



CHESTER KENT CURES A HEADACHE

IN TWO PARTS PART I.

BY SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

THE next thing Kent remembered, he struck earth. His parabolic flight through the sweet spring air, he surmised rather than recalled. Staggering to his feet, he stared in consternation at the edifice before him. He had long known it as a house of sober repute. No primmer domicile looked forth upon that most secluded of Washington's thoroughfares, St. Alban's Place. Yet, but a moment since, it had bellowed thunderously at him. Flames had darted from its spacious windows. Earth and air had been shaken by its wrath. After a sensation of momentary detachment from the universe, Kent now stood, with wronged nerves, confronting in the moonlight the mansion, which had opened up across its front a monstrous orifice, for the insufficient purpose of emitting an absurd wisp of vapor.

Some yards from Kent a privet hedge strangely agitated itself. The leaves shook and parted. An elderly woman emerged. Now, for an omelet to come forth from a hat, or a silver dollar to ooze out of one's right ear, is all very proper on the vaudeville stage. But that a well kept and carefully trimmed privet hedge, under the light of a strong May moon, should produce, by the fiat process, so to speak, a dame of the old school, solid, alert, handsome, elegantly clad, and of dominant aspect,—this is matter to shake human credulity. Moreover, Chester Kent was already considerably shaken. Some leniency is due, therefore, to the abruptness of his manner as he inquired:

"Who are you?"

"Never you mind," returned the old lady with asperity. "What happened?"

"Splendid," explained Kent, relieving his teeth and lips of a quantity of wool by the expulsive force of the word. He pointed to the mansion.

"Indeed! In my house? Why should my house explode?"

Kent shook his head.

"Are you an Italian?" she demanded.

"No. Are you a Buddhist?"

The old lady stared. "You are not an Italian," she decided. "By your accent, you are an American of education and breeding. By your words, you are an idiot. Why should you suppose me a Buddhist?"

"I don't. It was the first thing that came into my mind as paying the way to this counter question: why do you ask if I am an Italian?"

"Because I had some flower-stealing Italians ejected yesterday, and they went away with a piece of my mind sticking in their ears, and muttering vengeance. I thought you might be one of them, come back to blow me up. Will you come to the house with me?"

"With the greatest pleasure," answered Kent warmly. "I was venturing to hope that you would ask me."

"Indeed!" His new acquaintance eyed him quizzically. "You are not smitten at first sight with my septuagenarian charms, I assume. Why, then, this fervid interest?"

"It isn't given to everyone to catch a mystery in the act."

"Not much of a mystery," retorted the old lady. "If it wasn't the Italians, I know who it was. Give me your arm. What is your name and where do you live?"

"Chester Kent. My house is on the next corner."

"Professor Kent, the inventor? We use your drill in my stone quarries at Montfort. I am Miss Celia Wayland. What were you doing in my grounds?"

"I was passing by and stopped to admire your rhododendrons."

"Wonderful, aren't they? I make the tour of the grounds every night at this hour, rain or shine, to see that my flowers are all sleeping comfortably. Goodness! What a mess!"

She paused, dropping her companion's arm, and gazed at the second story front of the mansion, which had opened out like a paper box, scattering bricks and woodwork on the lawn below.

"Decidedly localized, the explosion," commented Kent.

"And with purpose. Those are my usual sleeping rooms. That wretched Denny!"

"Who?"

"Denny Boyle, my gardener."

"You suspect him?"

"It must have been he. The Italians wouldn't know my room. Come in."

ONE light had remained burning, in the library. Thither his hostess conducted Kent, and thither, before he could carry on his questioning further, came an in-

terruption of neighbors, stragglers, and finally the police.

Through the ensuing babel, Kent noted with admiration how the old lady preserved her temper, her poise, and her command of the situation, until the intruders were finally disposed of, the police on guard, and only herself, Kent, and the Inspector left. From her outline of the case to that official, Kent made out that Miss Wayland lived alone, except for her servants, and an occasional visit from her nephew, Robert Swart, who was interested with her in the Montfort quarries; that she had that morning discharged her gardener, Dennis Boyle, who had been with her for eight years; that Dennis had gone away with a vengeful light in his eye, and the avowed purpose of getting intoxicated; and that he had been seen around the place late that afternoon.

"Describe this Doyle, please," said the officer.

"A little, hard featured Irishman of fifty-five, with a fringe of close, fine gray hair, and only one hand. The other was blown off when handling fulminate caps in the quarry, where he worked before I took him in."

"Then he is used to explosives," commented the Inspector.

"Certainly. He was an expert quarryman."

"Why did you discharge him?"

"For impudence," said Miss Wayland with a rush of color. "He had the effrontery to dispute me on a question of pruning rose trees."

Chester Kent suppressed a smile. "Had you ever discharged him before?" he inquired.

"A dozen times," was the prompt reply. "But he always came back, after reducing himself to a state of beastly intoxication and proper penitence."

"Had he any special reason to suppose that he might not be permitted to return this time?"

"No, not that I know."

"What's the use of wasting time?" broke in the Inspector. "Boyle's our man."

Chester Kent smiled.

"Oh, I know you've dug out some queer games in your scientific line, Professor," continued the official, rendered a bit uneasy by the calm assurance of that smile; "but this is plain revenge."

"Leaving out of consideration certain peculiar features," supplied Kent. "Don't see 'em."

"Very likely," murmured the other.

"Plain a case as you'd want to see. Boyle has been a practical dynamiter. He had a grudge. He was seen about late this afternoon. What more is needed? We'll have him for you within twenty-four hours, Miss Wayland."

"That also is possible," remarked Kent. "Nobody doubts the efficiency of the police dragnet. The question is, What will you do with him after you get him?"

"Convict him."

"Hum-m-m-m," remarked Kent, like a large and ruminative bee.

"Now," said the policeman, "I'll just trot up and have a look at the room."

"Be good enough to leave everything exactly as you find it, Inspector," requested the scientist.

"And do you be good enough," said



"Is There an Infernal Machine in This Room Too?"