

MacGrath Harold

# The Carpet from Bagdad



Harold MacGrath  
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# Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	10
CHAPTER III	15
CHAPTER IV	20
CHAPTER V	25
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	30

# Harold MacGrath

## The Carpet from Bagdad

### CHAPTER I

#### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

To possess two distinctly alien red corpuscles in one's blood, metaphorically if not in fact, two characters or individualities under one epidermis, is, in most cases, a peculiar disadvantage. One hears of scoundrels and saints striving to consume one another in one body, angels and harpies; but oftentimes, quite the contrary to being a curse, these two warring temperaments become a man's ultimate blessing: as in the case of George P. A. Jones, of Mortimer & Jones, the great metropolitan Oriental rug and carpet company, all of which has a dignified, sonorous sound. George was divided within himself. This he would not have confessed even into the trusted if battered ear of the Egyptian Sphynx. There was, however, no demon-angel sparring for points in George's soul. The difficulty might be set forth in this manner: On one side stood inherent common sense; on the other, a boundless, roseate imagination which was likewise inherent – a kind of quixote imagination of suitable modern pattern. This *alter ego* terrified him whenever it raised its strangely beautiful head and shouldered aside his guardian-angel (for that's what common sense is, argue to what end you will) and pleaded in that luminous rhetoric under the spell of which our old friend Sancho often fell asleep.

P. A., as they called him behind the counters, was but twenty-eight, and if he was vice-president in his late father's shoes he didn't wobble round in them to any great extent. In a crowd he was not noticeable; he didn't stand head and shoulders above his fellow-men, nor would he have been mistaken by near-sighted persons, the myopes, for the Vatican's Apollo in the flesh. He was of medium height, beardless, slender, but tough and wiry and enduring. You may see his prototype on the streets a dozen times the day, and you may also pass him without turning round for a second view. Young men like P. A. must be intimately known to be admired; you did not throw your arm across his neck, first-off. His hair was brown and closely clipped about a head that would have gained the attention of the phrenologist, if not that of the casual passer-by. His bumps, in the phraseology of that science, were good ones. For the rest, he observed the world through a pair of kindly, shy, blue eyes.

Young girls, myopic through ignorance or silliness, seeing nothing beyond what the eyes see, seldom gave him a second inspection; for he did not know how to make himself attractive, and was mortally afraid of the opposite, or opposing, sex. He could bully-rag a sheik out of his camels' saddle-bags, but petticoats and lace parasols and small Oxfords had the same effect upon him that the prodding stick of a small boy has upon a retiring turtle. But many a worldly-wise woman, drawing out with tact and kindness the truly beautiful thoughts of this young man's soul, sadly demanded of fate why a sweet, clean boy like this one had not been sent to her in her youth. You see, the worldly-wise woman knows that it is invariably the lay-figure and not Prince Charming that a woman marries, and that matrimony is blindman's-buff for grown-ups.

Many of us lay the blame upon our parents. We shift the burden of wondering why we have this fault and lack that grace to the shoulders of our immediate forebears. We go to the office each morning denying that we have any responsibility; we let the boss do the worrying. But George never went prospecting in his soul for any such dross philosophy. He was grateful for having had so beautiful a mother; proud of having had so honest a sire; and if either of them had endued him with false weights he did his best to even up the balance.

The mother had been as romantic as any heroine out of Mrs. Radcliff's novels, while the father had owned to as much romance as one generally finds in a thorough business man, which is practically

none at all. The very name itself is a bulwark against the intrusions of romance. One can not lift the imagination to the prospect of picturing a Jones in ruffles and highboots, pinking a varlet in the midriff. It smells of sugar-barrels and cotton-bales, of steamships and railroads, of stolid routine in the office and of placid concern over the daily news under the evening lamp.

Mrs. Jones, lovely, lettered yet not worldly, had dreamed of her boy, bayed and decorated, marrying the most distinguished woman in all Europe, whoever she might be. Mr. Jones had had no dreams at all, and had put the boy to work in the shipping department a little while after the college threshold had been crossed, outward bound. The mother, while sweet and gentle, had a will, iron under velvet, and when she held out for Percival Algernon and a decent knowledge of modern languages, the old man agreed if, on the other hand, the boy's first name should be George and that he should learn the business from the cellar up. There were several tilts over the matter, but at length a truce was declared. It was agreed that the boy himself ought to have a word to say upon a subject which concerned him more vitally than any one else. So, at the age of fifteen, when he was starting off for preparatory school, he was advised to choose for himself. He was an obedient son, adoring his mother and idolizing his father. He wrote himself down as George Percival Algernon Jones, promised to become a linguist and to learn the rug business from the cellar up. On the face of it, it looked like a big job; it all depended upon the boy.

The first day at school his misery began. He had signed himself as George P. A. Jones, no small diplomacy for a lad; but the two initials, standing up like dismantled pines in the midst of uninteresting landscape, roused the curiosity of his school-mates. Boys are boys the world over, and possess a finesse in cruelty that only the Indian can match; and it did not take them long to unearth the fatal secret. For three years he was Percy Algy, and not only the boys laughed, but the pretty girls sniggered. Many a time he had returned to his dormitory decorated (not in accord with the fond hopes of his mother) with a swollen ear, or a ruddy proboscis, or a green-brown eye. There was a limit, and when they stepped over that, why, he proceeded to the best of his ability to solve the difficulty with his fists. George was no milksop; but Percival Algernon would have been the Old Man of the Sea on broader shoulders than his. He dimly realized that had he been named George Henry William Jones his sun would have been many diameters larger. There was a splendid quality of pluck under his apparent timidity, and he stuck doggedly to it. He never wrote home and complained. What was good enough for his mother was good enough for him.

It seemed just an ordinary matter of routine for him to pick up French and German verbs. He was far from being brilliant, but he was sensitive and his memory was sound. Since his mother's ambition was to see him an accomplished linguist, he applied himself to the task as if everything in the world depended upon it, just as he knew that when the time came he would apply himself as thoroughly to the question of rugs and carpets.

Under all this filial loyalty ran the pure strain of golden romance, side by side with the lesser metal of practicality. When he began to read the masters he preferred their romances to their novels. He even wrote poetry in secret, and when his mother discovered the fact she cried over the sentimental verses. The father had to be told. He laughed and declared that the boy would some day develop into a good writer of advertisements. This quiet laughter, unburdened as it was with ridicule, was enough to set George's muse a-wing, and she never came back.

After leaving college he was given a modest letter of credit and told to go where he pleased for a whole year. George started out at once in quest of the Holy Grail, and there are more roads to that than there are to Rome. One may be reasonably sure of getting into Rome, whereas the Holy Grail (diversified, variable, innumerable) is always the exact sum of a bunch of hay hanging before old Dobbin's nose. Nevertheless, George galloped his fancies with loose rein. He haunted the romantic quarters of the globe; he hunted romance, burrowed and plowed for it; and never his spade clanged musically against the hidden treasure, never a forlorn beauty in distress, not so much as chapter one of the Golden Book offered its dazzling first page. George lost some confidence.

Two or three times a woman looked into the young man's mind, and in his guilelessness they effected sundry holes in his letter of credit, but left his soul singularly untouched. The red corpuscle, his father's gift, though it lay dormant, subconsciously erected barriers. He was innocent, but he was no fool. That one year taught him the lesson, rather cheaply, too. If there was any romance in life, it came uninvited, and if courted and sought was as quick on the wing as that erstwhile poesy muse.

The year passed, and while he had not wholly given up the quest, the practical George agreed with the romantic Percival to shelve it indefinitely. He returned to New York with thirty-pounds sterling out of the original thousand, a fact that rejuvenated his paternal parent by some ten years.

"Jane, that boy is all right. Percival Algernon could not kill a boy like that."

"Do you mean to infer that it ever could?" Sometimes a qualm wrinkled her conscience. Her mother's heart told her that her son ought not to be shy and bashful, that it was not in the nature of his blood to suspect ridicule where there was none. Perhaps she had handicapped him with those names; but it was too late now to admit of this, and useless, since it would not have remedied the evil.

Jones hemmed and hawed for a space. "No," he answered; "but I was afraid he might try to live up to it; and no Percival Algernon who lived up to it could put his nose down to a Shah Abbas and tell how many knots it had to the square inch. I'll start him in on the job to-morrow."

Whereupon the mother sat back dreamily. Now, where was the girl worthy her boy? Monumental question, besetting every mother, from Eve down, Eve, whose trials in this direction must have been heartrending!

George left the cellar in due time, and after that he went up the ladder in bounds, on his own merit, mind you, for his father never stirred a hand to boost him. He took the interest in rugs that turns a buyer into a collector; it became a fascinating pleasure rather than a business. He became invaluable to the house, and acquired some fame as a judge and an appraiser. When the chief-buyer retired George was given the position, with an itinerary that carried him half way round the planet once a year, to Greece, Turkey, Persia, Arabia, and India, the lands of the genii and the bottles, of arabesques, of temples and tombs, of many-colored turbans and flowing robes and distracting tongues. He walked always in a kind of mental enchantment.

The suave and elusive Oriental, with his sharp practices, found his match in this pleasant young man, who knew the history of the very wools and cottons and silks woven in a rug or carpet. So George prospered, became known in strange places, by strange peoples; and saw romance, light of foot and eager of eye, pass and repass; learned that romance did not essentially mean falling in love or rescuing maidens from burning houses and wrecks; that, on the contrary, true romance was kaleidoscopic, having more brilliant facets than a diamond; and that the man who begins with nothing and ends with something is more wonderful than any excursion recounted by Sinbad or any tale by Scheherazade. But he still hoped that the iridescent goddess would some day touch his shoulder and lead him into that maze of romance so peculiar to his own fancy.

And then into this little world of business and pleasure came death and death again, leaving him alone and with a twisted heart. Riches mattered little, and the sounding title of vice-president still less. It was with a distinct shock that he realized the mother and the father had been with him so long that he had forgotten to make other friends. From one thing to another he turned in hope to soothe the smart, to heal the wound; and after a time he drifted, as all shy, intelligent and imaginative men drift who are friendless, into the silent and intimate comradeship of inanimate things, such as jewels, ivories, old metals, rare woods and ancient embroideries, and perhaps more comforting than all these, good books.

The proper tale of how the aforesaid iridescent goddess jostled (for it scarce may be said that she led) him into a romance lacking neither comedy nor tragedy, now begins with a trifling bit of retrospection. One of those women who were not good and who looked into the clear pool of the boy's mind saw the harmless longing there, and made note, hoping to find profit by her knowledge when the pertinent day arrived. She was a woman so pleasing, so handsome, so adroit, that many a

man, older and wiser than George, found her mesh too strong for him. Her plan matured, suddenly and brilliantly, as projects of men and women of her class and caliber without variation do.

Late one December afternoon (to be precise, 1909), George sat on the tea-veranda of the Hotel Semiramis in Cairo. A book lay idly upon his knees. It was one of those yarns in which something was happening every other minute. As adventures go, George had never had a real one in all his twenty-eight years, and he believed that fate had treated him rather shabbily. He didn't quite appreciate her reserve. No matter how late he wandered through the mysterious bazaars, either here in Egypt or over yonder in India, nothing ever befell more exciting than an argument with a carriage-driver. He never carried small-arms, for he would not have known how to use them. The only deadly things in his hands were bass-rods and tennis-racquets. No, nothing ever happened to him; yet he never met a man in a ship's smoke-room who hadn't run the gamut of thrilling experiences. As George wasn't a liar himself, he believed all he saw and most of what he heard.

Well, here he was, eight-and-twenty, a pocket full of money, a heart full of life, and as hopeless an outlook, so far as romance and adventure were concerned, as an old maid in a New England village. Why couldn't things befall him as they did the chap in this book? He was sure he could behave as well, if not better; for this fellow was too handsome, too brave, too strong, not to be something of an ass once in a while.

"George, you old fool, what's the use?" he thought. "What's the use of a desire that never goes in a straight line, but always round and round in a circle?"

He thrust aside his grievance and surrendered to the never-ending wonder of the Egyptian sunset; the Nile feluccas, riding upon perfect reflections; the date-palms, black and motionless against the translucent blue of the sky; the amethystine prisms of the Pyramids, and the deepening gold of the desert's brim. He loved the Orient, always so new, always so strange, yet ever so old and familiar.

A carriage stopped in front, and his gaze naturally shifted. There is ceaseless attraction in speculating about new-comers in a hotel, what they are, what they do, where they come from, and where they are going. A fine elderly man of fifty got out. In the square set of his shoulders, the flowing white mustache and imperial, there was a suggestion of militarism. He was immediately followed by a young woman of twenty, certainly not over that age. George sighed wistfully. He envied those polo-players and gentleman-riders and bridge-experts who were stopping at the hotel. It wouldn't be an hour after dinner before some one of them found out who she was and spoke to her in that easy style which he concluded must be a gift rather than an accomplishment. You mustn't suppose for a minute that George wasn't well-born and well-bred, simply because his name was Jones. Many a Fitz-Hugh Maurice or Hugh Fitz-Maurice might have been – But, no matter. He knew instinctively, then, what elegance was when he saw it, and this girl was elegant, in dress, in movement. He rather liked the pallor of her skin, which hinted that she wasn't one of those athletic girls who bounced in and out of the dining-room, talking loudly and smoking cigarettes and playing bridge for sixpenny points. She was tall. He was sure that her eyes were on the level with his own. The grey veil that drooped from the rim of her simple Leghorn hat to the tip of her nose obscured her eyes, so he could not know that they were large and brown and indefinably sad. They spoke not of a weariness of travel, but of a weariness of the world, more precisely, of the people who inhabited it.

She and her companion passed on into the hotel, and if George's eyes veered again toward the desert over which the stealthy purples of night were creeping, the impulse was mechanical; he saw nothing. In truth, he was desperately lonesome, and he knew, moreover, that he had no business to be. He was young; he could at a pinch tell a joke as well as the next man; and if he had never had what he called an adventure, he had seen many strange and wonderful things and could describe them with that mental afterglow which still lingers over the sunset of our first expressions in poetry. But there was always that hydra-headed monster, for ever getting about his feet, numbing his voice, paralyzing his hands, and never he lopped off a head that another did not instantly grow in its place. Even the sword of Perseus could not have saved him, since one has to get away from an object in order to cut it down.

Had he really ever tried to overcome this monster? Had he not waited for the propitious moment (which you and I know never comes) to throw off this species from Hades? It is all very well, when you are old and dried up, to turn to ivories and metals and precious stones; but when a fellow's young! You can't shake hands with an ivory replica of the Taj Mahal, nor exchange pleasantries with a Mandarin's ring, nor yet confide joys and ills into a casket of rare emeralds; indeed, they do but emphasize one's loneliness. If only he had had a dog; but one can not carry a dog half way round the world and back, at least not with comfort. What with all these new-fangled quarantine laws, duties, and fussy ships' officers who wouldn't let you keep the animal in your state-room, traveling with a four-footed friend was almost an impossibility. To be sure, women with poodles... And then, there was the bitter of acid in the knowledge that no one ever came up to him and slapped him on the shoulder with a – "Hel-lo, Georgie, old sport; what's the good word?" for the simple fact that his shoulder was always bristling with spikes, born of the fear that some one was making fun of him.

Perchance his mother's spirit, hovering over him this evening, might have been inclined to tears. For they do say that the ghosts of the dear ones are thus employed when we are near to committing some folly, or to exploring some forgotten chamber of Pandora's box, or worse still, when that lady intends emptying the whole contents down upon our unfortunate heads. If so be, they were futile tears; Percival Algernon had accomplished its deadly purpose.

Pandora? Well, then, for the benefit of the children. She was a lady who was an intimate friend of the mythological gods. They liked her appearance so well that they one day gave her a box, casket, chest, or whatever it was, to guard. By some marvelous method, known only of gods, they had got together all the trials and tribulations of mankind (and some of the joys) and locked them up in this casket. It was the Golden Age then, as you may surmise. You recall Eve and the Apple? Well, Pandora was a forecast of Eve; she couldn't keep her eyes off the latch, and at length her hands – Fatal curiosity! Whirr! And everything has been at sixes and at sevens since that time. Pandora is eternally recurring, now here, now there; she is a blonde sometimes, and again she is a brunette; and you may take it from George and me that there is always something left in the casket.

George closed the book and consulted his sailing-list. In a short time he would leave for Port Saïd, thence to Naples, Christmas there, and home in January. Business had been ripping. He would be jolly glad to get home again, to renew his comradeship with his treasures. And, by Jove! there *was* one man who slapped him on the shoulder, and he was no less a person than the genial president of the firm, his father's partner, at present his own. If the old chap had had a daughter now... And here one comes at last to the bottom of the sack. He had only one definite longing, a healthy human longing, the only longing worth while in all this deep, wide, round old top: to love a woman and by her be loved.

At exactly half after six the gentleman with the reversible cuffs arrived; and George missed his boat.

## CHAPTER II

### AN AFFABLE ROGUE

The carriage containing the gentleman with the reversible cuffs drew up at the side entrance. Instantly the Arab guides surged and eddied round him; but their clamor broke against a composure as effective as granite. The roar was almost directly succeeded by a low gurgle, as of little waves receding. The proposed victim had not spoken a word; to the Arabs it was not necessary; in some manner, subtle and indescribable, they recognized a brother. He carried a long, cylindrical bundle wrapped in heavy paper variously secured by windings of thick twine. His regard for this bundle was one of tender solicitude, for he tucked it under his arm, cumbersome though it was, and waved aside the carriage-porter, who was, however, permitted to carry in the kit-bag.

The manager appeared. When comes he not upon the scene? His quick, calculating eye was not wholly assured. The stranger's homespun was travel-worn and time-worn, and of a cut popular to the season gone the year before. No fat letter of credit here, was the not unreasonable conclusion reached by the manager. Still, with that caution acquired by years of experience, which had culminated in what is known as Swiss diplomacy, he brought into being the accustomed salutatory smile and inquired if the gentleman had written ahead for reservation, otherwise it would not be possible to accommodate him.

"I telegraphed," crisply.

"The name, if you please?"

"Ryanne; spelled R-y-a double-n e. Have you ever been in County Clare?"

"No, sir." The manager added a question with the uplift of his eyebrows.

"Well," was the enlightening answer, "you pronounce it as they do there."

The manager scanned the little slip of paper in his hand. "Ah, yes; we have reserved a room for you, sir. The French style rather confused me." This was not offered in irony, or sarcasm, or satire; mining in a Swiss brain for the saving grace of humor is about as remunerative as the extraction of gold from sea-water. Nevertheless, the Swiss has the talent of swiftly subtracting from a confusion of ideas one point of illumination: there was a quality to the stranger's tone that decided him favorably. It was the voice of a man in the habit of being obeyed; and in these days it was the power of money alone that obtained obedience to any man. Beyond this, the same nebulous cogitation that had subdued the Arabs outside acted likewise upon him. Here was a brother.

"Mail?"

"I will see, sir." The manager summoned a porter. "Room 208."

The porter caught up the somewhat collapsed kit-bag, which had in all evidence received some rough usage in its time, and reached toward the roll. Mr. Ryanne interposed.

"I will see to that, my man," tersely.

"Yes, sir."

"Where is your guest-list?" demanded Mr. Ryanne of the manager.

"The head-porter's bureau, sir. I will see if you have any mail." The manager passed into his own bureau. It was rather difficult to tell whether this man was an American or an Englishman. His accent was western, but his manner was decidedly British. At any rate, that tone and carriage must be bastioned by good English sovereigns, or for once his judgment was at fault.

The porter dashed up-stairs. Mr. Ryanne, his bundle still snug under his arm, sauntered over to the head-porter's bureau and ran his glance up and down the columns of visiting-cards. Once he nodded with approval, and again he smiled, having discovered that which sent a ripple across his sleeping sense of amusement. Major Callahan, room 206; Fortune Chedsoye, 205; George P. A. Jones, 210.

"Hm! the Major smells of County Antrim and the finest whisky in all the isle. Fortune Chedsoye; that is a pleasing name; tinkling brooks, the waving green grasses in the meadows, the kine in the water, the fleeting shadows under the oaks; a pastoral, a bucolic name. To claim Fortune for mine own; a happy thought."

As he uttered these poesy expressions aloud, in a voice low and not unpleasing, for all that it was bantering, the head-porter stared at him with mingling doubt and alarm; and as if to pronounce these emotions mutely for the benefit of the other, he permitted his eyes to open their widest.

"Tut, tut; that's all right, porter. I am cursed with the habit of speaking my inmost thoughts. Some persons are afflicted with insomnia; some fall asleep in church; I think orally. Beastly habit, eh?"

The porter then understood that he was dealing not with a species of mild lunacy, but with that kind of light-hearted cynicism upon which the world (as porters know it) had set its approving seal. In brief, he smiled faintly; and if he had any pleasantry to pass in turn, the approach of the manager, now clothed metaphorically in deferentialism, relegated it to the limbo of things thought but left unsaid.

"Here is a letter for you, Mr. Ryanne. Have you any more luggage?"

"No." Mr. Ryanne smiled. "Shall I pay for my room in advance?"

"Oh, no, sir!" Ten years ago the manager would have blushed at having been so misunderstood. "Your room is 208."

"Will you have a boy show me the way?"

"I shall myself attend to that. If the room is not what you wish it may be exchanged."

"The room is the one I telegraphed for. I am superstitious to a degree. On three boats I have had fine state-rooms numbered 208. Twice the number of my hotel room has been the same. On the last voyage there were 208 passengers, and the captain had made 208 voyages on the Mediterranean."

"Quite a coincident."

"Ah, if roulette could be played with such a certainty."

Mr. Ryanne sighed, hitched up his bundle, which, being heavy, was beginning to wear upon his arm, and signified to the manager to lead the way.

As they vanished round the corner to the lift, the head-porter studied the guest-list. He had looked over it a dozen times that day, but this was the first instance of his being really interested in it. As his chin was freshly shaven he had no stubble to stroke to excite his mental processes; so he fell back, as we say, upon the consoling ends of his abundant mustache. Curious; but all these persons were occupying or about to occupy adjacent rooms. There was truly nothing mysterious about it, save that the stranger had picked out these very names as a target for his banter. Fortune Chedsoye; it was rather an unusual name; but as she had arrived only an hour or so before, he could not distinctly recall her features. And then, there was that word bucolic. He mentally turned it over and over as physically he was wont to do with post-cards left in his care to mail. He could make nothing of the word, except that it smacked of the East Indian plague.

Here he was saved from further cerebral agony by a timely interruption. A man, who was not of bucolic persuasion either in dress or speech, urban from the tips of his bleached fingers to the bulb of his bibulous nose, leaned across the counter and asked if Mr. Horace Ryanne had yet arrived. Yes, he had just arrived; he was even now on his way to his room. The urban gentleman nodded. Then, with a finger slim and well-trimmed, he trailed up and down the guest-list.

"Ha! I see that you have the Duke of What-d'ye-call from Germany here. I'll give you my card. Send it up to Mr. Ryanne. No hurry. I shall be in again after dinner."

He bustled off toward the door. He was pury, well-fed, and decently dressed, the sort of a man who, when he moved in any direction, created the impression that he had an important engagement somewhere else or was paring minutes from time-tables. For a man in his business it was a clever expedient, deceiving all but those who knew him. He hesitated at the door, however, as if he had changed his mind in the twenty-odd paces it took to reach it. He stared for a long period at the elderly

gentleman who was watching the feluccas on the river through the window. The white mustache and imperial stood out in crisp relief against the ruddy sunburn on his face. If he was aware of this scrutiny on the part of the puffy gentleman, he gave not the least sign. The revolving door spun round, sending a puff of outdoor air into the lounging-room. The elderly gentleman then smiled, and applied his thumb and forefinger to the waxen point of his imperial.

In the intervening time Mr. Ryanne entered his room, threw the bundle on the bed, sat down beside it, and read his letter. Shadows and lights moved across his face; frowns that hardened it, smiles that mellowed it. Women hold the trick of writing letters. Do they hate, their thoughts flash and burn from line to line. Do they love, 'tis lettered music. Do they conspire, the breadth of their imagination is without horizon. At best, man can indite only a polite business letter, his love-notes were adjudged long since a maudlin collection of loose sentences. In this letter Mr. Ryanne found the three parts of life.

"She's a good general; but hang these brimstone efforts of hers. She talks too much of heart. For my part, I prefer to regard it as a mere physical function, a pump, a motor, a power that gives action to the legs, either in coming or in going, more especially in going." He laughed. "Well, hers is the inspiration and hers is the law. And to think that she could plan all this on the spur of the moment, down to the minutest detail! It's a science." He put the letter away, slid out his legs and glared at the dusty tips of his shoes. "The United Romance and Adventure Company, Ltd., of New York, London, and Paris. She has the greatest gift of all, the sense of humor."

He rose and opened his kit-bag doubtfully. He rummaged about in the depths and at last straightened up with a mild oath.

"Not a pair of cuffs in the whole outfit, not a shirt, not a collar. Oh, well, when a man has to leave Bagdad the way I did, over the back fence, so to speak, linen doesn't count."

He drew down his cuffs, detached and reversed them, he turned his folding collar wrong-side out, and used the under side of the foot-rug as a shoe-polisher. It was the ingenious procedure of a man who was used to being out late of nights, who made all things answer all purposes. This rapid and singularly careless toilet completed, he centered his concern upon the more vital matter of finances. He was close to the nadir: four sovereigns, a florin, and a collection of battered coppers that would have tickled the pulse of an amateur numismatist.

"No vintage to-night, my boy; no long, fat Havana, either. A bottle of stout and a few rags of plug-cut; that's the pace we'll travel this evening. The United Romance and Adventure Company is not listed at present. If it was, I'd sell a few shares on my own hook. The kind Lord knows that I've stock enough and to spare." He laughed again, but without the leaven of humor. "When the fool-killer snatches up the last fool, let rogues look to themselves; and fools are getting scarcer every day."

"Percival Algernon! O age of poets! I wonder, does he wear high collars and spats, or has she plumbed him accurately? She is generally right. But a man changes some in seven years. I'm an authority when it comes to that. Look what's happened to me in seven years! First, Horace, we shall dine, then we'll smoke our pipe in the billiard-room, then we'll softly approach Percival Algernon and introduce him to Sinbad. This independent excursion to Bagdad was a stroke on my part; it will work into the general plan as smoothly as if it had been grooved for the part. Sinbad. I might just as well have assumed that name: Horace Sinbad, sounds well and looks well." He mused in silence, his hand gently rubbing his chin; for he did possess the trick of talking aloud, in a low monotone, a habit acquired during periods of loneliness, when the sound of his own voice had succeeded in steadying his tottering mind.

What a woman, what a wife, she would have been to the right man! Odd thing, a man can do almost anything but direct his affections; they must be drawn. She was not for him; nay, not even on a desert isle. Doubtless he was a fool. In time she would have made him a rich man. Alack! It was always the one we pursued that we loved and never the one that pursued us.

"I'm afraid of her; and there you are. There isn't a man living who has gone back of that Mona Lisa smile of hers. If she was the last woman and I was the last man, I don't say." He hunted for a cigarette, but failed to find one. "Almost at the bottom, boy; the winter of our discontent, and no sun of York to make it glorious. Twenty-four hundred at cards, and to lose it like a tyro! Wallace has taught me all he knows, but I'm a booby. Twenty-four hundred, firm's money. It's a failing of mine, the firm's money. But, damn it all, I can't cheat a man at cards; I'd rather cut his throat."

He found his pipe, and a careful search of the corners of his coat-pockets revealed a meager pipeful of tobacco. He picked out the little balls of wool, the ground-coffee, the cloves, and pushed the charge home into the crusted bowl of his briar.

"To the devil with economy! A pint of burgundy and a perfecto if they hale us to jail for it. I'm dead tired. I've seen three corners in hell in the past two months. I'm going as far as four sovereigns will take me... Fortune Chedsoye." His blue eyes became less hard and his mouth less defiant. "I repeat, the heart should be nothing but a pump. Otherwise it gets in the way, becomes an obstruction, a bottomless pit. Will-power, that's the ticket. I can face a lion without an extra beat, I can face the various countenances of death without an additional flutter; and yet, here's a girl who, when I see her or think of her, sends the pulse soaring from seventy-seven up to eighty-four. Bad business; besides, it's so infernally unfashionable. It's hard work for a man to keep his balance 'twixt the devil and the deep, blue sea; Gioconda on one side and Fortune on the other. Gioconda throws open windows and doors at my approach; but Fortune locks and bars hers, nor knocks at mine. That's the way it always goes.

"If a man could only go back ten years and take a new start. Ass!" balling his fist at the reflection in the mirror. "Snivel and whine over the bed of your own making. You had your opportunity, but you listened to the popping of champagne-corks, the mutter of cards, the inane drivel of chorus-ladies. You had a decent college record, too. Bah! What a guileless fool you were! You ran on, didn't you, till you found your neck in the loop at the end of the rope? And perhaps that soft-footed, estimable brother of yours didn't yank it taut as a hangman's? You heard the codicil; into one ear and out the other. Even then you had your chance; patience for two short years, and a million. No, a thousand times no. You knew what you were about, empty-headed fool! And to-day, two pennies for a dead man's eyes."

He dropped his fist dejectedly. Where had the first step begun? And where would be the last? In some drab corner, possibly; drink, morphine, or starvation; he'd never have the courage to finish it with a bullet. He was terribly bitter. Everything worth while seemed to have slipped through his fingers, his pleasure-loving fingers.

"Come, come, Horace; buck up. Still the ruby kindles in the vine. No turning back now. We'll go on till we come bang! against the wall. There may be some good bouts between here and there. I wonder what Gioconda would say if she knew why I was so eager for this game?"

He went down to dinner, and they gave him a table in an obscure corner, as a subtle reminder that his style was *passé*. He didn't care; he was hungry and thirsty. He could see nearly every one, even if only a few could see him. This was somewhat to his vantage. He endeavored to pick out Percival Algernon; but there were too many high collars, too many monocles. So he contented himself with a mild philosophical observance of the scene. The murmur of voices, rising as the wail of the violins sank, sinking as the wail rose; the tinkle of glass and china, the silver and linen, the pretty women in their rustling gowns, the delicate perfumes, the flash of an arm, the glint of a polished shoulder: this was the essence of life he coveted. He smiled at the thought and the sure knowledge that he was not the only wolf in the fold. Ay, and who among these dainty Red Riding Hoods might be fooled by a vulpine grandmother? Truth, when a fellow winnowed it all down to a handful, there were only fools and rogues. If one was a fool, the rogue got you, and he in turn devoured himself.

He held his glass toward the table-lamp, moved it slowly to and fro under his nose, epicureanly; then he sipped the wine. Something like! It ran across his tongue and down his throat in tingling fire,

nectarious; and he went half way to Olympus, to the feet of the gods. For weeks he had lived in the vilest haunts, in desperate straits, his life in his open hands; and now once more he had crawled from the depths to the outer crust of the world. It did not matter that he was destined to go down into the depths again; so long as the spark burned he was going to crawl back each time. Damnable luck! He could have lived like a prince. Twenty-four hundred, and all in two nights, a steady stream of gold into the pockets of men whom he could have cheated with consummate ease, and didn't. A fine wolf, whose predatory instincts were still riveted to that obsolete thing called conscience!

"Conscience? Rot! Let us for once be frank and write it down as caution, as fear of publicity, anything but the white guardian-angel of the immortality of the soul. Heap up the gold, Apollyon; heap it up, higher and higher, till not a squeak of that still small voice that once awoke the chap in the Old Testament can ever again be heard. Now; no more retrospection, Horace; no more analysis; the vital question simmers down to this: If Percival Algernon balks, how far will four sovereigns go?"

## CHAPTER III

### THE HOLY YHIORDES

George drank *his* burgundy perfunctorily. Had it been astringent as the native wine of Corsica, he would not have noticed it. The little nerves that ran from his tongue to his brain had temporarily lost the power of communication. And all because of the girl across the way. He couldn't keep his eyes from wandering in her direction. She faced him diagonally. She ate but little, and when the elderly gentleman poured out for her a glass of sauterne, she motioned it aside, rested her chin upon her folded hands, and stared not at but through her *vis-à-vis*.

It was a lovely head, topped with coils of lustrous, light brown hair; an oval face, of white and rose and ivory tones; scarlet lips, a small, regular nose, and a chin the soft roundness of which hid the resolute lift to it. To these attributes of loveliness was added a perfect form, the long, flowing curves of youth, not the abrupt contours of maturity. George couldn't recollect when he had been so impressed by a face. From the moment she had stepped down from the carriage, his interest had been drawn, and had grown to such dimensions that when he entered the dining-room his glance immediately searched for her table. What luck in finding her across the way! He questioned if he had ever seen her before. There was something familiar; the delicate profile stirred some sleeping memory but did not wake it.

How to meet her, and when he did meet her, how to interest her? If she would only drop her handkerchief, her purse, something to give him an excuse, an opening. Ah, he was certain that this time the hydra-headed one should not overcome him. To gain her attention and to hold it, he would have faced a lion, a tiger, a wild-elephant. To diagnose these symptoms might not be fair to George. "Love at first sight" reads well and sounds well, but we hoary-headed philosophers know that the phrase is only poetical license.

Once, and only once, she looked in his direction. It swept over him with the chill of a winter wind that he meant as much to her as a tree, a fence, a meadow, as seen from the window of a speeding railway train. But this observation, transient as it was, left with him the indelible impression that her eyes were the saddest he had ever seen. Why? Why should a young and beautiful girl have eyes like that? It could not mean physical weariness, else the face would in some way have expressed it. The elderly man appeared to do his best to animate her; he was kindly and courteous, and by the gentle way he laughed at intervals was trying to bolster up the situation with a jest or two. The girl never so much as smiled, or shrugged her shoulders; she was as responsive to these overtures as marble would have been.

George's romance gathered itself for a flight. Perhaps it was love thwarted, and the gentleman with the mustache and imperial, in spite of his amiability, might be the ogre. Perhaps it was love and duty. Perhaps her lover had gone down to sea. Perhaps (for lovers are known to do such things) he had run away with the other girl. If that was the case, George did not think highly of that tentative gentleman's taste. Perhaps and perhaps again; but George might have gone on perhapsing till the crack o' doom, with never a solitary glimmer of the true state of the girl's mind. Whenever he saw an unknown man or woman who attracted his attention, he never could resist the impulse to invent a romance that might apply.

Immediately after dessert the two rose; and George, finding that nothing more important than a pineapple ice detained him, got up and followed. Mr. Ryanne almost trod on his heels as they went through the doorway into the cosy lounging-room. George dropped into a vacant divan and waited for his *café à la Turque*. Mr. Ryanne walked over to the head-porter's bureau and asked if that gentleman would be so kind as to point out Mr. George P. A. Jones, if he were anywhere in sight. He thoughtfully, not to say regretfully, laid down a small bribe.

"Mr. Jones?" The porter knew Mr. Jones very well. He was generous, and treated the servants as though they were really human beings. Mr. Rynane, either by his inquiry or as the result of his bribe, went up several degrees in the porter's estimation. "Mr. Jones is over there, on the divan by the door."

"Thanks."

But Rynane did not then seek the young man. He studied the quarry from a diplomatic distance. No; there was nothing to indicate that George Percival Algernon Jones was in any way handicapped by his Arthuresque middle names.

"No fool, as Gioconda in her infinite wisdom hath said; but romantic, terribly romantic, yet, like the timid bather who puts a foot into the water, finds it cold, and withdraws it. It will all depend upon whether he is a real collector or merely a buyer of rugs. Forward, then, Horace; a sovereign has already dashed headlong down the far horizon." The curse of speaking his thoughts aloud did not lie heavily upon him to-night, for these cogitations were made in silence, unmarked by any facial expression. He proceeded across the room and sat down beside George. "I beg your pardon," he began, "but are you not Mr. Jones?"

Mildly astonished, George signified that he was.

"George P. A. Jones?"

George nodded again, but with some heat in his cheeks. "Yes. What is it?" The girl had just finished her coffee and was going away. Hang this fellow! What did he want at this moment?

If Rynane saw that he was too much, as the French say, he also perceived the cause. The desire to shake George till his teeth rattled was instantly overcome. She hadn't seen him, and for this he was grateful. "You are interested in rugs? I mean old ones, rare ones, rugs that are bought once and seldom if ever sold again."

"Why, yes. That's my business." George had no silly ideas about trade. He had never posed as a gentleman's son in the sense that it meant idleness.

Rynane presented his card.

"How do you pronounce it?" asked George naïvely.

"As they do in Cork."

"I never saw it spelled that way before."

"Nothing surprising in that," replied Rynane. "No one else has, either."

George laughed and waited for the explanation.

"You see, Ryan is as good a name as they make them; but it classes with prize-fighters, politicians, and bar chemists. The two extra letters put the finishing touch to the name. A jewel is all right, but what tells is the way you hang it round your neck. To me, those additional letters represent the jewel Ryan in the hands of a Lalique."

"You talk like an American."

"I am; three generations. What's the matter?" with sudden concern.

George was frowning. "Haven't I met you somewhere before?"

"Not to my recollection." A speculative frown now marred Rynane's forehead. It did not illustrate a search in his memory for such a casualty as the meeting of George. He never forgot a face and certainly did not remember George's. Rather, the frown had its source in the mild dread that Percival Algernon had seen him somewhere during one of those indispositions of the morning after. "No; I think you have made a mistake."

"Likely enough. It just struck me that you looked something like a chap named Wadsworth, who was half-back on the varsity, when I entered my freshman year."

"A university man? Lord, no! I was turned loose at ten; been hustling ever since." Rynane spoke easily, not a tremor in his voice, although he had received a slight mental jolt. "No; no college record here. But I want to chat with you about rugs. I've heard of you, indirectly."

"From the carpet fellows? We do a big business over here. What have you got?"

"Well, I've a rug up in my room I'd like to show you. I want your judgment for one thing. Will you do me the favor?"

Since the girl had disappeared and with her those imaginary appurtenances that had for a space transformed the lounging-room into a stage, George saw again with normal vision that the room was simply a common meeting-ground for well-dressed persons and ill-dressed persons, of the unimpeachable, the impeccable, the doubtful and the peccant; for in Cairo, as in ancient Egypt, there is every class and kind of humans, for whom the Decalogue was written, transcribed, and shattered by the turbulent Moses, an incident more or less forgotten these days. From the tail of his eye he gave swift scrutiny to this chance acquaintance, and he found nothing to warrant suspicion. It was not an unusual procedure for men to hunt him up in Cairo, in Constantinople, in Smyrna, or in any of the Oriental cities where his business itinerary led him. The house of Mortimer & Jones was widely known. This man Ryanne might have been anywhere between thirty and forty. He was tall, well set up, blond and smooth-skinned. True, he appeared to have been ill-fed recently. A little more flesh under the cheek-bones, a touch of color, and the Irishman would have been a handsome man. George could read a rug a league off, as they say, but he was a child in the matter of physiognomy, whereas Ryanne was a past-master in this regard; it was necessary both for his business and safety.

"Certainly, I'll take a look at it. But I tell you frankly," went on George, "that to interest me it's got to be a very old one. You see, it's a little fad of mine, outside the business end of it. I'm crazy over real rugs, and I know something about every rare one in existence, or known to exist. Is it a copy?"

"No. I'll tell you more about it when we get to my room."

"Come on, then." George was now quite willing to discuss rugs and carpets.

Having gained the room, Ryanne threw off his coat and relighted his cigar, which, in a saving mood, he had allowed to go out. He motioned George to be seated.

"Just a little yarn before I show you the rug. See these cuffs?"

"Yes."

"You will observe that I have had to reverse them. Note this collar? Same thing. Trousers-hems a bit frayed, coat shiny at the elbows." Ryanne exhibited his sole fortune. "Four sovereigns between me and a jail."

George became thoughtful. He was generous and kind-hearted among those he knew intimately or slightly, but he had the instinctive reserve of the seasoned traveler in cases like this. He waited.

"The truth is, I'm all but done for. And if I fail to strike a bargain here with you... Well, I should hate to tell you the result. Our consul would have to furnish me passage home. Were you ever up against it to the extent of reversing your cuffs and turning your collars? You don't know what life is, then."

George gravely produced two good cigars and offered one to his host. There was an absence of sound, broken presently by the cheerful crackle of matches; two billowing clouds of smoke floated outward and upward. Ryanne sighed. Here was a cigar one could not purchase in all the length and breadth of the Orient, a Pedro Murias. In one of his doubtfully prosperous epochs he had smoked them daily. How long ago had that been?

"Yonder is a rug, a prayer-rug, as holy to the Moslem as the idol's eye is to the Hindu, as the Bible is to the Christian. For hundreds of years it never saw the outside of the Sultan's palace. One day the late, the recently late, Abdul the Unspeakable Turk, gave it to the Pasha of Bagdad. Whenever this rug makes its appearance in Holy Mecca, it is worshiped, and none but a Sultan or a Sultan's favorite may kneel upon it. Bagdad, the hundred mosques, the old capital of Suleiman the Great, the dreary Tigris and the sluggish Euphrates, a muezzin from the turret calls to prayer, and all that; eh?"

George leaned forward from his chair, a gentle terror in his heart. "The Yhiordes? By Jove! is that the Yhiordes?"

Admiration kindled in Ryanne's eyes. To have hit the bull's-eye with so free and quick an aim was ample proof that Percival Algernon had not boasted when he said that he knew something about rugs.

"You've guessed it."

"How did you come by it?" George demanded excitedly.

"Why do you ask that?"

"Man, ten-thousand pounds could not purchase that rug, that bit of carpet. Collectors from every port have been after it in vain. And you mean to tell me that it lies there, wrapped in butcher's paper?"

"Right-O!"

Ryanne solemnly detached a cuff and rolled up his sleeve. The bare muscular arm was scarred by two long, ugly knife-wounds, scarcely healed. Next he drew up a trousers-leg, disclosing a battered shin. "And there's another on my shoulder-blade, the closest call I ever had. A man who takes his life in his hands, as I have done, merits some reward. Mr. Jones, I'll be frank with you. I am a kind of derelict. Since I was a boy, I have hated the humdrum of offices, of shops. I wanted to be my own man, to go and come as I pleased. To do this and live meant precarious exploits. This rug represents one of them. I am telling you the family secret; I am showing you the skeleton in the closet, confidentially. I stole that rug; and when I say that the seven labors of our old friend Hercules were simple diversions compared, you'll recognize the difficulties I had to overcome. You know something of the Oriental mind. I handled the job alone. I may not be out of the jungle yet."

George listened entranced. He could readily construct the scenes through which this adventurer had gone: the watchful nights, the untiring patience, the thirst, the hunger, the heat. And yet, he could hardly believe. He was a trifle skeptical. Many a rogue had made the mistake of playing George's age against his experience. He had made some serious blunders in the early stages of the business, however; and everybody, to gain something in the end, must lose something at the start.

"If that rug is the one I have in mind, you certainly have stolen it. And if it's a copy, I'll tell you quickly enough."

"That's fair. And that's why," Ryanne declared, "I wanted you to look at it. To me, considering what I have gone through to get it, to me it is the genuine carpet. To your expert eye it may be only a fine copy. I know this much, that rare rugs and paintings have many copies, and that some one is being hooked, sold, bamboozled, sandbagged, every day in the week. If this is the real article, I want you to take it off my hands," the adventurer finished pleasantly.

"There will be a hue and cry."

"No doubt of it."

"And the devil's own job to get it out of Egypt." These were set phrases of the expert, preliminaries to bargaining. "One might as well carry round a stolen elephant."

"But a man who is as familiar with the game as you are would have little difficulty. Your integrity is an established fact, on both sides of the water. You could take it to New York as a copy, and no appraiser would know the difference. It's worth the attempt. I'd take it to New York myself, but you see, I am flat broke. Come; what do you or I care about a son-of-a-gun of a Turk?" drolly.

"What do you want for it, supposing it's genuine?" George's throat was dry and his voice harsh. His conscience roused herself, feebly, for it had been a long time since occasion had necessitated her presence.

Ryanne narrowed his eyes, carefully balancing the possibilities. "Say, one thousand pounds. It is like giving it away. But when the devil drives, you know. It is beyond any set price; it is worth what any collector is willing to pay for it. I believe I know the kind of man you are, Mr. Jones, and that is why, when I learned you were in Cairo, I came directly to you. You would never sell this rug. No. You would become like a miser over his gold. You would keep it with your emeralds (I have heard about them, too); draw the curtains, lock the doors, whenever you looked at it. Eh? You would love it

for its own sake, and not because it is worth so many thousand pounds. You are sailing in a few days; that will help. The Pasha is in Constantinople, and it will be three or four weeks before he hears of the theft, or the cost," with a certain grimness.

"You haven't killed any one?" whispered George.

"I don't know; perhaps. Christianity against paganism; the Occidental conscience permits it." Ryanne made a gesture to indicate that he would submit to whatever moral arraignment Mr. Jones deemed advisable to make.

But George made none. He rose hastily, sought his knife and, without so much as by your leave, slashed the twine, flung aside the paper, and threw the rug across the counterpane. It was the Yhiordes. There was not the slightest doubt in his mind. He had heard it described, he had seen a photograph of it, he knew its history and, most vital of all, he owned a good copy of it.

Against temptation that was robust and energetic and alluring (like the man who insists upon your having a drink when you want it and ought not to have it), what chance had conscience, grown innocuous in the long period of the young man's good behavior? Collectors are always honest before and after that moment arrives when they want something desperately; and George was no more saintly than his kind. And how deep Ryanne and his confederates had delved into human nature, how well they could read and judge it, was made manifest in this moment of George's moral relapse.

Bagdad, the jinns, Sinbad, the Thousand and One Nights, Alibaba and the Forty Thieves: George was transported mentally to that magic city, standing between the Tigris and the Euphrates, in all its white glory of a thousand years gone. Ryanne, the room and its furnishings, all had vanished, all save the exquisite fabric patterned out of wool and cotton and knotted with that mingling love and skill and patience the world knows no more. He let his hand stray over it. How many knees had pressed its thick yet pliant substance? How many strange scenes had it mutely witnessed, scenes of beauty, of terror? It shone under the light like the hide of a healthy hound.

The nerves of a smoker are generally made apparent by the rapidity of his exhalations. These two, in the several minutes, had filled the room with a thick, blue haze; and through this the elder man eyed the younger. The sign of the wolf gleamed in his eyes, but without animosity, modified as it was by the half-friendly, half-cynical smile.

"I'll risk it," said George finally, having stepped off the magical carpet, as it were. "I can't give you a thousand pounds to-night. I can give you three hundred, and the balance to-morrow, between ten and eleven, at Cook's."

"That will be agreeable to me."

George passed over all the available cash he had, rolled up the treasure and tucked it under his arm. That somewhere in the world was a true believer, wailing and beating his breast and calling down from Allah curses upon the giaour, the dog of an infidel, who had done this thing, disturbed George not in the least.

"I say," as he opened the door, "you must tell me all about the adventure. It must have been a thriller."

"It was," replied Ryanne. "The story will keep. Later, if you care to hear it."

"Of course," added George, moved by a discretionary thought, "this transaction is just between you and me."

"You may lay odds on that," heartily. "Well, good night. See you at Cook's in the morning."

"Good night." George passed down the corridor to the adjoining room.

And now, bang! goes Pandora's box.

## CHAPTER IV

### AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

That faculty which decides on the lawlessness of our actions: so the noted etymologist described conscience. It fell to another distinguished intellect to add that conscience makes cowards of us all. Ay. She may be overcome at times, side-tracked for any special desire that demands a clear way; but she's after us, fast enough, with that battered red lantern of hers, which, brought down from all tongues crisply into our own, reads – "Don't do it!" She herself is not wholly without cunning. She rarely stands boldly upon the track to flag us as we come. She realizes that she might be permanently ditched. No; it is far safer to run after us and catch us. A digression, perhaps, but more pertinently an application.

Temptation then no longer at his shoulder, George began to have qualms, little chaps, who started buzzing into his moral ears with all that maddening, interminable drone which makes one marvel however do school-teachers survive their first terms. Among these qualms there was none that pleaded for the desolate Turk or his minions whose carelessness had made the theft possible. For all George cared, the Moslem might grind his forehead in the soulless sand and make the air palpitate with his complaints to Allah. No. The disturbance was due to the fact that never before had he been wittingly the purchaser of stolen goods. He never tried to glose over the subtle distinction between knowing and suspecting; and if he had been variously suspicious in regard to certain past bargains, conscience had found no sizeable wedge for her demurrers. The Yhiordes was confessedly stolen.

He paused, with his hand upon the door-knob of his room. If he didn't keep the rug, it would fall into the hands of a collector less scrupulous. To return it to the Pasha at Bagdad would be pure folly, and thankless. It was one of the most beautiful weavings in existence. It was as priceless in its way as any Raphael in the Vatican. And he desired its possession intensely. Why not? Insidious phrase! Was it not better that the world should see and learn what a wonderful craft the making of a rare rug had been, than to allow it to return to the sordid chamber of a harem, to inevitable ruin? As Ryanne said, what the deuce was a fanatical Turk or Arab to him?

Against these specious arguments in favor of becoming the adventurer's abettor and accomplice, there was first the possible stain of blood. The man agreed that he had come away from Bagdad in doubt. George did not like the thought of blood. Still, he had collected a hundred emeralds, not one of which was without its red record. Again, if he carried the rug home with his other purchases, he could pull it through the customs only by lying, which was as distasteful to his mind as being a receiver of stolen goods.

He had already paid a goodly sum against the purchase; and it was not likely that a man who was down to reversing his collars and cuffs would take back the rug and refund the money. The Yhiordes was his, happen what might. So conscience snuffed out her red lantern and retired.

Some light steps, a rustle, and he wheeled in time to see a woman open a door, stand for a minute in the full light, and disappear. It was she. George opened the door of his own room, threw the rug inside, and tiptoed along the corridor, stopping for the briefest time to ascertain the number of that room. He felt vastly more guilty in performing this harmless act than in smothering his mentor.

There was no one in the head-porter's bureau; thus, unobserved and unembarrassed, he was free to inspect the guest-list. Fortune Chedsoye. He had never seen a name quite like that. Its quaintness did not suggest to him, as it had done to Ryanne, the pastoral, the bucolic. Rather it reminded him of the old French courts, of rapiers and buckles, of powdered wigs and furbelows, masks, astrologers, love-intrigues, of all those colorful, mutable scenes so charmingly described by the genial narrator of the exploits of D'Artagnan. And abruptly out of this age of Lebrun, Watteau, Molière, reached an ice-cold hand. If that elderly codger wasn't her father, who was he and what?

The Major – for George had looked him up also – was in excellent trim for his age, something of a military dandy besides; but as the husband of so young and exquisite a creature! Out upon the thought! He might be her guardian, or, at most, her uncle, but never her husband. Yet (O poisonous doubt!), at the table she had ignored the Major, both his jests and his attentions. He had seen many wives, joyfully from a safe distance, act toward their husbands in this fashion. Oh, rot! If his name was Callahan and hers Chedsoye, they could not possibly be tied in any legal bonds. He dismissed the ice-cold hand and turned again to the comforting warmth of his ardor.

He had never spoken to young women without presentation, and on these rare occasions he had broached the weather, suggested the possibilities of the weather, and concluded with an apostrophe on the weather at large. It was usually a valedictory. For he was always positive that he had acted like a fool, and was afraid to speak to the girl again. Never it failed, ten minutes after the girl was out of sight, the brightest and cleverest things crowded upon his tongue, to be but wasted on the desert air. He was not particularly afraid of women older than himself, more's the pity. And yet, had he been as shy toward them as toward the girls, there would have been no stolen Yhiordes, no sad-eyed maiden, no such thing as The United Romance and Adventure Company, Ltd.; and he would have stepped the even tenor of his way, unknown of grand passions, swift adventure, life.

George was determined to meet Fortune Chedsoye, and this determination, the first of its kind to take definite form in his mind, gave him a novel sensation. He would find some way, and he vowed to best his old enemy, diffidence, if it was the last fight he ever put up. He would manœuvre to get in the way of the Major. He never found much trouble in talking to men. Once he exchanged a word or two with the uncle or guardian, he would make it a point to renew the acquaintance when he saw the two together. It appeared to him as a bright idea, and he was rather proud of it. Even now he was conscious of clenching his teeth strongly. It's an old saying that he goes farthest who shuts his teeth longest. He was going to test the precept by immediate practice.

He had stood before the list fully three minutes. Now he turned about face, a singular elation tingling his blood. Once he set his mind upon a thing, he went forward. He had lost many pleasurable things in life because he had doubted and faltered, not because he had reached out toward them and had then drawn back. He was going to meet Fortune Chedsoye; when or how were but details. And as he discovered the Major himself idling before the booth of the East Indian merchant, he saw in fancy the portcullis rise and the drawbridge fall to the castle of enchantment. He strolled over leisurely and pretended to be interested in the case containing mediocre jewels.

"This is a genuine Bokhara embroidery?" the Major was inquiring.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"How old?"

The merchant picked up the tag and squinted at it. "It is between two and three hundred years old, sir."

To George's opinion the gods themselves could not have arranged a more propitious moment.

"You've made a mistake," he interposed quietly. "That is Bokhara, but the stitch is purely modern."

The dark eyes of the Indian flashed. "The gentleman is an authority?" sarcastically.

"Upon that style of embroidery, absolutely." George smiled. And then, without more ado, he went on to explain the difference between the antique and the modern. "You have one good piece of old Bokhara, but it isn't rare. Twenty-pounds would be a good price for it."

The Major laughed heartily. "And just this moment he asked a hundred for it. I'm not much of a hand in judging these things. I admire them, but have no intimate knowledge regarding their worth. Nothing to-night," he added to the bitter-eyed merchant. "The Oriental is like the amateur fisherman: truth is not in him. You seem to be a keen judge," as they moved away from the booth.

"I suppose it's because I'm inordinately fond of the things. I've really a good collection of Bokhara embroideries at home in New York."

"You live in New York?" with mild interest. The Major sat down and graciously motioned for George to do the same. "I used to live there; twenty-odd years ago. But European travel spoils America; the rush there, the hurry, the clamor. Over here they dine, there they eat. There's as much difference between those two performances as there is between *The Mikado* and *Florodora*. From Portland in Maine to Portland in Oregon, the same dress, same shops, same ungodly high buildings. Here it is different, at the end of every hundred miles."

George agreed conditionally. (The Major wasn't very original in his views.) He would have shed his last drop of blood for his native land, but he was honest in acknowledging her faults.

Conversation idled in various channels, and finally became anchored at jewels. Here the Major was at home, and he loved emeralds above all other stones. He proved to be an engaging old fellow, had circled the globe three or four times, and had had an adventure or two worth recounting. And when he incidentally mentioned his niece, George wanted to shake his hand.

Would Mr. Jones join him with a peg to sleep on? Mr. Jones certainly would. And after a mutual health, George diplomatically excused himself, retired, buoyant and happy. How simple the affair had been! A fellow could do anything if only he set his mind to it. To-morrow he would meet Fortune Chedsoye, and may Beelzebub shrive him if he could not manage to control his recalcitrant tongue.

As he passed out of sight, Major Callahan smiled. It was that old familiar smile which, charged with gentle mockery, we send after departing fools. It was plain that he needed another peg to keep company with the first, for he rose and gracefully wended his way down-stairs to the bar. Two men were already leaning against the friendly, inviting mahogany. There was a magnum of champagne standing between their glasses. The Major ordered a temperate whisky and soda, drank it, frowned at the magnum, paid the reckoning, and went back up-stairs again.

"Don't remember old friends, eh?" said the shorter of the two men, caressing his incarnadined proboscis. "A smile wouldn't have hurt him any, do you think?"

"Shut up!" admonished Ryanne. "You know the orders; no recognition on the public floors."

"Why, I meant no harm," the other protested. He took a swallow of wine. "But, dash it! here I am, more'n four thousand miles from old Broadway, and still walking blind. When is the show to start?"

"Not so loud, old boy. You've got to have patience. You've had some good pickings for the past three months, in the smoke-rooms. That ought to soothe you."

"Well, it doesn't. Here I come from New York, three months ago, with a wad of money for you and a great game in sight. It takes a week to find you, and when I do... Well, you know. No sooner are you awake, than what? Off you go to Bagdad, on the wildest goose-chase a man ever heard of. And that leaves me with nothing to do and nobody to talk to. I could have cried yesterday when I got your letter saying you'd be in to-day."

"Well, I got it."

"The rug?"

"Yes. It was wild; but after what I'd been through I needed something wild to steady my nerves; some big danger, where I'd simply have to get together."

"And you got it?" There was frank wonder and admiration in the puffy gentleman's eyes. "All alone, and you got it? Honest?"

"Honest. They nearly had my hide, though."

"Where is it?"

"Sold."

"Who?"

"Percival."

"Horace, you're a wonder, if there ever was one. Sold it to Percival! You couldn't beat that in a thousand years. You're a great man."

"Praise from Sir Hubert."

"Who's he?"

"An authority on several matters."

"How much did he give you for it?"

"Tut, tut! It was all my own little jaunt, Wallace. I should hate to lie to you about it."

"What about the stake I gave you?"

Ryanne made a sign of dealing cards.

"Threw it away on a lot of dubs, after all I've taught you!"

"Cards aren't my *forte*."

"There's a yellow streak in your hide, somewhere, Horace."

"There is, but it is the tiger's stripe, my friend. What I did with my money is my own business."

"Will she allow for that?"

"Would it matter one way or the other?"

"No, I don't suppose it would. Sometimes I think you're with us as a huge joke. You don't take the game serious enough." Wallace emptied his glass and tipped the bottle carefully. "You're out of your class, somehow."

"So?"

"Yes. You have always struck me as a man who was hunting trouble for one end."

"And that?" Ryanne seemed interested.

Wallace drew his finger across his throat. Ryanne looked him squarely in the eye and nodded affirmatively.

"I don't understand at all."

"You never will, Wallace, old chap. I am the prodigal son whose brother ate the fatted calf before I returned home. I had a letter to-day. She will be here to-morrow sometime. You may have to go to Port Saïd, if my little plan doesn't mature."

"The *Ludwig*?"

"Yes."

"Say, what a *Frau* she would have made the right man!"

Ryanne did not answer, but glowered at his glass.

"The United Romance and Adventure Company." Wallace twirled his glass. "If you're a wonder, she's a marvel. A Napoleon in petticoats! It does make a fellow grin, when you look it all over. But this is going to be her Austerlitz or her Waterloo. And you really got that rug; and on top of that, you have sold it to George P. A. Jones! Here's –"

"Many happy returns," ironically.

They finished the bottle without further talk. There was no conviviality here. Both were fond of good wine, but the more they drank, the tighter grew their lips. Men who have been in the habit of guarding dangerous secrets become taciturn in their cups.

From time to time, flittingly, there appeared against one of the windows, just above the half-curtain, a lean, dark face which, in profile, resembled the kite – the hooked beak, the watchful, preyful eyes. There were two hungers written upon that Arab face, food and revenge.

"Allah is good," he murmured.

He had but one eye in use, the other was bandaged. In fact, the face, exhibited general indications of rough warfare, the skin broken on the bridge of the nose, a freshly healed cut under the seeing eye, a long strip of plaster extending from the ear to the mouth. There was nothing of the beggar in his mien. His lean throat was erect, his chin protrusive, the set of his shoulders proud and defiant. Ordinarily, the few lingering guides would rudely have told him to be off about his business; but they were familiar with all turbans, and in the peculiar twist of this one, soiled and ragged though it was, they recognized some prince from the eastern deserts. Presently he strode away, but with a stiffness which they knew came from long journeys upon racing-camels.

George dreamed that night of magic carpets, of sad-eyed maidens, of fierce Bedouins, of battles in the desert, of genii swelling terrifically out of squat bottles. And once he rose and turned on the lights to assure himself that the old Yhiordes was not a part of these vivid dreams.

He was up shortly after dawn, in white riding-togs, for a final canter to Mena House and return. In two days more he would be leaving Egypt behind. Rather glad in one sense, rather sorry in another. Where to put the rug was a problem. He might carry it in his steamer-roll; it would be handier there than in the bottom of his trunk, stored away in the ship's hold. Besides, his experience had taught him that steamer-rolls were only indifferently inspected. You will observe that the luster of his high ideals was already dimming. He reasoned that insomuch as he was bound to smuggle and lie, it might be well to plan something artistically. He wished now that he was going to spend Christmas in Cairo; but it was too late to change his booking without serious loss of time and money.

He had a light breakfast on the veranda of the Mena House, climbed up to the desert, bantered the donkey-boys, amused himself by watching the descent of some German tourists who had climbed the big Pyramid before dawn to witness the sunrise, and threw pennies to the horde of blind beggars who instantly swarmed about him and demanded, in the name of Allah, a competence for the rest of their days. He finally escaped them by footing it down the incline to the hotel gardens, where his horse stood waiting.

It was long after nine when he slid from the saddle at the side entrance of the Semiramis. He was on his way to the bureau for his key, when an exquisitely gloved hand lightly touched his arm.

"Don't you remember me, Mr. Jones?" said a voice of vocal honey.

George did. In his confusion he dropped his pith-helmet, and in stooping to pick it up, bumped into the porter who had rushed to his aid. Remember her! Would he ever forget her? He never thought of her without dubbing himself an outrageous ass. He straightened, his cheeks afire; blushing was another of those uncontrollable asinities of his. It was really she, come out of a past he had hoped to be eternally inresuscitant; the droll, the witty woman, to whom in one mad moment of liberality and Galahadism he had loaned without security one hundred and fifty pounds at the roulette tables in Monte Carlo; she, for whom he had always blushed when he recalled how easily she had mulcted him! And here she was, serene, lovely as ever, unchanged.

"My dear," said the stranger (George couldn't recall by what name he had known her); "my dear," to Fortune Chedsoye, who stood a little behind her, "this is the gentleman I've often told you about. You were at school at the time. I borrowed a hundred and fifty pounds of him at Monte Carlo. And what do you think? When I went to pay him back the next day, he was gone, without leaving the slightest clue to his whereabouts. Isn't that droll? And to think that I should meet him here!"

That her name had slipped his memory, if indeed he had ever known it, was true; but one thing lingered incandescently in his mind, and that was, he *had* written her, following minutely her own specific directions and inclosing his banker's address in Paris, Naples, and Cairo; and for many passings of moons he had opened his foreign mail eagerly and hopefully. But hope must have something to feed upon, and after a struggle lasting two years, she rendered up the ghost... It wasn't the loss of money that hurt; it was the finding of dross metal where he supposed there was naught but gold. Perhaps his later shyness was due as much to this disillusioning incident as to his middle names.

"Isn't it droll, my dear?" the enchantress repeated; and George grew redder and redder under the beautiful, grateful eyes. "I must give him a draft this very morning."

"But... Why, my dear Madame," stammered George. "You must not... I...!"

Fortune laughed. Somehow the quality of that laughter pierced George's confused brain as sometimes a shaft of sunlight rips into a fog, suddenly, stiletto-like. It was full of malice.

## CHAPTER V

### THE GIRL WHO WASN'T WANTED

If any one wronged George, defrauded him of money or credit, he was always ready to forgive, agreeing that perhaps half the fault had been his. This was not a sign of weakness, but of a sense of justice too well leavened with mercy. Humanity errs in the one as much as in the other, doubtless with some benign purpose in perspective. Now, it might be that this charming woman had really never received his letter; such things have been known to go astray. In any case he could not say that he had written. That would have cast a doubt upon her word, an unpardonable rudeness. So, for her very beauty alone, he gave her the full benefit of the doubt.

"You mustn't let the matter trouble you in the least," he said, his helmet now nicely adjusted under his arm. "It was so long ago I had really forgotten all about it." Which was very well said for George.

"But I haven't. I have often wondered what you must have thought of me. Monte Carlo is such a place! But I must present my daughter. I am Mrs. Chedsoye."

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Jones;" and in the sad eyes there was a glimmer of real friendliness. More, she extended her hand.

It was well worth while, that hundred and fifty pounds. It was well worth the pinch here and the pinch there which had succeeded that loan. For he had determined to return to America with a pound or two on his letter of credit, and the success of this determination was based upon many a sacrifice in comfort, sacrifices he had never confided to his parents. It was not in the nature of things to confess that the first woman he had met in his wanderings should have been the last. As he took the girl's hand, with the ulterior intent of holding it till death do us part, he wondered why she had laughed like that. The echo of it still rang in his ears. And while he could not have described it, he knew instinctively that it had been born of bitter thought.

They chatted for a quarter of an hour or more, and managed famously. It seemed to him that Fortune Chedsoye was the first young woman he had ever met who could pull away sudden barriers and open up pathways for speech, who, when he was about to flounder into some *cul-de-sac*, guided him adroitly into an alley round it. Not once was it necessary to drag in the weather, that perennial if threadbare topic. He was truly astonished at the ease with which he sustained his part in the conversation, and began to think pretty well of himself. It did not occur to him that when two clever and attractive women set forth to make a man talk (always excepting he is dumb), they never fail to succeed. To do this they contrive to bring the conversation within the small circle of his work, his travels, his preferences, his ambitions. To be sure, all this is not fully extracted in fifteen minutes, but a woman obtains in that time a good idea of the ground plan.

Two distinct purposes controlled the women in this instance. One desired to interest him, while the other sought to learn whether he was stupid or only shy.

At last, when he left them to change his clothes and hurry down to Cook's, to complete the bargain for the Yhiordes, he had advanced so amazingly well that they had accepted his invitation to the polo-match that afternoon. He felt that invisible Mercurial wings had sprouted from his heels, for in running up the stairs, he was aware of no gravitative resistance. That this anomaly (an acquaintance with two women about whom he knew nothing) might be looked upon askance by those who conformed to the laws and by-laws of social usages, worried him not in the least. On the contrary, he was thinking that he would be the envy of every other man out at the Club that afternoon.

"Well?" said Mrs. Chedsoye, a quizzical smile slanting her lips.

"You wish my opinion?" countered the daughter. "He is shy, but he is neither stupid nor silly; and when he smiles he is really good-looking."

"My child," replied the woman, drawing off her gloves and examining her shapely hands, "I have looked into the very heart of that young man. A thousand years ago, a red-cross on his surtout, he would have been beating his fists against the walls of Jerusalem; five hundred years later, he would have been singing *chant-royales* under lattice-windows; a paladin and a poet."

"How do you know that? Did he make love to you?"

"No; but I made love to him without his knowing it; and that was more to my purpose than having him make love to me," enigmatically. "Three days, and he was so guileless that he never asked my name. But in Monte Carlo, as you know, one asks only your banker's name."

"And your purpose?"

"It is still mine, dear. Do you realize that we haven't seen each other in four months, and that you haven't offered to kiss me?"

"Did he go away without writing to you about that money?"

Mrs. Chedsoye calmly plucked out the inturnd fingers of her gloves. "I believe I did receive a note inclosing his banker's address, but, unfortunately, in the confusion of returning to Paris, I lost it. My memory has always been a trial to me," sadly.

"Since when?" coldly. "There is not a woman living with a keener memory than yours."

"You flatter me. In affairs that interest me, perhaps."

"You never meant to pay him. It is horrible."

"My dear Fortune, how you jump at conclusions! Did I not offer him a draft the very first thing?"

"Knowing that at such a moment he could not possibly accept it?" derisively. "Sometimes I hate you!"

"In these days filial devotion is a lost art."

"No, no; it is a flower parents have ceased to cultivate."

And there was in the tone a strained note which described an intense longing to be loved. For if George Percival Algernon Jones was a lonely young man, it was the result of his own blindness; whereas Fortune Chedsoye turned hither and thither in search of that which she never could find. The wide Lybian desert held upon its face a loneliness, a desolation, less mournful than that which reigned within her heart.

"Hush! We are growing sentimental," warned the mother. "Besides, I believe we are attracting attention." Her glance swept a half-circle complacently.

"Pardon me! I should be sorry to draw attention to you, knowing how you abhor it."

"My child, learn from me; temper is the arch-enemy of smooth complexions. Jones – it makes you laugh."

"It is a homely, honest name."

"I grant that. But a Percival Algernon Jones!" Mrs. Chedsoye laughed softly. It was one of those pleasant sounds that caused persons within hearing to wait for it to occur again. "Come; let us go up to the room. It is a dull, dusty journey in from Port Saïd."

Alone, Fortune was certain that for her mother her heart knew nothing but hate. Neglect, indifference, injustice, misunderstanding, the chill repellence that always met the least outreaching of the child's affections, the unaccountable disappearances, the terror of the unknown, the blank wall of ignorance behind which she was always kept, upon these hate had builded her dark and brooding retreat. Yet, never did the mother come within the radius of her sight that she did not fall under the spell of strange fascination, enchaining, fight against it how she might. A kindly touch of the hand, a single mother-smile, and she would have flung her arms about the other woman's neck.

But the touch and the mother-smile never came. She knew, she understood: she wasn't wanted, she hadn't been wanted in the beginning; to her mother she was as the young of animals, interesting only up to that time when they could stand alone. That the mother never made and held feminine friendships was in nowise astonishing. Beauty and charm, such as she possessed, served immediately

to stimulate envy in other women's hearts. And that men of all stations in life flocked about her, why, it is the eternal tribute demanded of beauty. Here and there the men were not all the daughter might have wished. Often they burnt sweet flattery at her shrine, tentatively; but as she coolly stamped out these incipient fires, they at length came to regard her as one regards the beauty of a frosted window, as a thing to admire and praise in passing. One ache always abided: the bitter knowledge that had she met in kind smile for smile and jest for jest, she might have been her mother's boon companion. But deep back in some hidden chamber of her heart lay a secret dread of such a step, a dread which, whenever she strove to analyze it, ran from under her investigating touch, as little balls of quicksilver run from under the pressure of a thumb.

She was never without the comforts of life, well-fed, well-dressed, well-housed, and often her mother flung her some jeweled trinket which (again that sense of menace) she put away, but never wore. The bright periods were when they left her in the little villa near Mentone, with no one but her old and faithful nurse. There, with her horse, her books and her flowers, she was at peace. Week into week and month into month she was let be. Never a letter came, save from some former schoolmate who was coming over and wanted letters of introduction to dukes and duchesses. If she smiled over these letters it was with melancholy; for the dukes and duchesses, who fell within her singular orbit, were not the sort to whom one gave letters of introduction.

Where her mother went she never had the least idea. She might be in any of the great ports of the world, anywhere between New York and Port Saïd. The Major generally disappeared at the same time. Then, perhaps, she'd come back from a pleasant tram-ride over to Nice and find them both at the villa, maid and luggage. Mayhap a night or two, and off they'd go again; never a word about their former journey, uncommunicative, rather quiet. These absences, together with the undemonstrative reappearances, used to hurt Fortune dreadfully. It gave her a clear proof of where she stood, exactly nowhere. The hurt had lessened with the years, and now she didn't care much. Like as not, they would drag her out of Eden for a month or two, for what true reason she never could quite fathom, unless it was that at times her mother liked to have the daughter near her as a foil.

At rare intervals she saw steel-eyed, grim-mouthed men wandering up and down before the gates of the Villa Fanny, but they never rang the bell, nor spoke to her when she passed them on the street. If she talked of these men, her mother and the Major would exchange amused glances, nothing more.

If, rightly or wrongly, she hated her mother, she despised her uncle, who was ever bringing to the villa men of money, but of coarse fiber, ostensibly with the view of marrying her off. But Fortune had her dreams, and she was quite content to wait.

There was one man more persistent than the others. Her mother called him Horace, which the Major mellowed into Hoddy. He was tall, blond, good-looking, a devil-may-care, educated, witty, amusing; and in evening dress he appeared to be what it was quite evident he had once been, a gentleman. At first she thought it strange that he should make her, instead of her mother, his confidante. As to what vocation he pursued, she did not know, for he kept sedulous guard over his tongue; but his past, up to that fork in the road where manhood says good-by to youth, was hers. And in this direction, clever and artful as the mother was, she sought in vain to wrest this past from her daughter's lips. To the mother, it was really necessary for her to know who this man really was, had been, knowing thoroughly as she did what he was now.

Persistent he undeniably was, but never coarse nor rude. Since that time he had come bade from the casino at Monte Carlo, much the worse for wine, she feared him; yet, in spite of this fear, she had for him a vague liking, a hazy admiration. Whatever his faults might be, she stood witness to his great physical strength and courage. He was the only man, among all those who appeared at the Villa Fanny and immediately vanished, who returned again. And he, too, soon grew to be a part of this unreal drama, arriving mysteriously one day and departing the next.

That a drama was being enacted under her eyes she no longer doubted; but it was as though she had taken her seat among the audience in the middle of the second act. She could make neither head nor tail to it.

Whenever she accompanied her mother upon these impromptu journeys, her character, or rather her attitude, underwent a change. She swept aside her dreams; she accepted the world as it was, saw things as they were; laughed, but without merriment; jested, but with the venomous point. It was the reverse of her real character to give hurt to any living thing, but during these forced marches, as the Major humorously termed them, and such they were in truth, she could no more stand against giving the cruel stab than, when alone in her garden, she could resist the tender pleasure of succoring a fallen butterfly. She was especially happy in finding weak spots in her mother's armor, and she never denied herself the thrust. Mrs. Chedsoye enjoyed these sharp encounters, for it must be added that she gave as good as she took, and more often than not her thrusts bit deeper and did not always heal.

Fortune never asked questions relative to the family finances. If she harbored any doubts as to their origin, to the source of their comparative luxury, she never put these into speech.

She had never seen her father, but she had often heard him referred to as "that brute" or "that fool" or "that drunken imbecile." If a portrait of him existed, Fortune had not yet seen it. She visited his lonely grave once a year, in the Protestant cemetery, and dreamily tried to conjure up what manner of man he had been. One day she plied her old Italian nurse with questions.

"Handsome? Yes, but it was all so long ago, *cara mia*, that I can not describe him to you."

"Did he drink?" Behind this question there was no sense of moral obloquy as applying to the dead.

"Sainted Mary! didn't all men drink their very souls into purgatory those unreligious days?"

"Had he any relatives?"

"I never heard of any."

"Was he rich?"

"No; but when the signora, your mother, married him she thought he was."

It was not till later years that Fortune grasped the true significance of this statement. It illumined many pages. She dropped all investigations, concluding wisely that her mother, if she were minded to speak at all, could supply only the incidents, the details.

It was warm, balmy, like May in the northern latitudes. Women wore white dresses and carried sunshades over their shoulders. A good band played airs from the new light-operas, and at one side of the grand-stand were tea-tables under dazzling linen. Fashion was out. Not all her votaries enjoyed polo, but it was absolutely necessary to pretend that they did. When they talked they discussed the Spanish dancer who paraded back and forth across the tea-lawn. They discussed her jewels, her clothes, her escort, and quite frankly her morals, which of the four was by all odds the most popular theme. All agreed that she was handsome in a bold way. This modification invariably distinguishes the right sort of women from the wrong sort, from which there is no appeal to a higher court. They could well afford to admit of her beauty, since the dancer was outside what is called the social pale, for all that her newest escort was a prince *incognito*. They also discussed the play at bridge, the dullness of this particular season, the possibility of war between England and Germany. And some one asked others who were the two well-gowned women down in front, sitting on either side of the young chap in pearl-grey. No one knew. Mother and daughter, probably. Anyhow, they knew something about good clothes. Certainly they weren't ordinary tourists. They had seen What's-his-name tip his hat; and this simple act would pass any one into the inner shrine, for the general was not promiscuous. There, the first-half was over. All down for tea! Thank goodness!

George was happy. He was proud, too. He saw the glances, the nods of approval. He basked in a kind of sunshine that was new. What an ass he had been all his life! To have been afraid of women just because he was Percival Algernon! What he should have done was to have gone forth boldly, taken what pleasures he found, and laughed with the rest of them.

There weren't two other women in all Cairo to compare with these two. The mother, shapely, elegant, with the dark beauty of a high-class Spaniard, possessing humor, trenchant comment, keen deduction and application; worldly, cynical, high-bred. The student of nations might have tried in vain to place her. She spoke the French of the Parisians, the Italian of the Florentines, the German of the Hanoverians, and her English was the envy of Americans and the wonder of the Londoners. The daughter fell behind her but little, but she was more reserved. The worldly critic called this good form: no daughter should try to outshine her widowed mother.

As Fortune sat beside the young collector that afternoon, she marveled why they had given him Percival Algernon. Jones was all right, solid and substantial, but the other two turned it into ridicule. Still, what was the matter with Percival Algernon? History had given men of these names mighty fine things to accomplish. Then why ridicule? Was it due to the perverted angle of vision created by wits and humorists in the comic weeklies, who were eternally pillorying these unhappy prefixes to ordinary cognomens? And why this pillorying? She hadn't studied the subject sufficiently to realize that the business of the humorist is not so much to amuse as to warn persons against becoming ridiculous. And Percival Algernon Jones was all of that. It resolved itself into a matter of values, then. Had his surname been Montmorency, Percival Algernon would have fitted as a key to its lock. She smiled. No one but a fond mother would be guilty of such a crime. And if she ever grew to know him well enough, she was going to ask him all about this mother.

What interest had her own mother in this harmless young man? Oh, some day she would burst through this web, this jungle; some day she would see beyond the second act! What then? she never troubled to ask herself; time enough when the moment arrived.

"I had an interesting adventure last night, a most interesting one," began George, who was no longer the shy, blundering recluse. They were on the way back to town.

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