made an appearance as yet.

When he reached the club, the big building was swarming with men of his acquaintance, yet he seemed curiously apart from them. Since his father's murder and the death of his mother, he had proceeded under what engineers call "forced draught." His nerves, like iron, had been drawn tight—to the snapping point: only some great climax of relief would disentangle the tense feelings which he now controlled with external calmness, and sub-surface tremors which warned him of an approaching catastrophe.

For an hour he sat brooding in the quiet library of the club. He had tried to eat; but all the artistry of the famous French *chef* could not conjure up an appetite. Men passed by him, glancing curiously at the usually jovial companion; the twisted, drawn expression surprised them. He tried to read a magazine; the printed lines "pied" themselves before his twitching eyes, blurring into a vision of that last bitter scene in the room with his dying father. And even the vision had faded now, to dissolve into one dull mass of color—a wavering, throbbing field of *red*!

"Mr. Warren Jarvis! Mr. Warren Jarvis!"

The page stood by the library door, calling. He sprang to his feet, brought back to a consciousness of the present with galvanic suddenness. He turned, bewildered for an instant, and then walked slowly toward the boy.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A man wants to see you, sir, down at the front door. A colored man...."

Jarvis waited for no more. He hurried down the oaken stairway, out through the vestibule, and hatless, breathless—relieved to a great extent from his tension—he caught the hand of faithful Rusty Snow.

"Lawd be praised!" murmured that jubilant henchman. "I done thought he might beat me to it!"

"What do you mean, Rusty? Why didn't you come inside?"

"Dat cop at de door wouldn't let no darky come in. I want to talk to you right away, Marse Warren. Right away quick."

Jarvis turned about, with a direction to await him.

He hurried to the coat-room, caught up his light overcoat and hat, and rushed out through the door. Rusty helped him into the garment, with fingers tremulous with joy at the renewal of this familiar and loving task.

"Come, we'll go down the side street. I've given up my apartment, and there's no place to talk but the sidewalk. What did your telegram mean, Rusty?"

"Well, sah, jest what it said. I done followed dat man all de way from Meadow Green to de Manhattan Hotel, dat's what it mean."

Jarvis stopped and, with eyes dilating, looked Rusty full in the face.

"Jim Marcum in New York? What can he be doing here?"

Rusty chuckled.

"Me—oh—my, boss, but dat's jest what I thought at fust. But now I knows. I spent all my time an' all de money I could beg offen de major tryin' to snoop aroun' dem gin-mills down home to l'arn. An' it wasn't ontel yestiddy afternoon dat I seen dis yere Marcum come galloping down on hossback, wid some poh white trash moonshiner ridin' wid 'im. Dey goes right to de depoh an' jumps offen de hosses. I wuz in Eph Black's saloon, but dar ain't nuffin missin' me. I walks over to de station agent's winder an' I sees dis Marcum wid a roll o' bills dat would choke a hoss. He buys a ticket, an' den he goes down de patform. I axes Hen Barrows, de agent, where dat man goin'. He says Noo York. Den I is satisfied. I jest walks down de track to de junction, by de water tank."

"Hurry up, Rusty. What about Marcum?" was Warren's impatient interjection.

"Wall, I sees dis yere man with 'im watchin' de platform—an' wen de train pull in, inter it Marcum goes. She alluz slows up at de sidin'—cause dere's a junction, an' so I jumps 'er, at de hind platform. Well, Marse Warren, dat man he's on de train. It's only day coaches ontel we gets to Lueyville, an' I walks from de Jim Crow car through de train just onct. Dis Marcum he don't recollect me,—I'm just a darky to him. But I sees 'im a-workin' in his seat wid som'pin dat shows he recollects you, sah."

"What was that, Rusty?"

"He was a-oilin' a gun—an' you know who dat gun is for. He'll be a-lookin' for you, Marse Warren."

"What did you do then? How did you manage to stay on the train?"

"Oh, I jest stuck dere, Marse Warren. Dis nigger has had enough 'sperience in dis world to know dat he spends all he has w'en he has it. So de day you left I takes de money you gives me for a railroad ticket, an' buys one an' puts it inside my pocket. So, I was ready for dis Marcum. I follows 'im to Lueyville, whar I telegram to you, and keeps right on 'is trail w'en he changes cars for Cincinnati. He keeps on comin' to Noo York, an' I am in de day coach all dat time. Den I follows right to de Manhattan Hotel. He ain't nebber been in Noo York befoh, because he walks all de way to de hotel instid o' takin' a taxicab. Dat man ain't no *quality*!"

Warren was lost in thought. He stopped at the next corner.

"Listen, Rusty. You did good work. I wanted to have you find him, and instead he came right to me. Now, we must end this whole thing to-night." For an instant the Kentuckian was nonplused, and instinctively turned to the old family servant with that curious trust which the native Southerner instinctively places in the "family" negro. "What shall I do now, Rusty?"

Rusty's usually big eyes narrowed to slits in which the whites were hardly visible.

"Marse Warren, jest wait for dat man. He's here, you knows it, for your life. Ef you cain't git him, *I can*. I got mah razor an' dat's a better weepoan dan any ole gun. You jest wait—an' let me do de rest."

Warren turned and started back toward the club.

"I'll be waiting at the Export Club, Rusty. If he hunts up my address on Madison Avenue, the hall boy will send him there. If he wants to see me, he already has my address—and everyone in Meadow Green knows the club as my address. Now, you go up to the rooms I have taken in the Belmont Hotel. The room number is 417—you just wait there until you hear from me. What did you mean by 'supplies' in that telegram, Rusty?"

The darky chuckled.

"Lawsee, Marse Warren, I knows dat you is a reg'lar Noo Yorker by dis time and don't carry de supplies of a gentlemen. I mean a .38-caliber! Has you got one?"

Warren smiled for the first time since their surprising meeting.

"No, I guess I have become a victim of New York. The worst weapon I have on me, Rusty, is a fountain pen—and I'm afraid Jim Marcum couldn't read the ammunition!"

Rusty looked slyly about him. They were in a dark spot on Fifth Avenue, the shop fronts deserted and not a pedestrian within a block. The darky slipped his hand into his pocket, and surreptitiously handed his master a heavy, portentous automatic which would have sent joy into the heart of a Texas Ranger. There was a vibration of honest pride in his voice as he explained:

"Dere, Marse Warren. I went widout po'k chops an' chicken all de way to Noo York jest to lay in supplies while I was waitin' betwixt trains at Lueyville! I 'lowed you all 'd be too wrapped up in yoh troubles ter bother about dis, an' I recomembered dis here Noo York Sullivan Law w'ich makes it a crime fer a decent citerzen ter carry a gun, so dat the burglars kin work in peace. Take it, Marse Warren, an' plant every seed in de right place!"

The tears came into the eyes of the Kentuckian.

"Rusty, you're a jewel!"

"Yassir, in a ebony settin'! But, now, please git back to dat club place, an' wait fer Jim Marcum. Dat man's mind was on his bizness when I seen him in de smokin' cyar, an' he ain't thinkin' of nothin' else!"

They strolled down toward the club again. Warren gave a few parting directions and handed Rusty a roll of bills for emergency.

"Remember, Rusty, when you hear from me by any message at all, you're to come at once,—I'll just mention my first name. I'm registered at the Belmont as John Kelly of New Orleans—I couldn't hide my Southern accent. Tell them you're my valet, and show the key—I can trust you to get up to the room. If I call for you, pay the bill from that change, and don't let the grass grow under those number twelves!"

Rusty smirked happily.

"Hallelujah, Marse Warren, you'se jokin' agin—de fightin' blood of de Jarvises is bilin'—I knows de signs. Why, Marse Warren, I recollects yoh father when...."

But his master's face changed.

"Not now, Rusty. I'm thinking too much about my father. No more talk for either of us. Just action."

He turned into the side street toward the Export Club. Rusty—fresh from Kentucky psychology—doffed his cap and disappeared as Warren entered the Grecian portal.

Inside the clubhouse he found a letter awaiting him. It was scrawled in the bold, ungrammared style which might have been expected. He read it standing tensely by the doorway, as dozens of men walked in and out, little dreaming of the tragedy attached to that casual fragment of white note-paper. It was written on the stationery of the Hotel Manhattan—diagonally across the street from the hostel where Warren had inadvertently registered for his brief stay in the city.

He read the words again and again.

"DEAR JARVIS; export Club, new York.

am visiting in New York and would like to see you and call off our
kwarrel youre fathers death was misunderstandin and were last of our
families will be at Above hotel all evenin and tomorrow come Around
when you get chance and shake hands i Will prove I aint meant no harm.

Friend JIM MARCUM."

The Kentuckian crumpled the note in his hand, and then walked toward the fireplace of the grill. It had been weeks since any logs had been burned there, but the flakes of soot still clung to the stone casement. Warren struck a match, and a curious smile illumined his face as he ignited the paper, holding its flaming fabric between his fingers until the last half-inch had burned. He dropped the tiny fragment after lighting his cigar with its flame.

One of his friends, a Brazilian coffee merchant, addressed him in the native tongue, which Warren spoke as fluently as English.

"Ah, *señor*, you care not for your letter?"

"Oh, it's just a little invitation to a party to-night," laughed Jarvis of Kentucky. "If anyone found it on my person, he might think I kept late hours and associated with bad company. Let us have a drink to our friendship in the club, for I may take a long journey to-night, and never see you again!"

III

IN THE ROYAL SUITE

A beautiful young woman stirred uneasily in the early slumber of the evening. Eleven floors below her, in the foyer of the Hotel Manhattan, the after-theater crowd of visitors thronged and buzzed happily. But the girl, after an unusual day of anxiety in a strange land, was ill at ease, with fitful dreams.

The Paris clock of her Highness delicately struck two musical notes upon the chimes, to indicate the half-hour; at the same instant, as though by echo and

vehement confirmation, two revolver shots resounded in the corridor.

The girl shuddered as she opened her large dark eyes, sitting bolt upright in bed. She heard a slamming of doors, a growing hubbub in the usually decorous hallway outside, and her feminine curiosity almost conquered the aristocratic reserve, to impel her to rise and discover the origin of the hubbub.

She was spared the trouble, for suddenly the door of her boudoir received a vigorous thump. The lock crashed and it swung open, admitting the rays of a red electric lamp in the corridor outside. The portal swung shut with even greater promptitude, as a dark body leaped over the threshold.

"*Madre de Dios!*" she screamed. Then, after a gasp, "Who's there!"

The intruder backed against the door, working with the top bolt, which was still intact. She could see the vague outline by the dim glow of the moonlight which streamed into her room.

Then, as she seemed preparing for another cry, he turned toward her.

"Ssssh! Don't make any noise," he whispered vibrantly, audaciously.

The girl slipped from her bed and drew a flimsy dressing-gown about her.

"What do you want?"

"Silence!"

She had reached the lamp on the small boudoir table near the bed. She switched on the electric light. They stared at each other wide-eyed—but stirred by different feelings. Hers was the fright of a woman finding herself in the power of a strange and desperate man; his the battling alertness of a man fighting for his own life against odds.

It was Jarvis of Kentucky!



It was Jarvis of Kentucky

Despite his immaculate evening clothes, the blanched face, drawn mouth, and the revolver in his hand made him appear to her as the personification of that vague terror of the unfamiliar dark which all women and children know so well. He crouched there, reading the character in her haughtily tossed head and imperious eyes. The details of her beauty he ignored, remembering only three important facts: "She is young, she is frightened but has not lost control of herself." He reached forward and touched the switch of the lamp. Again the moon was the sole illumination of the room!

A voice outside in the corridor came to them.

"What's the row?"

"Somebody's shooting up the hotel!" was the reply, from another throat.

"Not a sound ... do you understand?" whispered Jarvis, as he backed toward the door again.

"What right...?" she began.

"Quiet!"

The voices in the corridor were closer now.

"Where'd he go? Look on the fire-escape."

"No use—he's on this floor, I tell you."

The girl advanced toward him, her own spirit asserting itself, as she realized that help was within calling distance. Yet she did not call!

"What is it? What do you want? What have you done?"

Warren slipped the revolver into his pocket to reassure her.

"It's all right now. I'm not going to harm you, if you will just keep quiet. Is that clear to you?"

"Is it money you want? All the money I have is on that dressing-table. Take it and go."

He shook his head, now observing the wealth of hair, the healthy, aristocratic poise of shoulders and arms, and the depths of her eyes.

"I'm not a burglar. I don't want your money."

"Well, then, what do you want?" She was beginning to be impatient.

There was a sound of rapid steps down the corridor. Jarvis sprang toward the door, his eyes still intent on hers.

"Listen ... they're coming!... They mustn't search this room—do you understand—you must put them off." He assured himself that the upper bolt was intact and shot tightly. "I'm not what you think I am.... Is there no way out that way, through the door over there behind you?"

She shook her head.

"No, that is my maid's room."

"The fire-escape—where is that?"

"In the hall opposite."

Jarvis snapped a finger, angry at his own mistake.

"I thought that red meant it was in this room. Oh, hell!... I beg your pardon!"

A faint smile turned up the corner of the red lips, and she shrugged her shoulders ever so lightly.

"Well, you know where it is now; why don't you go?"

Jarvis shook his head with determination: it was evident that this surprised and surprising young person would be amenable to reason—he had many logical reasons at his command.

"I can't go that way—they'll be waiting in the hall," he declared, as he studied the windows and portals. "The red light in the corridor fooled me—I thought the fire-escape would get me to the floor below, where I could take an elevator down during the hubbub. There they come again."

As the odd pair stood, with bated breath, quick steps and a running fire of conversation could be heard in the hall. It was evident that the chase was getting warm.

The girl studied the pose of her curious visitor—it was not the cringing attitude of a criminal. In the lines of his well-built figure there was the unmistakable grace of a gentleman to the manor born—the fearless confidence, despite his predicament, of a man confident of his own justification.

She was puzzled—her curiosity gradually overcoming her outraged feelings and her natural resentment against his assured usurpation of the situation.

This was a new experience for the lady of the lacy filaments and regal poise; yet it was far from unpleasant to meet such calm masculinity. She switched on the light once more, to feel a surprising satisfaction in the impersonal, unabashed honesty of those steady blue eyes.

Jarvis became conscious of a twinge in his hand, and looking down at his left hand, observed a little rivulet of blood dripping down to his finger-tips. He quickly drew his handkerchief from his pocket, as though to cover the wound before she saw it. The action and its motive did not escape the observant dark eyes. Her sex asserted itself; she advanced, nervous once more.

"You are wounded? What has really happened? You must dress that hand ..."

"I almost stopped one of the bullets—that's all. You see it was not one-sided. But I am afraid it will be, if they get me now. I don't see how the devil——" here he ran to the shaded window to peer at the twinkling street lamps far below,——"Oh, damn!"

The girl's manner froze again. She stepped back instinctively; and yet that bandaged hand compelled her eyes. She spoke slowly.

"You have evidently shot someone, and are making me shield you from justice."

Warren Jarvis shook his head, with that straightforward look which was so convincing.

"Not from justice, but from the law?"

"I thought they were the same."

His smile was bitter, as he retorted: "No, not always. There would be no justice for me at the hands of the law: justice was not accomplished by the law in all these years."

She dropped a white hand to the table by which she stood.

"Well, that is not for me to decide. I must only...."

"You must only listen—you shall decide. At least you shall listen, in order that you may forgive my intrusion, my selfishness in compromising you as I have done." He hesitated, and for the first time color came into the drawn cheeks; a softening echo was observable in her own. "If you find me guilty, when I tell you, I'll—well—I'll take that door or anything you say."

"Your presumption is ridiculous," were her words, and yet she did not call for assistance. Jarvis realized that he had at least won a foothold for his plea. And he had not given up his dogged hope.

"I wouldn't call it ridiculous—a man has a right to argue for his life."

"But," she parried, "could any decision be more unjust than mine must be, when delivered at the point of a pistol?"

Jarvis took the challenge. He laid the weapon upon the dressing-table by her side and crossed the room, leaving her between himself and the door.

"Now, my dear lady, there's nothing to prevent you from covering me, calling for help, and solving the riddle as you please. After all, what does it matter, whether the end comes to-day or to-morrow, for it would be impossible to elude the police. You don't understand, I know—but I am not flying from justice: it was a case of shoot or be shot. You will notice that only one cartridge in that revolver has been used. But, listen—they're on the right trail at last."

He noiselessly crossed to the door and listened to the renewed excitement without. There was a triple knock, and the voice of a man, evidently of authority, rang out.

"Open up here. Is there anybody in here? Open, I tell you."

Jarvis turned toward the girl, whose face reflected a dozen curious emotions as she watched him. He made his last appeal.

"It's up to you to do with me as you like," he murmured.

Her mind was made up quickly, and she pointed toward a door to the left—it led to her bath. Jarvis disappeared behind its shelter. At the same instant the door of the maid's room opened, and a chic little servant ran out chattering, clinging to her mistress' arm for protection.

"Be silent," was the cool command. The knocking continued, with more voices joining in the exhortations. The girl pointed to the door, and the silent command was obeyed. Trembling like an aspen, the little maid opened it, and the burly form of a house detective appeared at the entrance.

"Are you all right in here?" he asked, and then observing the two white-robed figures he doffed the conventional derby hat without which no professional hotel detective would seem natural. "I beg your pardon, ma'am. I just came to see if you had had any trouble."

"No," replied the mistress calmly. "What is the matter?"

"Mighty sorry to trouble you, but we're looking for a party and we ain't goin' to stop till we find him. We just thought he might have beat it into this room for a getaway. If you want anything, just call us, for we'll be up and down these halls all night now."

As he shut the door, the unusual young woman waved toward it once more.

"Lock it well, Nita," she said in Spanish. "Control yourself, child. You have a chill. Go to bed again. I will not want you again until six o'clock in the morning."

As Nita retired she hesitated before her doorway. Her sharp black eyes caught the glint of the bulky revolver upon the library table. Those same black eyes dilated, her lips moved as though for another frightened exclamation, but all she said was: "Thank you, madame! I will not bother you again until six o'clock. Good-night, madame!"

Then she closed her door.

Nita was as discreet as she was faithful, in the service of her beloved madame. And she was essentially Spanish in her appreciative grasp of a romantic situation.

IV

AN OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

The bathroom door opened slowly, with the slightest perceptible knock.

"May I come in?" was the low and meek inquiry.

"You may, and then you may go out as soon as possible," was the resolute response.

Warren's countenance was smiling again, and the smile was infectious. So curious had been this burglarizing method of escape, so unusual the imperturbable girl who had assisted him against all conventional expectations, that the horror of the last half-hour was partially dissipated. When a man meets a great crisis of his life and overcomes it, there is a queer relaxation of strained nerves,—with a woman the result would be hysteria; with a man of Warren Jarvis' type it was a self-surprising amiability and calmness.

"Would you mind bolting the door again? He might return. And thank you very much for delaying the death sentence—now I can explain."

The girl glided to the door and tested the lock. It was secure, and she turned about to return that infectious smile of the eyes, albeit grudgingly.

Warren, finally realizing that he was weak from strain, and aching in every muscle from the ordeal of the past twenty-four hours, looked appealing at the comfortable armchair.

"May I sit down for just a minute?" he pleaded. "I have not slept since the night before last. I have not rested for a fortnight."

The girl nodded. He relaxed, and dropped into a blessed position of comfort. He buried his face in his hands—how many times had he struck this same attitude since the bitter days at Meadow Green, without realizing the repetition!

For two minutes or an hour he sat there—he knew not which. His companion, with sudden renewal of consciousness of the *déshabille* of her dressing-gown, retreated to the corner of the brass bed. She sat down, to scrutinize the better this strange intruder. The moonlight which fell in pale green bars across the Bokhara beneath her slippered feet; the melodramatic situation which had brought them together; the unmistakable gentility of this compelling intruder of her maidenly domain; the curious collapse of his aggressiveness—all these things united to cast a sympathetic spell over her. She was foolish—to the extreme of placing herself in a ridiculous situation! She was culpable—in protecting a self-confessed butcher! She was weak—in yielding to girlish sentiment by permitting this man to shatter the conventionalities,—she who had been accustomed, throughout her twenty years of

adulation and awe-inspiring respect, to a servile respect from every man, woman, and child! And, worst of all to an essentially feminine mind, she had allowed this presumptuous, calculating stranger to override her better judgment, to subjugate her resistance, without a visible tribute to the charms which had stirred the masculine souls of a continent!

And yet, in spite of—perhaps, *because of*—all these illogical, provoking, equilibrium-shattering irritants—she sat there, patiently, eagerly awaiting an explanation. Consistency, thy name is not Maidenhood!

Suddenly he looked at her.

"Do you know what a feud is?" was the curious prologue.

Her answer was apt and surprising.

"Feud? Spain is the garden of feuds."

"So is Kentucky. That's where I'm from. You're Spanish, then?"

"Yes!"

"Then you'll understand and sympathize.... Those shots you heard ended a feud which has lived through three or four generations. They brought me back to earth, to life, to a realization of things about me, after the most horrible nightmare through which I've ever passed. I know my own name now,—and I had almost forgotten it since I went back home—so short a time, so many centuries ago!"

Then Warren Jarvis told her the story; his eyes were half closed, and with his fingers clasped and intertwined beneath his square-chiseled chin he recounted the steps of the recent event with the monotone of one who chants a mechanically memorized tale. She understood at last.

"But what did he do when you went to his room in the hotel?"

"Just what I expected—in fact, what I prayed for! As the door opened he fired his revolver—and I carry the witness inside this crimson handkerchief. I had my own weapon in my coat pocket ... it's a trick I learned in Central American revolutions. I fired from my waist, burned a hole in my overcoat—and burned a hole in the heart of that murderous hound."

Suddenly he sprang to his feet and walked to the window, just as he had done back in Meadow Green so short a time before.

"Dad, dear old dad! I know you're satisfied. I let him take the first chance, and it was his last."

He was silent. The girl twisted the dressing-gown in her slender, nervous fingers. She waited for him to speak. He turned about, and dropped his hands, palm outward, as he quietly ended it all with the question: "Now, can you understand why the law would not give me justice?"

"Is he dead—are you sure?"

"I didn't wait—I came ... to ... visit you. Now are you going to drive me out?... You don't know what it is to fight single-handed against fearful odds. That's how I planned to spend my summer. To fight the endless fight alone...."

She leaned forward eagerly as she answered: "Oh, yes, I do! I know what it means.... I, too, have been fighting against fearful odds!"

Jarvis looked at her sharply.

"There is no man to fight for you?"

"No man who dares."

"Oh, God! If there had only been a woman left for me to fight for!... But with my mother gone it was simply a hopeless, desperate determination to square the score at any cost, and then cry 'Quits!' and care nothing."

She drew back, studying the outline of his agile body, as he stood silhouetted against the moonlight.

"And are you alone?"

"Alone."

"And if you're caught," there was a curious eagerness in her low voice, "it means payment with your life?"

"Yes!"

"Suppose that I decided to help you—to do more than I have done?"

Jarvis discarded his fatalism, as he caught at this loophole.

"What do you mean?"

"You have no fear of death? You are not afraid of ghosts?"

"Ghosts? Don't joke with me. I am an American."

"Yes—ghosts—they are not confined to America, or China, or Africa. I mean Spanish ghosts."

Jarvis' laugh was almost bitter, as he responded with a tense earnestness:

"After to-night I am not afraid of the living or the dead. What are you thinking about?"

After a hesitation, poignant in its baffling anxiety, she rose and walked toward him, absolutely forgetful of their curious meeting and their lack of a common ground of interest.

"If you escape from here, it will be because I helped you. We might say, I saved your life,—if what you tell me is true and if I do it from a selfish motive entirely, I am justified. I have work for you ... hard, dangerous work, and as I am frank, it may mean your life in the end. It's a chance, and you have nothing to lose."

"And if I agree?"

"You will begin by taking the ancient feudal oath of my country."

"Isn't my word enough? I'm a Kentuckian, you know."

"But I insist."

Jarvis smiled indulgently.

"Very well—I'll swear the blackest oath you can utter." His eyes twinkled. "Let's hear it all now."

The girl drew back her shoulders haughtily. It was apparent that she took this curious idea more seriously than the prelude would suggest.

"What is your name?"

"Jarvis."

"All of it?"

"Warren Jarvis."

She raised her hands, to the Kentuckian's surprise.

"Kneel then, Warren of Jarvis!... No, not that way,—on one knee only!"

"I beg your pardon." Jarvis began to feel ridiculous, in spite of himself. But there were reasons for humoring this curious beauty. The footsteps were still audible in the hall.

"Now repeat this oath: I, Warren of Jarvis" (he followed word for word), "Señor of all the domains, fiefs, keeps, and marches of Warren of Kentucky..."

"Whew!" and he stifled a laugh as he echoed the words.

The girl continued: "Do convey to Maria Theresa, of Aragon, all my worldly titles and possessions..."

"Sounds like I were marrying her—I beg your pardon. 'Do convey to Maria Theresa, of Aragon, all my worldly titles and possessions!'"

The shade of a smile played over his features.

The girl caught his hand in hers, placed her left in both of his, and then continued: "And receive them back as vassal and retainer and to faithfully fight in my lady's cause, according to the feudal laws of Castile and Aragon!"



—*"and to faithfully fight in my lady's cause"*

As he finished the repetition, she added: "Arise, vassal!"

With the spirit of the ceremony, he jestingly caught her hand and kissed it, as he arose. She drew back sharply.

"That is part of the ceremony, but I meant to omit it."

Warren Jarvis laughed provokingly.

"That seemed to me the only sensible part of it—again I beg your pardon. But who on earth is this Maria Theresa of Aragon person whose hired man I have become?"

The girl drew herself up with a hauteur which could never have been imitated upon the stage. Her dark eyes glinted coldly as she replied: "I—I am her Serene Highness—Maria Theresa—Princess of Aragon!"

Jarvis looked at her, waiting for the cue to the joke. She was serious. It was all so unreal, so ridiculous—and yet back there on the floor of the room down the corridor lay Jim Marcum. This mad, sad, heart-rending, adventure must have driven him to insanity. He rubbed his brow, looked out of the window, heard the unromantic honk-honk of a piratical night-owl taxicab on the street so far below. He steadied his mental equilibrium, and looked again at the self-possessed young woman, whose regal manner was as convincing as all the other details were unconvincing. On the table lay a fortune in jewels and rings and a necklace. He had not noticed them before. He remembered the Spanish conversation which he had heard through the

bathroom door. He realized from the size and elegance of the rooms that this must indeed be a regal suite in the great hotel.

And the girl's steady look never wavered.

American humor, in the presence of royalty, came to his aid in this staggering blow to his credence.

"Good-*night*! You a Princess ... and I've been ordering you around with a gun! Great Scott ... what *next*?"

V

EXIT JARVIS, LAUGHING

The Princess turned toward the door, for a step could be heard in the corridor.

"Before that official returns we must have a plan. I thought it out while you were behind the door. But, perhaps, it will be too hard a task for you."

"I'll try it. Anything to get out of here! And I would like to know what it is you want me to do for you—what about the ghost?"

"I will tell you in good time. Just now for your escape. It is getting late, and the hours are speeding past. You are in a hopeless trap here. Now, my trunk..."

"What about it?"

"I am sending it on board the *Mauretania* at six o'clock, and no one could possibly suspect."

Jarvis turned to study this curious vehicle of transportation. It was a strong, well-built piece of baggage, indeed; but to be cooped up in it, at the mercy of baggageman and truckman, hoisters and stewards—the thought was staggering.

"You're joking," he began, but she resolutely shook her wealth of hair.

"It's the only chance, and a daring one at that. I am jeopardizing my own safety by assisting you. Surely, if life is so uncertain for you at best, you cannot lose by a trial."

Jarvis stooped over it, and began lifting out the trays, to study the questionable roominess of the interior.

"What about these?" he asked, and as he spoke a locket dropped to the floor. The girl darted forward to pick it up, and Jarvis observed it for the first time. Her solicitude seemed unusual to the Kentuckian.

"Did I break something?"

"No. It's nothing. I mean, it's all right. It's just a locket. I broke it myself yesterday, on purpose. It means a great deal to me, and perhaps to you. Some day you may know the reason why ... Shall we send the trays to the steamer by messenger?"

Jarvis thought for an instant. Here was such an utterly improbable method of escape, such a strange new twirl in his whirlpool of adventure, that he had to find his bearings.

"I have it now," he explained. "You had better telephone—we must have someone we can trust implicitly."

The Princess crossed toward the desk telephone on the small table by her bed, and looked at him inquiringly.

"Ask the operator to connect you with the Hotel Belmont. That's just across the street. My room is 417. Rusty, my servant, is there. He is waiting for some word from me, as he knew the possibilities when I met Jim Marcum. He can be counted on till Judgment Day and then a few hours afterwards! Tell him to come here at once—mention my first name only, with no other explanation—that will bring him and give no other clue to an outsider. You never can tell about a telephone. But fortunately, I registered there under a different name. Try it now."

The girl had the receiver off the hook. After a short delay she was talking directly with the faithful servitor, whose trembling voice betokened his anxiety. But Rusty was too sage to ask too many questions—he had served in affairs of delicacy before this.

"Hello—is this Mr. Rusty?... Yes? Well, listen carefully. You are to come right over to the Manhattan Hotel across the street and a bellboy will be waiting for you at the desk. He is to bring you up to room 1121."

Jarvis interrupted: "Tell him to keep his mouth shut!"

The Princess balked at the colloquialism.

"And—and—don't talk to anyone ... What's that?... Oh, yes. '*Warren*.'... There, he'll be coming over immediately."

Jarvis, the executive, was now in action.

He had emptied the trunk as she was talking, tossing out fascinating feminine mysteries of lace and silks, with a nonchalance which brought a twinkle into the dark eyes. He turned again.

"Hurry, now—call up the clerk downstairs. Tell them to look out for Rusty and send him up here."

More delicate symphonies of Parisian architecture were thrown on the floor, and Warren had taken out his pocket-knife.

"Hello, hello," called the Princess. "I'm expecting a man."

"A colored man," was Warren's parenthesis.

"Yes,... a colored man ... to get some bundles. He will come right to the desk ... please send him up at once ... It is very important."

The Princess observed Jarvis' attempt to bore a hole in the side of the trunk. He was laboring diligently, until the blade snapped.

"Confound it!"

"Why are you doing that?"

"I must breathe, you know ... Now, how can I cut a hole in the blessed thing?" He scratched his forehead in a quandary.

The Princess brought him her shears from the dresser. In a few minutes he had made two openings which seemed to satisfy him, but it had been no easy task.

"What time does the boat sail?"

"Nine o'clock."

"Good. That will give Rusty time to get aboard with these trays and my baggage. Let me see, it is a quarter of six now—how quickly the dawn has slipped in!"

There was a knock on the outer door, and Jarvis again disappeared behind the bathroom portal, with instinctive caution.

At a call from the Princess, the door opened after she had slid back the upper bolt. The girl stepped back abashed at the appearance of the excited negro. Rusty rolled his eyes, suspiciously taking in the contents of the room.

"Whar's Marse Warren?" and his voice was hoarse. Jarvis stepped into view. "Lawd bless you, Marse Warren. I done thought dat Marcum got you dis time."

"Never mind what you thought. Help me wrap up these trays. We sail for Europe in two hours."

Rusty gasped, shot another big-eyed look at the beautiful girl and then at his master.

"Two hours—good Lawd!—you mean WE?"

The Princess was holding out a steamer rug in silence.

"Yes, Rusty, you and I. Here, give me a hand with this rug," and with the aid of his servant he made a quick job of the bundling. "Now, take these—with our baggage from the Belmont—to the steamship *Mauretania* of the Cunard line. Buy accommodations.... Mind, you won't see me until after we get out to sea. You stay in your stateroom and sit tight until you hear from me."

He took out his wallet.

"You understand now? Cunard line. You can find it some way—just take a taxi, and get there as fast as you can. The clerk at the hotel will get the tickets over the telephone, and you can pay him when you settle for the whole bill, with that other money I gave you. Now, get hold of this money, and keep hold of it. No gin now, Rusty!"

He turned around, and observed the amused surprise on the face of his fair companion.

"I beg your pardon.... This is Rusty;—Rusty, this is the Princess of Aragon...."

Rusty bowed.

"Howdy do, Mrs. Princess!"

"There, that will do. Is it all clear for you now?"

"Yassir. I takes everything to the steamboat—gets accommo—accommo—wall, I knows what you means, Marse Warren, if I cain't spell it. I gets them things for us and Mrs. Princess."

The girl reddened under the beaming smile, but Jarvis quickly interceded.

"Not for the Princess; just for us two. What's the name of the boat?"

"The *Mary Tania*!"

"That'll do. Now be off, and don't get left behind."

As Rusty made his exit with the bulky bundle, the Princess smiled: "Good-by, Rusty," and he bobbed his head with a broader grin than ever as he disappeared down the corridor toward the elevator.

"Time nearly up," muttered Warren, as he took off his coat. "Pardon the disrobing—but I'll be more at ease in my shirt-sleeves. It's a stingy little room to spend three hours in. I'll lie this way, with my head toward this corner. Remember, this trunk must not go into the hold of the ship—have it marked 'Wanted' and 'This End Up.' I'll take the shears along and cut another hole from the inside if it gets too suffocating."

The girl walked to the table and picked up the revolver, which she held out.

"You'd better take this, too."

"How do you know you can trust me now?"

There was a veiled irony in her retort, although it was accompanied by a smile: "I don't. I have to take that chance. I have no other choice at this late hour."

"You must have a pretty good reason for it in the back of your head. But what about this ghost? I may never hear the sequel. At least give me some food for thought during my travels in the dark."

"Are you afraid?"

"Lord, no! I merely wanted to know. Well, I'll wait. But, now, honest Injun, as we say down in Kentucky, are you a really, sure-enough princess?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Oh, I don't know. Somehow you are not quite like what I thought a princess would be.... I mean, you're different from the popular conception of a royal person. Your English is so perfect."

"I learned it in an English boarding-school."

"Your informality—for it has been put to a severe test these last few hours,—your adaptability,—you have more understanding, more sympathy, more heart."

She turned away and tilted a haughty chin.

"In that last respect, sir, you will find me quite like the popular conception."

A knocking on the door interrupted further interchanges on the peculiarities of royalty. Jarvis clambered inside the vehicle of his escape, and drew down the lid, with a farewell smile.

"Trunks, lady, for the steamer!" came the voice of the porter, as he resumed his thumping on the door panel.

"Just a minute." The Princess hurriedly bundled up the scattered garments, jumbling them upon the bed. She turned the key in the trunk and, with a quick feminine survey of the field for damaging, overlooked evidence, called to her maid.

"Nita, admit the porter."

The servant appeared with surprising promptness. The man pushed in his truck, with the obsequious manner which is a prelude to the smirking appreciation of a handsome gratuity.

"Have the other trunks gone, my good man?" queried her Serene Highness.

"Yes'm. Last night, mum."

"This trunk goes on a special wagon."

"Yes'm."

At this juncture the house detective appeared at the doorway. He stopped and looked questioningly at the broken lock. He was alert as a weasel despite his ponderous physique: he fingered it, and studied the evidence of fresh splinters. The Princess continued calmly.

"Have it marked 'Wanted'" (and as she indicated with a jeweled finger), "'This End up with Care.'"

The porter nodded.

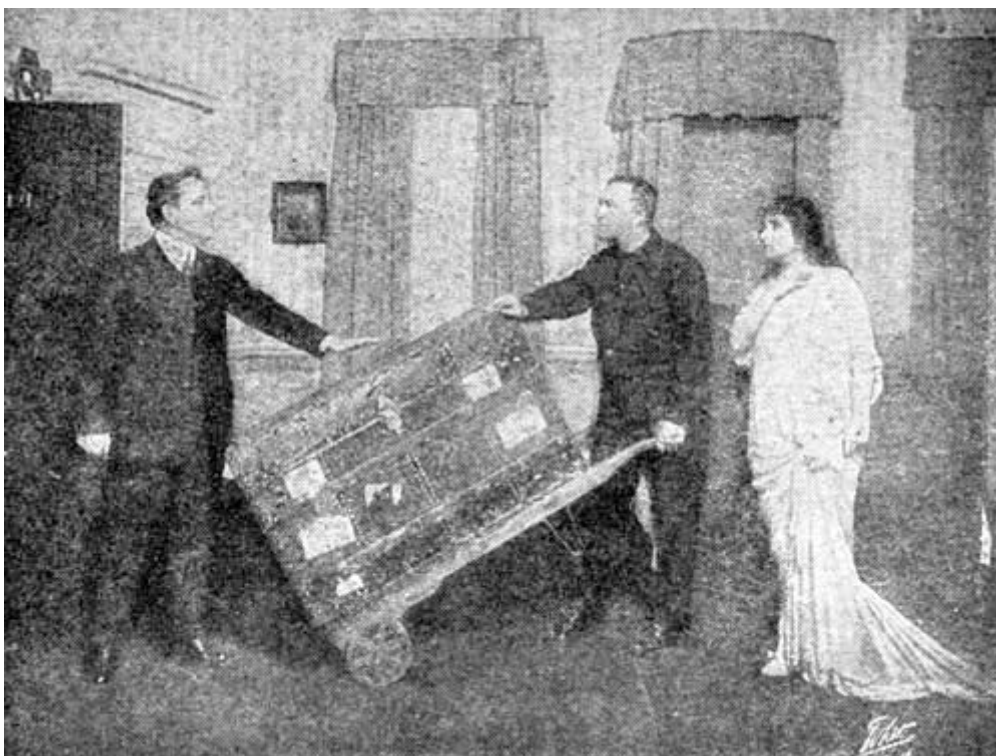
"I'll put special stickers on it, mum. You'll find it in your stateroom when you get to the steamer. Is that all, mum?"

"Handle it gently, porter."

"Shure, lady and I never smashed one in me life! I'll handle it as rivirintly as if it held the relics of a saint, mum. I'm that careful in me worruk. So don't worry one little bit, mum."

As he started out with the heavy piece of luggage on his truck, the detective stopped him sternly.

"Just a minute. How did that lock get broken?"



"Just a minute. How did that lock get broken?"

The Princess felt herself changing color, yet she shrugged her shoulders as she turned away.

Nita suddenly chattered in Spanish to her, and the detective shot a sharp glance at the girl.

"What does she say?" he cried. "She knows something about it."

"She says the other porter banged the door before we came in, for it was that way when she entered to arrange my clothes. I have had my sleep interrupted all night long, and I do not care for any insolence now."

The detective looked a bit sheepish, but stuck to his inquest.

"When did you come?"

"Yesterday."

"And when do you go away?"

"We sail this morning for Europe."

"Huh," and there was a suggestion of doubt in his grunt. "The police are making an investigation in the hotel. They would like to have a look at these rooms. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. My maid will show them around."

"What time do you sail? Does this trunk go on board?"

"Yes,—I want it sent on a special wagon, for I fear we will be late. The steamer sails at nine o'clock."

The detective nodded to the porter, who brushed close by the Princess with his cargo.

"*Bon voyage!*" she said with a smile.

"What's that?" asked the detective.

"I merely called my maid. You're an unusually impertinent and inquisitive man. In my country gentlewomen are shown some degree of courtesy, even by hotel servants," she remarked icily.

The detective's ruddy face grew redder.

"Well, I dunno about your country, whatever that is. But in this country, and in this hotel there don't nothin' get by me. That's all. Come on in, boys."

Two bluecoats entered the room, gazed awkwardly about, and walked to the window to peer down at the street. Then they passed out, not without, it must be admitted, an envious glance at the collection of jewels on the table.

As the door closed behind them, her Serene Highness turned toward Nita, as she relaxed in the chair by the dressing-table.

"You may dress my hair, child. I wonder how the door was broken?"

"Ah, madame," was the guileless response. "*Quién sabe?*"

VI

OVER THE SEA AND FAR AWAY

That journey to the *Mauretania* was never to be forgotten by Warren Jarvis; and yet so weird, bruising, jumbling, and altogether horrible was it, that he could never distinctly remember its details.

With hands stretched tensely against the corners of the trunk, he warded off as best he could the shocks of the skilled baggage-breakers along the route. Again and again, an unexpected twist would bang his throbbing head against the adamantine sides, and with a wince, a sharp, in-drawn breath, he would hold himself "together" for one more bump!

The air was stifling; yet the foresight of cutting the holes gave him enough oxygen to maintain his senses. At last, after æons of suffering which reminded him of nothing so much as his initiation into the college fraternity, he felt himself being dragged up the side of the great ocean greyhound.

More jolts, more rolls and bangs, and at last, with muscles wrenched, a swollen forehead and nerves aquiver, there was rest.

"I'm in her cabin at last—and now for a graceful exit!" he told himself, with an enforced jocularity. But this was no easy task. He spent a full half-hour, working and prying with the shears against the lock which imprisoned him with indomitable force from the outside of the iron-and-leathern prison.

Upon the outer deck of the great turbiner, the Princess nervously fought her way through the great throng of voyagers and their friends. Nita was close by her side. It seemed impossible to capture a steward who was not busy with the bearing of bouquets and wine baskets. In other circumstances this young personage would have been furious at the lack of respect which she had been educated to expect from the throngs of her own country.

But to-day her only anxiety was to find her elusive quarters for the strange cruise, to learn whether or not her new knight-errant were alive or dead from the rigors of his escape.

At last, with the aid of an extravagant *largesse*, she was conducted to her staterooms.

As she entered the parlor of her luxurious suite, the first sight which caught her eye was the trunk, inverted! The printed sign of direction, "This End up with Care," were upside down!

She gasped, and looked nervously about to note the expression upon the face of Nita. That young woman was busy studying the handsome features of the ingratiating bedroom-steward. So engrossed was she that she stumbled over the elevated sill of the door from the promenade deck.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, miss!" apologized the steward. "Did you hurt yourself? These doors are always troublesome until you get used to them. But they are necessary to keep out the water in rough weather."

The Princess was thinking only of the opportunity to open the fateful trunk.

"You don't anticipate a bad passage, steward?"

"Rather uncertain, ma'am, at this time of the year," and he busied himself adjusting the hand luggage and arranging the chairs. "But your location is good. You'll find the *Mauretania* as steady as a parish church. Here is the clothes press, ma'am, and the other rooms are off there. It's quite the finest suite on the boat, ma'am."

The steward looked about ingratiatingly, then he turned toward the door.

"If you want anything, ma'am—there is the telephone.... I'll place your trunk, if you please, ma'am!"

He started to drag the trunk to the side of the cabin, but the Princess intervened.

"That's all right; you may place it later. But you *might* fix it right side up!"

The steward turned it, as the girl breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'm so sorry, ma'am. I hope the contents are not upset."

"I hope not."

"Anything else, ma'am?"

"No, not now, steward? How soon do we sail?"

"Very soon," and as he spoke there came the stentorian warning: "All ashore that's going ashore!" The call was repeated four times, and the voice died away in the distance of the long promenade deck.

With a bow, and a significant glance at the attractive maid, the steward finally dragged himself out of the attractive cabin. The Princess sank nervously into a chair.

"That is all, now, Nita. I have the key to the trunk. I will call you when I need you."

"Yes, your Highness. But, will your Highness excuse me if I am mistaken in thinking that I recognized his Excellency the Duke, your exalted cousin, among the passengers as we came up the gangplank...?"

Her Highness was distinctly startled, but she showed no trace of her emotion to the servant.

"My cousin—it is impossible. He is at Madrid, where his Majesty the King is holding Court."

"Yes, your Highness," and she went, but her inflection showed that she knew herself to be in the right. Nita was too good a servant to argue with her betters.

"Carlos here? How could he be, I wonder?" and the Princess fumbled with her keys, until she found the right one. She opened the trunk with a trembling hand, and began to raise the cover, a quiver in her voice.

"Are you all right ... Mr. Jarvis?"

It was the voice of a nervous, frightened girl—not of a royal personage—this time.

Just then she heard a knock on the cabin door. There was no time for a response. "Quiet! Be careful!" she cautioned, *sotto voce*.

As she hurried to the door, she pulled her taut nerves together. There on the threshold was her kinsman: Nita had been right as usual, in her sharp way.

Carlos, Duke of Alva, with smiling lips and sinister eyes, greeted her with the suave courtesy which is so characteristic of his race and class. He typified the worst of the Spanish folk, even as the young girl did the best. To a keen student of physiognomy the mental attitude of the Duke of Alva would have been an open book. To Maria Theresa, loyal to family and countrymen, he was the symbol of her own strata in Spain—yet, beneath her gracious forgiveness of and enforced indifference to many things, there lurked a latent mistrust, which she had never yet defined in practical, applicable terms.

With white teeth, crisp-curling black hair, and eyes of sparkling coal-shade, the Duke of Alva bowed with that polished grace which had broken many a heart and carried him over many a stretch of thin ice, in the courtly adventuring on the Continent.

"Carlos!" exclaimed the Princess.

"Fair cousin—if I but knew you were as pleased, as you are surprised, at seeing me!" With the words he advanced and kissed her cold finger-tips with Old-World punctiliousness.

"What are you doing on the *Mauretania*? Why did you leave Spain, Carlos?"

As he shut the door he smiled, and now her intuition warned her of the cunning which lurked behind those pleasantly curving lips.

"First tell me that you are glad to see me! I have come many leagues to hear those words, Maria!"

"Why.... Why,... of course, I am always glad to see you, cousin."

He simulated a pathetic irony. "You say you are always glad to see me—and yet, I fear it is not *always* since my unfortunate quarrel with your brother. Alas, and that has hardened your heart against me."

The Duke was a suitor of the romantic school: each phrase was studied, each attitude as obviously planned as a military campaign. It was a method which had invariably succeeded, until his efforts with the Princess of Aragon. Yet, he was too satisfied with bygone results to abandon the time-tried artistries of former victories.

The Princess dropped her eyes before the undeniable questioning of his burning glances. As she looked away, he assured himself that he had scored.

"My brother ... what do you know of him, Carlos? When did you see him last? Have you been in Seguro?"

Two long whistles, and the vibration of the great steamship evidenced the beginning of the long voyage. The answer to the questions was still more pathetic in cadence.

"Ah, how I dread telling you!... I was there a few days before leaving for America. I learned, unfortunately, that despite my very friendly advice, he had been prowling about that ridiculous old castle again, in search of the mythical treasure your grandfather is supposed to have secreted there."

He laughed, and the girl instinctively shuddered with a newborn distrust. There was no mirth in the sound.

"You heard nothing more? Was he well and safe when you left the town?"

"He was as well and safe as I would consider any man who was prowling about that castle in a foolhardy way."

She wished to get rid of him: that ominous trunk might contain a dead man, for all she knew.

"How did you find me? Why did you come to America?"

"What could have brought me here but love and anxiety for you?"

She turned away impatiently and walked toward the cabin porthole.

"Oh, come, Carlos. The ship is almost in mid-stream. Let us go out on deck, for one last look at America."

"Thank you; I can do very well without it!" he retorted, as he sat down upon the trunk. "My dear Maria, why do you not desist from this silly pursuit of an imaginary treasure? What is the value of money—we are Spaniards, not shirt-sleeved, mercenary pigs of Americans! We strive for it, only to obtain the happiness and luxury which it brings. Can it bring any greater happiness than that which I have so many times laid at your feet—the love and honored name of a man who would

protect and worship you? You have wonderful beauty and family rank. I have power, influence at Court, and an unconquerable ambition. Mine is the intellect to conceive, the heart to dare, and the will to complete! Think what our alliance would mean to us both.... My dear girl—there is nothing which could halt me, nothing which I could not crush!"

Had many a man made this speech he would have punctuated its termination with a clenched fist. But the scion of an intriguing aristocracy bared his teeth in a wolf-like smile as he unsheathed his sword-cane an inch or two, to snap it back into place, with a snarling smile in his drooping eyes.

However, the speech and the theatrical delivery of the gifted courtier were wasted effort. Maria Theresa of Spain was impervious to the surface sheen: she had seen true metal within the past twenty-four hours!

"Oh, Carlos—you should have been a novelist or a dramatist! I much prefer the romantic sky-line of New York harbor to your reminiscence of Don Quixote!"

The great roar of the turbine vibrated through the ship. She advanced to the cabin door, and imperiously called to him to follow.

"I insist. I need fresh air.... *We'll be gone ten minutes!*"

And grudgingly the Duke of Alva followed her, with a vicious swish of his cane at the unoffending trunk.

As the door slammed, the top of the trunk was slowly lifted, and the battered, bleeding face of Warren Jarvis might have been visible above the iron ridge of its lock bar.

Stiffly he drew himself out of the trunk, to blink in the unaccustomed light.

"O,... O.... O.... Oh! Lord!... If I only had that last baggageman by the neck!"

He bent forward and back to limber an apparently paralyzed spinal column.

"Well, I'm all here!"

He stumbled across the cabin, where he helped himself to a welcome drink of water. He tenderly caressed the bruised elbows, and breathed hard.

"I'm *most* all here!"

He looked down at his twisted, cracked patent-leather shoes.

"My feet are bent—they'll never get well!"

He sat limply down on the top of the trunk, and fumbling in his hip pocket drew forth a bent and battered cigarette case. As he struck a light to inhale a few welcome, cheering puffs, he looked about his strange surroundings with the old, unconquerable Jarvis spirit.

"A Princess—a Duke—a castle—a treasure! Well, well! But the problem is: *Where the devil do I fit in?*"

VII

THE ROMANCE OF THE CASTLE

Warren hobbled painfully to the telephone on the wall. This connected with a central switchboard from which he knew he could reach his own stateroom—provided Rusty had not failed in his trust.

"Great Scott! Suppose it is impossible to get accommodations! I'll have to ride as a stowaway in the hold, after all!" he thought.

At any rate he knew that the ten minutes were rapidly dissipating, and from what he had learned by eavesdropping through the trunk, the Duke was not the kindest person in the world for a man in such a predicament.

"Hello!" he called. "Hello, there.... Yes. I want the stateroom of Mr. Jarvis.... Yes, Warren Jarvis.... No, I don't know the number of the room.... All right."

There was a pause, and he improved the opportunity to unlimber his arms and legs, while waiting by the instrument. At last came the welcome voice with the African accents: "Yassir, hello. Who do you want?"

"Hello, Rusty!... Good boy.... Listen, come up to this stateroom, and bring me an overcoat and a scarf. Yes, and bring me a damp towel with some soap on it. Yes, and stick a comb into the coat pocket."

"Law, boss, I dunno whar you-all is?"

"That's right. Wait a minute." He opened the door to the cabin passageway, and squinted at the number plate. Back again to the telephone he continued: "Stateroom A, Promenade deck.... And bring up that big bundle in the steamer rug. Quick now."

Jarvis hung up the receiver and walked stiffly to the window, peering out at the disappearing shores.

"Well, good-by, Uncle Sam. I don't know when I'll see you again. And as for you, Miss Liberty—I don't believe there will be any of your sisters or cousins around this precious castle where Fate is taking me. I don't know which of us two is the craziest—this Duke or myself." Then, after a pause, he added, "Well, his taste is not to be sneered at; that's certain."

There was a knock at the door. Warren was uncertain as to the wisest thing to do. He called: "Go away—we're all very ill!" Then he darted for one of the side staterooms.

But the door opened slowly, and the plump physiognomy of Rusty Snow appeared. Rusty stumbled awkwardly over the elevated threshold, dropping the large bundle, landing prone on the deck.

"Wha'f-f-foh they want to build a dern fool door like that?" complained Rusty, scrambling up with a bruised shin, the tenderest spot of a negro.

His master worked feverishly, untying the trays and fitting them into the trunk from which he had tardily removed his dress coat, and the revolver. Then he smiled at Rusty.

"How in de name of Moses did you-all git on de steamboat, Marse Warren?" was his servant's next remark, as he helped on with the coat over the painful shoulders.

"I came in the trunk—and it was almost as good traveling as some of those mountain railroads back in Kentucky. Quick, hand me that towel—my face is bleeding."

A few quick movements, the use of the comb, and he looked more presentable, resembling Jarvis the clubman once again.

"Did you see any signs of the police, Rusty?"

"No, sir. Nary a sign."

"Are you sure?"

"Dead sartin, Marse Warren."

"Did you look?"

"No, sir. I cain't say as I did. I wasn't anxious to look."

The door opened, with a suddenness which caused both men to jump. It was the Princess. She smiled with relief as she saw the rehabilitation.

"How de do, Mrs. Princess?" was Rusty's polite greeting, with a bow. His formality was growing more impressive, as the acquaintance extended. Here was "quality" indeed—Rusty was a judge of "breed"!

"How do you do, Rusty?" and she laughed girlishly.

Then she turned toward her vassal. He wore a quizzical, friendly, and amusingly pathetic look. The bruises of his trip were evident upon the clear-cut features.

"I am so glad that you made it all right. But how they must have bumped and banged and wobbled and whirled you!"

"I believe I could go over Niagara Falls in a barrel now, without turning a hair."

She saw the hand—with its red wound. She winced, and reached for the hand, womanlike.

"Oh, that's dreadful. You must have it attended at once. Let me get something."

Warren stoically drew it away from the gentle touch of the white fingers.

"Oh, it's all right. The ship's surgeon will welcome a little professional exercise. I'll be the first patient, as we're not out far enough for the seasickness practice yet."

He turned toward Rusty, who was making a mental comparison of the room with the steamboat cabins back on the Ohio River. Rusty decided that even the old *Gallia Queen*, in her palmyest days, could not have been much more resplendent than this "foreign" boat!

"You can go back and rest yourself, Rusty," suggested Jarvis. "And, listen—what's the number of the stateroom?"

"Seven-twenty-nine, sir."

"How did you get the tickets, in my name? I was registered differently at the other hotel."

"Oh, I jest told 'em dey was for Mr. R. Snow, a rich Southern gentleman. When I gits down here, I tells Mr. Snow has decided to send his repersentative! Den I had de name changed—dat's all, Marse Warren."

Maria Theresa smiled again, and Rusty accepted it as a supreme compliment.

"You are a diplomat, Rusty," she said.

"No, lady—I mean, Mrs. Princess.... I'm a Republican," and Rusty started for the door.

"Go lock yourself in there, and don't talk to anyone. Remember you are deaf and dumb. Understand, deaf and dumb!"

"Yassir—dumb's de word!"

As the door closed behind him, the girl turned toward Jarvis, a troubled cloud overshadowing her pleasant features.

"There is something I must tell you ... my cousin, the Duke of Alva, is on board of the *Mauretania*."

He smiled whimsically as he replied, "Yes, and he professes to love you devotedly."

She flushed furiously, and looked at the pattern of the rug.

"You overheard?"

"I underheard. The trunk was not my idea but yours, you know.... You're afraid of that man, too. What's the trouble? He's very sure of himself, isn't he?"

The girl hesitated, and then replied almost timidly:

"Carlos is very powerful.... I may be driven into his hands."

"You mean he may make you marry him?"

"Yes ... if you fail," and she cast an apprehensive glance toward the door to the promenade deck.

"If I fail," and Warren was dumbfounded, even after the unreal scenes which had prologued this situation. "If I fail. What do you mean? Wait a minute—let me get my bearings: things are coming too fast and furious for my poor intelligence.... I—you—the Duke—how do I fit in?"

The girl tried to regain her composure.

"You mustn't ask now: take things for granted until we can explain them together, alone. He may come in any minute. I can tell you before we get to the castle."

Warren lost his patience.

"I think I should know about this castle nonsense now. I admit you saved me from the police last night—although undoubtedly they may be on board the ship now, for we have not passed the three-mile limit yet. Can't you be frank with me, in spite of that ridiculous oath of allegiance which I took?"

"It was not ridiculous, Mr. Jarvis. It was in life-and-death earnestness. I would not have felt that I could truly trust you unless you had gone through that. Remember, I am a product of a different civilization from your own: I am still superstitious, if you please to term it so, in the Old-World sense. I speak your language, and indeed think in it with you. But back in the inner shrine of my being I am a Spanish woman, true to my heredity. You are essentially an American—droll, well-balanced, cynical—and oblivious to any other national psychology than your own."

The girl's earnestness was droll.

"I am a bit hard and unsympathetic," agreed Warren softly. "I did not mean to be so. You and I came into each other's lives in a wild unreal way which an outsider would hardly believe possible. The truest thing in real life is its melodramatic, unbelievable unrealism. That's where the novelists, the poets, and the play-makers have a terrific handicap against them. Things which happen every day would be ridiculed in print. The great rule of actual existence is: 'It *can't* be possible, but it *is*!' But, while we have time, tell me my cues, for I share your opinion of the Duke of Alva. I would never nominate him for President!"

The girl wrung her hands nervously—the first signs he had seen of a spiritual weakening.

"I am completely in the dark," added Jarvis; "I'm just a plain man, not a mindreader. Let's get down to brass tacks!"

She did not understand the local idiom. But she realized that at last she had found a sympathetic confessor.

"I hardly know where to begin. It seems absurd—in this pleasant day-lit stateroom—to talk of ghosts. But the fact is that my family castle is haunted."

Jarvis was lighting another cigarette from the battered silver case; he burned his fingers, as he studied her, in surprise. Then he laughed provokingly. "So I gathered from your amiable cousin. What kind of specters? Of the Hamlet variety or the old maid brand?"

She answered very seriously.

"Call it anything you like. But my castle is haunted, just the same. This is absolutely a case of facts, which mean so much to me that I would not exaggerate *now*! My grandfather was one of the wealthiest nobles in Spain. When he died my father went to take possession of the family estates in Seguro. The little town—as you count populations in America—was buzzing with weird stories of uncanny things and supernatural happenings in the old castle on the hill. It was deserted, after centuries of loyal occupancy. All the retainers had deserted their posts and fled. All told of a weird, horrible thing in armor which stalked the ancestral halls at night—of agonized groans, clanking chains, infernal fumes of sulphur—you know how ghost stories run?"

"I know the ghost stories, and most of the people who tell them run because of their own yellow streaks!" retorted Warren. "But, go on, your Highness. It's fascinating—I haven't heard a good 'hant' yarn since old Mammy Chloe died, back at Meadow Green."

She pouted, for his cynicism struck home. Yet was she earnest, and again she endeavored to impress him.

"Laugh, sir, as much as you please. My father laughed the same way. He called them silly, ignorant peasant tales. He said he would show them that it was now the twentieth century, and teach them how foolish were their fears."

She hesitated. Her dark eyes burned as she continued slowly: "He went there, Mr. Jarvis. He went there! He was never seen again!"

The Kentuckian leaned forward, engrossed.

"What happened?"

"No one knows. He disappeared—vanished utterly, without the slightest clew. Grandfather's treasure was never found!"

"Oh, what treasure?" Jarvis was almost rude in his impatient interest.

"The fortune he left. You know, grandfather converted all his wealth into Spanish gold to finance a Spanish colonization scheme in the West Indies. It amounted to about a million dollars in your American money."

Warren whistled, and twisted his intertwined fingers about an elevated knee—whose ache had been forgotten.

"That's a ripping good yarn. When did all this happen?"

"Fifteen years ago. Since then, two other men disappeared in the same horrible manner as my father did. Not a trace of their leaving: it is so horrible that it makes my heart creep to tell it. And yet you scoff!"

"I'm sorry," he said penitently. "But what's the latest news from the trenches?"

"Now the Duke tells me that my brother has entered the fatal castle ... you see that daring runs in the blood! Up to a week ago he had sent me a cable every day. Everything was well until Sunday. Then his messages stopped. All this week there has not been a word, not even answering my cables!"

Warren digested this in silence for a moment.

"Why did your Highness leave Spain, knowing all this?"

"Well, Mr. Jarvis, a part of the legend tells that my grandfather had drawn a secret map showing exactly where his treasure was located. It was not safe to let the public know where wealth was located, fifteen years ago, in Spain."

"From the extremely businesslike devotion of that ghost, it doesn't seem that conditions have improved in the district of your exalted estates!"

"Oh, Mr. Jarvis, can't you be serious? I learned from an old letter to my grandmother, from her husband the Prince, that this plan had been hidden in the back-clasp of a locket containing her miniature. Without letting my brother know of the secret, for fear that he would foolishly tell it, I engaged a secret-service man from Paris to look the matter up. When my grandparents died, much of the estate was sold—for the Spanish-American War had wrought havoc with the family income. That locket had been sold to an American collector, and I came to America

just in time to save it from being sold to some museum. I pawned my mother's jewels to buy it. That was the locket which dropped from the trunk, in my bedroom last night."

"And you have the locket?"

"Yes—but not my brother!"

"Ah, then, my particular chore as vassal to this haunted family is to find your brother and solve the mystery? In other words, you want me to put this infernal, tin-plated, panhandling ghost out of his misery?"

"Yes ... Mr. Jarvis!" and the Princess was more humble than he had noticed her during the hours of their acquaintance. "Are you frightened by the ghost?"

"You asked that question before. Where I came from only negroes and poor whites fear the departed spirits. Perhaps this spirit is not as departed as circumstances would indicate. But, how about the Duke? What is his interest in the ghost?"

"He fears it, too. He has begged me to stay away from the wretched castle altogether. If it were not for my brother's future, and the fortune of the family—his family, and perhaps ... my family ... some day ... I would shun the place. We are not completely destitute, you know!"

Jarvis studied the luxurious furnishings of the cabin, the jewels and aristocratic modishness of the girl's attire, and nodded.

"I imagine you're not! But this high, exalted, and altogether superior cousin of yours is far from being a fool. He will want to know how, where, why you met me. And what he doesn't know, contrary to the usual theory, is apt to interfere with his sleep. Beware, your Highness, of men who cannot sleep o'night—they think altogether too shrewdly!"

The girl was worried.

"He will ask dreadful questions. I know him, Mr. Jarvis!"

"So do I. Will you tell him you have made of me a ... perfectly good vassal?"

"I think not—just yet," and there was a shyness in her manner.

Jarvis looked adown his nose, and there was a smile on the firm lips below it!

"By the way, Mrs. Princess—as Rusty so beautifully phrases it—just how should a vassal, a fine A-number-One vassal, address his liege-lady and the owner of his soul? What is the *au fait* procedure in this case? You know I am only an ignorant pig of an American!"

She hesitated, embarrassed, and then answered: "Highness—is correct!"

"Highness! I had imagined so—incidentally we were introduced by Fate on the eleventh floor, as I recollect. Tell me, Highness: a vassal doesn't amount to much, does he? I always considered him a piker!"

She was mystified. These phrases had not been in the curriculum of the exclusively proper English boarding-school.

"A piker—a soldier who carries a pike?"

"No, just a pawn in this human game of chess—along with the queens, and kings, and castles—and knights!... But I have known of a pawn saving a game, in the hands of an expert. By the way, and apropos of nothing-whatever-at-all, could a good, hard-working, reliable, moral, union-labeled vassal work his way up to a good job—such as a Duke or a Lord, or something like that?"

She caught the drift of his quizzical humor, and retorted in kind.

"You're an ambitious vassal. Such men have occasionally lost their heads—literally speaking. I'm afraid you wouldn't be content with anything less than a kingship."

The Kentuckian spoke with meaning behind his jest.

"A king—a prince—or a bandit!"

"A bandit—why a bandit? That is essentially Spanish!"

Jarvis lit another cigarette.

"A king could command—a prince might request—a bandit generally seizes!"

"What?" and the woman emerged from the hauteur of the royal personality.

"That which a vassal can only admire!"

VIII

THE NEW PROFESSION

A knock on the door brought them both back to—the deck of the *Mauretania*, with terra firma not so far distant below!

"There he is now," she whispered nervously. "Who shall I say you are? And what?"

"Oh, any old thing—Warren, Mr. Warren. Leave the classification to me. Self-identification is an American trait!"

She crossed the cabin, and after a timid pause opened the door.

"Come in," she murmured.

"Ah, I'm intruding," exclaimed Carlos, Duke of Alva, with an intonation which expressed an invitation for Warren Jarvis to make a graceful exit.

"Not at all," blankly observed Jarvis. "I've just been discussing my professional task at the castle; as a member of the family you can give me some good working material."

"I don't understand," spluttered Carlos, taken aback.

"Pardon me, cousin. This is Mr. Warren, of America, who has consented to help me. My cousin, the Duke of Alva." She walked behind the two men, comparing them

keenly: the deadly parallel column was not at all unfavorable to the insouciant Kentuckian.

"Glad to know you," volunteered Jarvis. "Have a cigarette?"

"I never smoke in the presence of ladies," retorted the Duke. Then with a patronizing air he added: "I am honored to meet you, sir, if you are in my royal cousin's employ. So, you are interested in the castle?"

"Oh, not so much in the castle as in the ghost. I'll attend to him."

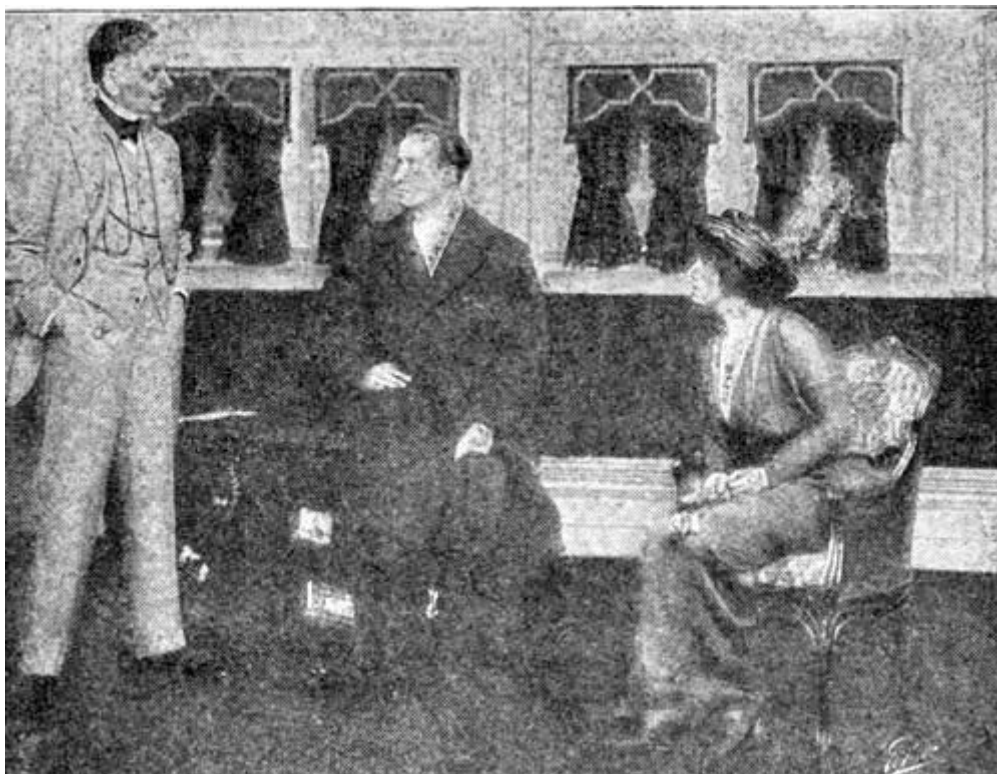
"And is that your regular profession?"

"You are a good guesser, my dear Duke. That is my business—solving mysteries—locking up family skeletons—chasing spooks and putting salt on their tails. We have a professional name for it in the United States."

"And what is that, sir?" asked Carlos, uncertain whether to be affronted or to draw out this strange bird to a confidence. A quick glance at his cousin's immobile face gave him no hint.

Jarvis continued amiably.

"We are living in an age of specialists. You have doubtless heard of Farley the Strike Breaker, of Roosevelt the Trust Breaker. I forgot to bring my business cards with me; but if I may be so immodest as to tell the truth, I am known from Bowling Green to the Golden Gate as Warren the Ghost Breaker!"



"I am known from Bowling Green to the Golden Gate, as Warren the Ghost Breaker"

This astounding news fairly took the Duke off his feet. He mentally clawed the air for his equilibrium.

"*Madre de Dios!*" ejaculated the Duke, dropping his sword-cane. As he recovered from his astonishment, the Princess interceded: "I am so glad you came. I promised the Ghost Breaker that you would join us shortly. You will be able to tell him, so much better than I, of all the strange circumstances. I have only given him a rough outline of what happened up to the time I left my brother on his way to the castle."

Carlos sank into a chair, irritated at the American's disinterested lack of courtesy: Jarvis had not even risen from his seat on the trunk. Somehow or other Carlos despised that trunk!

"I will be delighted to throw any possible light on the mystery of the castle. But first let us leave your brother in peace, to let me know why you came to America?"

Maria Theresa drew the locket from her reticule.

"This is what brought me."

"May I see it?" and the Duke held out his hand, ingratiatingly. "What a charming old antique!"

"No, Carlos. Rather you may see the locket, but not the memorandum in the back."

The Duke registered an expression of polite surprise.

"Memorandum?"

"Yes," and the Princess removed a small bit of paper from the ivory back, swinging it forward to her cousin's hand, on the long silver chain. The nobleman's dark face assumed a ruddier hue, as he caught the trinket in fingers which Jarvis noticed were trembling in tell-tale manner. Jarvis watched the two of them in silence.

"It's a curious old piece of work. And you came all the way to New York to get it?"

"Yes."

"You were fortunate to find it so soon."

"I knew where to find it, Carlos; yet I was almost too late. Think of it, after that dear old family heirloom had lain in an antique shop for nearly ten years—suddenly there came two inquiries for it in a day, two beside my own. The first was from a distinguished-looking gentleman who had called early in the morning, describing it roughly to the old man, urging him to hunt for it. It took an hour to find it—and I happened to come in at the end of the hour. I doubled the offer of a museum collector, and trebled that of the distinguished-looking gentleman. I secured it."

Here, the Princess shot a sharp look into the half-closed eyes of the Duke.

"Who do you suppose could have wanted that locket but myself, Carlos?"

"I suppose," and it was the assumed indifference of a cornered schemer, "it has already occurred to you that I am the 'distinguished-looking gentleman.' Has it, cousin?"

The girl's curiosity piqued her.

"But how did you learn about the memorandum, Carlos?"

"I didn't, cousin. I had not the slightest suspicion that the locket contained an important secret; I doubt it now. I was merely following my pet hobby, in addition to a little family sentiment. I wanted to recover some of those precious heirlooms which had been scattered to the four winds."

"When did you know that this one had been scattered to New York,—on your last visit to the boulevards of Paris?" And Jarvis' smile was as ingenuous as that of a babe of two.

The Duke of Alva scowled. There seemed something uncanny in the sharpness of this American; but he prided himself upon the power of diplomacy.

"I have seldom been in Paris: they are not so much interested in antiques as in very lively moderns, Mr. Ghost Breaker!... But there, you interrupted my thought! You would be surprised to see the collection which I have already rescued, and which, Maria, will some day be yours. You Americans are not noted as really astute collectors, Mr. Jarvis."

"Well, our collectors who don't worry over millions are frequently stung by clever counterfeits. But we laboring men, who must devote all our time to our work, are usually able to tell imitations from the real thing. We are not impressed by 'four-flushing,' your Excellency!"

The Duke scowled at Warren, vainly attempting to divine the meaning of the Yankee slang. But the Kentuckian was impatient: he knew that debates were seldom as productive as labor in a workshop, when it came down to fundamentals.

Carlos was impatiently interrupted.

"Well, so much for the treasure—let's hear about the ghost. Of course I'm *certain* that there's no connection between the two, in such an aristocratic land as Spain, which scoffs at the American pursuit of the miserable, despised dollar.... What's your private opinion of this ghost? Is he a real, dependable, hell-bent spook, deserving all this press stuff which has been given to him? I've had so much experience with spirits—being a native Kentuckian—that they must be 100-proof to interest me!... Do you really put any stock in ghosts, Duke?"

"Yes, Mr. Warren, I am convinced that there are such things. This world is filled with evidences of the supernatural."

"Then you honestly believe this castle is haunted?"

"I know it!" And the Duke's black eyes sparkled with an intensity which had its effect even upon the cynical Warren Jarvis.

"So you think this ghost is dangerous to encounter—that it is the cause of the mysterious deaths and disappearances in the old castle?"

"I do, Mr. Warren!"

Jarvis whistled meditatively. The Duke looked disgusted; this was so absolutely against all rules of his own conduct with women.

"Well, what do you know about *that*?"

Warren was again silent. The Duke was tabulating his own material and preparing his next charge of ammunition.

"*Ghost* is a broad term, your Excellency. There are fifty-seven varieties of them, just like good pickles. They're equally bad for the digestion. What is your particular conception of this particular ghost?"

The Duke answered impatiently.

"There are certain occult forces in this world, Mr. Warren, that science cannot classify or fathom. Some of them are at work in that castle, manifesting their weird powers. A priest might call them demons or fiends—a psychologist might term them, perhaps, returned spirits.... I can't say; but I have been there, and heard their curious warnings and manifestations. There is something definable there, in the periphery of those ancient ruins. A malignant spiritual force lurks within that mediæval stronghold. While it haunts those musty halls it is madness for any man to expose himself there."

"You could write a good book on it, Duke," observed Jarvis irreverently. "Have you ever seen this ghost?"

"My brother has," interrupted Maria Theresa impetuously. "Twice, to my knowledge, before I left Seguro. So had my father and the others who disappeared from human ken!"

"Good Lord!" and there was a touch of the mock-heroic in the Kentuckian's voice, which escaped his companions.

"According to the family tradition," continued the Princess, "no one has ever seen it three times, and lived to tell the story."

"How do you connect this gentlemanly spook with the treasure, your Excellency?" burst in Jarvis, with a swift look of interrogation which discomfited the nobleman.

"Spook? Treasure? I see no connection. What do you mean?"

"Oh, there is always money when the ghost walks," was the mysterious reply of the American, wasted on the untheatrical Spaniards. "That is the first premise upon which a reliable scientific Ghost Breaker begins his task of investigation."

"I don't know what your experience may have been, Mr. Warren. You are evidently a brave man, but you have yet to encounter a ghost like this supernatural spirit. Things are different in the Old World!"

Warren Jarvis sniffed.

"Huh! Brave? It takes no bravery to fight a coward—that is what the ghost is. It's a coward like every other stealthy, sneaking spirit, afraid to show itself by daylight, in the glare of the sun. I can tell you now that men are not half so afraid of spirits as the spirits are afraid of men. If you face the supernatural, it is more than half beaten to a frazzle, before the fight begins. In my professional career I have learned that ghosts, horse thieves, and peevish wildcats can all be tamed by the same little charm."

The Princess was mystified.

"Charm? What do you mean—a relic?"

The Duke leaned forward, his eyes sparkling with interest.

"What is it?"

"I'd hate to tell you," responded Warren Jarvis. "It's part of my system."

And he forthwith drew out the revolver, caressing it with an unmistakable confidence.

"I had been hoping, Mr. Warren," remarked the Duke, "that you had some subtle method worthy of handling this problem, and justifying the reputation for such work which you say you maintain through America. You evidently propose to meet the forces of the supernatural with firearms.... I may as well tell you that this specter has been shot at before without the slightest effect."

The Kentuckian smiled gently.

"Quite likely, your Excellency. I have seen rifle-fire that had not the slightest effect on a wildcat for the simple reason that the firing was wilder than the cat!"

The Duke of Alva bestowed a pitying glance upon the weapon and its owner.

"I'm sorry for you, Mr. Warren. You will find that the ghost is more real than the treasure."

The Princess arose indignantly. She interrupted, with feminine betrayal of her own hand.

"But the treasure is real, Carlos. Would I have crossed the ocean for this locket unless I knew?"

Carlos looked at her sharply.

"I know I am right, now, Carlos. With the memorandum which I found inside the old locket, anyone, a total stranger, could walk right up to the very stone that hides it."

There was a meaning tone in Jarvis' voice, as he added: "A pretty dangerous paper to have around—look out that somebody else doesn't get there ahead of you."

The Duke shot back a quick answer to the message between the words: "Yes, it is a dangerous paper—if it leads anyone into the castle."

"Well, despite the danger and the threats of—the ghost—I'd go a long way for the fun of unraveling a good mystery with a little spice of danger thrown in."

The Duke scowled, and then with a peculiar emphasis on his words drew a newspaper from the breast pocket of his coat.

"You needn't have taken such a long trip, Mr. Warren. You are leaving behind you, in New York, a very interesting and unusual mystery. The papers are full of the story to-day.... It will interest you too, cousin. You were stopping at the Manhattan Hotel last night, I believe?"

"Yes," said the girl indifferently; but she and Jarvis exchanged eloquent glances.

The Duke was reading with unusual interest, it seemed to Jarvis.

"Why, no..." he began. "I was so wrapped up in my baggage that I really didn't have the time nor inclination to bother with the scandal of the day. Tell us about it?"

The nobleman began to read:

"Pistol duel in Manhattan Hotel.... Colonel James Marcum, a wealthy and prominent Kentucky sportsman, nearly met death at an early hour this morning in a revolver battle in his hotel room..."

He glanced down the column and continued:

"Even at a late hour the police had no clew to the identity of his assailant, except the remarkable fact that the person is still hiding somewhere in the hotel..."

The Kentuckian interrupted:

"The villain is probably a long way from the hotel by this time if he knows what's what!"

"But they say he couldn't have gotten out without being seen," continued the Duke, still studying the printed column.

"Oh, that's the theory of the reporters. They'd lose their jobs if they ever told the real truth in a criminal case," remarked Jarvis coolly. "Don't believe what the papers say—unless it's nice and about yourself!"

"Well, Mr. Ghost Breaker, what is your own opinion? You are an expert in these matters," insisted the Duke. "This affair interests me."

Jarvis was more than nonchalant.

"He might have escaped in a thousand ways. But such work is not in my line: that's 'gum-shoe' stuff—for plain common or garden detectives."

Nita entered the cabin, and Maria Theresa arose uncertainly.

"I'll call you when I need you, Nita." There was some hidden portent in her tone which Jarvis failed to divine. He decided that discretion was the better part of valor. He rose, and walked toward the door to the promenade deck.

"We are keeping you from getting settled, I fear," he declared. "So, if you'll excuse me at this time, I'll hope to see you at luncheon.... And as for you, Duke, it's a great pleasure to meet your Excellency."

Carlos bowed with military grace.

"Thank you, Mr. Warren. I find you most interesting. I shall be glad to hear more of your remarkable profession. Good-morning, sir."

The Kentuckian turned away.

As Warren reached the deck door there was a knock upon the portal to the cabin passage.

Nita followed him, and then turned to open the second entrance. Two pompous, red-cheeked, red-necked individuals stepped forward, without so much as a "by-your-leave!"

The first one spoke, reading from a smudgy memorandum book.

"You are Miss M. T. Ar-r-ragan?"

The Princess acquiesced.

"You was at the Hotel Manhattan last night?"

"Yes."

"The lock on your bedroom door was broken?"

"Yes?"

The speaker jerked back the left lapel of his coat, displaying a silver badge with great satisfaction.

"I am from headquarters, madame, and I have orders to clear up one or two little matters connected with that affair at the hotel last night."

The speaker glared at them suspiciously.

The chivalry of Spain asserted itself. The Duke stepped forward with spirit, gripping the cane as though it were a cavalry saber.

"Orders—orders—what orders? To break into this lady's private cabin? What headquarters?"

"It seems to me, bo, that you're in a lady's private cabin yourself. I'm from police headquarters, bo!"

"Do you know whom you are addressing, fellow?"

"Say, nix on this *fellow* stuff. That'll be about all from you."

Maria Theresa interceded with her winsome grace and irresistible smile.

"Yes, Carlos, let me attend to the matter. Won't you come into the cabin, gentlemen, and be seated?"

The two detectives beamed, their bosoms heaved with pride at this unexpected recognition of their importance. They entered, waving away the steward and closing the cabin door behind them.

"We're just been discussing that mystery, Inspector!" observed Jarvis, coming nearer and taking his seat upon the trunk once more. This irritated the Duke, who added: "You are, I take it, one of the 'gum shoes'?"

Jarvis turned toward Maria Theresa, disregarding all properties due to the presence of the aristocracy, and yielded to that nervous twitching of the left eye which expresses such manifold meaning with such minimum of sound!

The detective whirled about, from his scrutiny of the cabin, walking toward the Duke. He fairly howled in the surprised nobleman's face:

"Gum shoe! Say, are you trying to kid me?"

The Duke replied with asperity:

"Well, sir. You are speaking rather loudly. I presume that I have offended you?"

"You presume! I should say you do. That's a hot one. Who are you, anyway?"

"I am Carlos, Hernando y Calderos, Duke of Alva. I have other titles, but they would hardly interest you."