BORROWED FROM THE NIGHT

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By Anna C. Minogue

CHAPTER XX

George Martins sat for a moment in deep thought; then, he ordered his horse and rode to Lexington. It was early in the day and the streets were deserted, save for a few negroes and white laborers. He passed through the quiet town until he reached the hotel. Here he dismounted and entering said to a porter whom he met:

"Did Colonel Ingram get down from Frankfort last night?"

"No, sah! Least a-ways, he didn't come hyah," returned the boy. Mr. Martins made a gesture of annoyance. It was evident that he was at a loss to account for the non-arrival of his colleague and friend. After a moment, he again spoke: "How long until the stage arrives? An hour? My man doesn't open up my office until 8 o'clock, and I have some important letters to write; can you find me a room, Dave, where I won't be disturbed?"

"Dah ain't a spah room in de house, sah, 'ceptin' de fron't pahlah upstahs, an' de Spanish genulm'n's usin' dat. But he won't rize foh an houah yet, an' ef yoh cah to write yoh lettahs dah, Mistah Mahtin, I'll show yoh up, sah."

Mr. Martins seemed to hesitate for a moment, then said, "See if the parlor is ready. Senor Martinez may have risen early this morning."

The boy obeyed and presently returned with the information that the gentleman had not left his sleeping apartment. Mr. Martins went upstairs, and the negro, after seeing him seated, closed the door, and returned to his sweeping. When he knew himself to be free from surveillance, Mr. Martins crossed the room to the door which connected the parlor with Senor Martinez' sleeping-room, and tapping on it, said, in a low voice, "I wish to see you immediately!"

Even as he spoke, the lock was turned, and the gentleman was beside him. They greeted each other coolly, but George Martins saw, with a sense of shock and surprise, the ravages which harrowing thoughts, remorse and suspense had wrought upon his companion. If he had needed confirmation of the truth of his son's story, he found it on this face.

"In less than an hour, the stage from Frankfort arrives," began George Martins; "when I must go down to deliver these letters," taking two bulky envelopes from his pocket, "which the porter supposes I am up here to write. I have business with you, as of course you have surmised. It must be dispatched in that length of time."

"There is a minute of the fifty wasted already by your preliminaries," remarked the other, who was fiercely resenting his visitor's too close scrutiny of his altered face. "My American despatch is as ready for my use, sir, as is my Spanish leisure."

Mr. Martins smiled and wasted another of the minutes in silent observation of his first-born; then he said, lowering his voice: "It has been discovered. I have come to warn you."

The hearer was about to utter a haughty interrogatory, when George Martins lifted an authoritative hand:

"American despatch, remember, not Spanish leisure—or lies! Before 9.30 o'clock the sheriff and his deputies will be in from their country homes. This house will be surrounded, and you will find yourself in the clutches of the law, charged with the attempt to assassinate the Democratic leader, St. John Worthington. Your life, then, will not be worth this!" and he lifted from the table a candle, burnt down to the socket. All the blood left his hearer's face, but instantly he regained command of himself and smiled his bitter smile.

"What's your game now, my father?" he sneered.

"I wish to save your life. I do not want that document to be found upon your dead body. Now listen to me. This is Saturday, which brings to this town the people from the country and from adjoining counties. Among them there will be wild and lawless men, with as little regard for human life—"

"As Mr. George Martins or his Indian son," supplied the hearer, and at the words Martins' face darkened.

"If," continued Mr. Martins, "it had not been proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that Mr. Frisbie was innocent of this deed, it would have been the duty of the sheriff to have taken him yesterday to Frankfort. To have left him in Lexington jail to-day would have been criminally to expose his life. You are unknown here, except as a friend of mine, I, according to their light, would profit by the death of St. John Worthington. They will not see in you, as the citizens of this town do, a Spanish gentleman, but a hired assassin, brought here by me, or other members of my party, to remove their leader, and our hated foe. I need not tell you that human nature, unrestrained, is the same, whether under a red skin or a white one. Revenge makes men mad. I tell you, you will never see the rise of another sun, if the men come to town to-day in numbers and begin to indulge in liquor."

There could be no mistaking the sincerity and emotion of George Martins' voice and words; but what they aroused in the heart of his hearer it was not easy to say. He was beginning to regain his habitual calm or indifference, which intercourse with men ever brought to the surface. It was only when he was alone that he was long in tumult.

"This is a queer harangue, and, if you will pardon me for saying it, a rather weak attempt to frighten me. I see no purpose in the one, no need of the other. Mr. Worthington has not spoken, I am sure. He will never speak until she gives him permission—and," his voice broke completely, "she will never speak."

"True," said George Martins, "you have closed her lips as effectively as you did her mother's."

"Is she dead?" He gasped over the question, and George Martins, making him to see that he noted his emotion, replied:

"Not yet. She was only breathing this morning."

"Mon Dieu!" Then, as if angered by the holy name, spoken in the language of his saintly teachers, he broke out: "And how the devil do you know anything about what happened! What brought you here, you cunning dog, with your web of lies?"

Mr. Martins was getting his "American despatch" with a vengeance; but the clock on the mantelpiece showed that ten minutes of the fifty were spent, and profitlessly.

"Before I say more, let me ask you to answer this question. Did I not deal candidly with you in our last meeting? Did I deceive you? Did I make any false statement? I am come to deal as candidly with you this morning. I do not deny that my own interests were the prime motives which sent me here; but you must believe that I am sincere, that I am speaking the truth, else I am wasting time; and, unless you follow my advice, the time thus wasted you require to prepare for your death. It is known upon reliable authority that you persecuted Miss Martinez by your attentions, and when she refused to see you, you sent her a threatening message by the servant. Mrs. Halpin, who overheard you, will confirm the evidence of the negro. You were observed by several to watch for Miss Martinez. On that particular evening you were seen to enter the street half an hour before the discovery of the bodies had been made. It is known that you are absent from the hotel for that length of time. Worthington has never said that he did not recognize the man who struck him, but that he was unknown to him. You and he are not acquainted, which is his meaning of the word. When asked directly, he will not equivocate. If you were certain of a trial before judge and jury, the case might not be a severe one. St. John Worthington may not prosecute you. But," and he paused effectively, "knowing the excited feelings of the people, I am convinced that this is a matter which St. John Worthington's friends will take out of his hands and the law's hands. And," he paused again, longer this time, "should you escape the wrath of those admirers and the natural resentment of Mr. Worthington, there is still Preston Martins to be reckoned with. Let Teresa die and he will pursue you throughout the earth to bring you to justice, for you will have taken from him something far dearer than life, the woman he loves — his affianced wife."

"Was it he who discovered this?" The words were fairly hissed out, and though he feared for the white son with the red son's enmity against him, the father answered.

"Yes."

The red of anger mounted to the face of the listener, leaving the scar on the nose outlined in dull white, but he gave no expression to the passion which was tearing his soul, and instead, asked coolly:

"And confided his knowledge to you?"

"And his intentions also," supplemented the father.

"They dare not arrest me! I am a subject of the Spanish King."

"Are you? Residence in a country, alone, does not make a man a subject of its government," suggested Mr. Martins, and by the blackness that showed for an instant upon the face before him, he shrewdly guessed that his clever son had forgotten to secure the protection of the country he so admired. "Yet, even if you could produce the necessary evidence, and had a body of Spanish soldiery to protect you, in addition, what effect, think you, would that have upon an angry mob? They would say hang him first, and then let the country settle with Spain afterwards."

Martins paused, and his son sat in silence, his eyes fixed on the wall. His observation of the people during the last few days, assisted by the recollection of many scenes witnessed in Cuba and the South American states, made him know that George Martins spoke truthfully when he warned him that it is difficult to restrain men, maddened by what they considered the outcome of plotting against their rights. He knew that if arrested his life was only worth the strength of the jail-door—and he had seen the jail! But was he to be arrested? He had only this man's word for it and no means of having it confirmed unless he chose to run the risk of seeing it disproved by the non arrival of the sheriff. He had sense to see that the way of prudence led him from Lexington, yet his heart was held to the spot. But free, he could plan and execute; imprisoned even if he escaped peril, he was handicapped.

"I will spare my hospitable country a future reckoning with Spain," he said. "Although I know that I am playing into your hand by absence and consequent delay, I will still do it. That stage goes from here to Paris, I believe, thence to Maysville on the Ohio? It will carry me away from her; but remember that it will also carry me back on another day."

He was turning hastily away to make ready for the stage coach, but George Martins interposed.

"Our interview is not yet over. I am not so foolish as to make myself accessory to my enemy's crime by warning him of his danger, without some powerful incentive. You are virtually a prisoner. You can purchase your freedom with that document which you carry in your pocket!"

Then, under the lightning flash of certitude, all was plain to his hearer. He saw the truth in every word that his father had spoken and knew that he could secure liberty only in the relinquishment of his birth-right For a moment he stood appalled. Fate was still on the white man's side, and he unclosed his lips and swore such an oath, that, godless man though he was, it chilled the blood in the veins of George Martins. Then he stood perfectly still and looked upon his father, who remembering that he was alone with this enraged creature in a sleeping house, quailed.

"I've heard you!" at length the son commanded, "Now, do you hear me! I am caged, whether by your machinations, or your son's, I do not know. My birthright, the sacrifice of my revenge, is exchange for my release! The former leaves him in the possession of wealth which rightly should be shared with me; the latter secures you immunity from disgrace and punishment. Sooner than yield, I'll take my chance of trial by a judge, if I can get it; death by a mob if it must be. But whether a judge sentence me, or a mob hang me, be assured that I will not depart with my revenge unsated. In the court-room or under the gallows tree, I shall proclaim the story of your shame, and demand of those who condemn me that they shall punish you as they will have punished me."

For another moment he gazed with hatred on the face of his father; then turned and walked slowly back to his bedroom. The clock on the mantlepiece ticked out the minutes; sounds of re-awakening life came from the various apartments; then, over the morning air broke the clear tinkle of bells, which announced the coming of the stage-coach. It would wait at the hotel twenty minutes for breakfast, after which time the long journey would be continued. Five minutes later, the bells ceased at the door beneath, and then the porter mounted the stairs with the information for Mr. Martins that his friend had not arrived, and to remind him that the coach would leave in a short time. The door closed and again Mr. Martins was alone. The clock ticked away five minutes; ten minutes; the stage-driver blew his horn, but still George Martins hoped that love of life was stronger in that maddened heart than desire for revenge. As the last notes of the clearly-blown whistle died upon the morning air, the door unclosed, and his son stood before him. There were tears in his eyes and sobs in his voice, as he said:

"Revenge is sweet, but life is sweeter. And Fate is still on your side! I am handing over my all, my all, to save the life you gave me. I did not ask to come, neither did you seek my permission. My life has been crimsoned by crime—crime of your fostering, my father! And my future will be cursed because of your unrelenting cruelty! Here it is, my all, my birthright, my inheritance!" and he took the leather case from his pocket, opened it, drew out the precious document, gazed upon it through his tears; then replaced it in the case, and held it toward his father.

"Am I craven to love life better than my rights?" he asked, bitterly. "Then look into your own heart and there see where I get that base spirit!"

He thrust the packet into his father's hand and turned abruptly to the inner room for his hat and valise. As he passed the elder man on the way to the stairs, and noted the poorly concealed joy and triumph of that hated face, he paused for a moment, and hissed out:

"We part with victory on your side. But remember that now I am a secret foe where before I was an open one. We shall meet again."

He hurried downstairs and meeting the surprised proprietor announced his intention of paying a flying trip to the neighboring town of Paris. "I will be back the day after to-morrow," he added. "Yes, a cup of coffee, that is all I have time for," as mine host ushered the polite Spaniard into the dining-room, while outside the driver was blowing his last horn. The host's orders sent the servants flying hither and thither. It was a pretty state of affairs that a guest, and such a guest, should have to rush off in this fashion, after scalding his throat by hastily swallowing the hot coffee, because an unreasonable stage-driver insisted upon starting at eight o'clock. In the meanwhile the porter was hurrying upstairs to remind Mr. Martins that the stage was leaving, and if his letters were to go by it they must be given to him that very instant. "Yes, boy, just through!" and Mr. Martins hastily stamped the important looking envelopes and thrust them into the black hand. If the porter's usually observant eyes had had time to take in details, they would have seen that the ink had not been uncorked nor the pens moved from their places. When the door closed after the negro, George Martins took the stopper from the inkstand, and dipping in a pen left it standing in the bottle. Then he rose and looking down upon the street saw the gaily painted stage-coach drawn by six horses, saw the negro give the two letters, saw the hotel keeper unfasten the door and assist Senor Martinez into the vehicle. The driver cracked his whip, setting the bells a-jingling as the horses with one accord started into a quick trot down the deserted street. Then the watcher turned from the window. He clasped his hands over the document in his pocket and all the joy of his heart showed itself on his handsome face. Free! free! It mattered not whether Teresa lived or died; he need never again know a pang of fear; he would go down to his grave blessed by his wife's love and untortured by their son's abhorrence. As he was about to take his chair, the thought suddenly occurred to him that the wily departed guest might have left a criminating document behind. He noiselessly unfastened the door and entered the bedroom, but there was no scrap of paper visible, not even a writing implement. He noticed, however, that a candle was burning on the stand. Mechanically he extinguished it and returned to his place by the table in the front parlor, waiting the hour that brought in his servant to make ready his office. As the clock struck nine, he left the hotel, unseen. On his walk to his office, a horseman passed him on the street, the sheriff, to meet whom he knew his son was then riding over the white country road. Alone in his rooms he drew the precious document from his pocket. He thought he would reread it; but as his eyes met the first sentences, the paper fell from his hands. Instead of the carefully penned letters, he saw his cousin's white dead face. and the white dead face of his cousin's wife. Then another face rose from the paper, the face of Teresa Martinez, also white and dead. Two other faces crowded in—the living, tortured faces of his sons as he had seen them that morning. He bounded from his chair, snatched up the document, and went to the wide mouthed fire place. He knelt on the hearth and laid it upon the scraps of papers which the servant had forgotten to destroy. He lighted a match, applied it to the paper, and watched the tiny flames curl around it, and as he watched he noticed that the writing which was uppermost was the writing of his Indian son; those condemnatory, revengeful words which were traced with the fast congealing blood on the frozen plains of Raisin. The suction of the air up the chimney fanned the flames and in less than five seconds all that remained of Gerald Martins' will and the Indian's poor claim to his rights was a little heap of ashes.

TO BE CONTINUED

A FRIEND INDEED

The car started with a jerk, and Mr. Boyton's legs failed him. He sat down abruptly on the street and gazed after the car with a pained and puzzled smile till a man caught him under the arm and, lifting him up, put him on his feet.

"Hurt?" inquired the man, handing Mr. Boyton his silk hat, and leading him to the pavement.

"No, just a bit surprised," Mr. Boyton answered, recovering his breath, and donning his hat. "Many thanks," he added.

"Welcome," said the man, and went on his way.

Mr. Boyton brushed some of the dust—fortunately the weather was dry—from his frock coat, and turned into the side street which, on leaving the car, he had been told was a short cut to the offices that were his destination. He had not proceeded far, however, ere he realized that, although uninjured, he was considerably shaken by his fall, and desired to rest for a few minutes. At sixty-one a man is apt to fall heavily, even if one be the reverse of stout and apparently in the best of condition, as was Mr. Boyton.

A small, second-hand book shop suggested the retreat he sought, and he entered the doorway which a more burly individual would have found difficult of passage owing to the piled-up boxes of cheaply priced and more or less damaged volumes. After the glare of the street the light in the shop seemed dim, and Mr. Boyton looked about him for a few minutes ere he perceived a short counter on which stood a desk, and behind which he distinguished the bowed head of a man, probably, he thought, the proprietor. Mr. Boyton laid his hand on the back of a chair a little distance from the counter. "Don't let me disturb you, and pardon my intrusion," he said, pleasantly. "May I sit here for a little while? I had a slight fall outside just now, and it has rather shaken me. I only want a seat—nothing else."

The man behind the counter—a small person, gray-haired and pale—had risen, and stood holding a book, making a place with one of his fingers. For an instant he stared at Mr. Boyton, checked an exclamation and let his book drop. He stooped and groped for it, found it at last, and saying, "Certainly certainly, sir; take a seat," he resumed his own, and once more bowed his head.

Mr. Boyton expressed his thanks, and feeling no particular desire for conversation, apart from the fact that the book-seller appeared to be engrossed with his own affairs, he seated himself and fixed his attention on a company prospectus which he drew from his pocket, unaware that the bookseller several times raised his eyes to gaze earnestly, if stealthily, over the desk.

In ten minutes Mr. Boyton felt himself again, and rose to take his departure. "I am very much obliged to you," he said turning toward the counter. At first the bookseller appeared not to hear him. Then he raised his head as though politeness forced him to do so against his inclination.

"You're very welcome. Good day," he said quietly, and bent over his book again.

Mr. Boyton hesitated, said "Good-day" mechanically, and walked out of the shop. On the pavement he halted, and looked up at the board above the window and door—"James Carnachan, Bookseller."

"Good heavens!" he muttered, feeling even more shaken than by his recent mishap; "to think of finding him here! Jamie Carnachan!"

He turned to re-enter the shop, but abruptly changed his intention, and having hailed and secured a cab, was driven to the great offices where half a score of prosperous gentlemen sat around a large table waiting the advent of "Mr. Boyton of New York," whose signature would complete a financial deal calculated to increase still further their own prosperity and more than likely to wipe the names of a hundred or so less prosperous gentlemen from the map of commerce. The individuals round the table, it must, be mentioned, were anxious and fearful lest Mr. Boyton, whom none of them had met, should get the best of the bargain, as individuals are who want the best of the bargain for themselves, and they whispered virtuously, one with another, of his scruples and agreed that their own nation's interest be protected before everything.

They need, not, however, have excited themselves. Mr. Boyton arrived, drank a glass of water, and came to business, looking rather bored. The matter was carried through far more speedily than anyone had anticipated. The nation's interests were duly protected, and after Mr. Boyton's departure — he refused several luncheons on the plea of other engagements—the prosperous gentlemen congratulated one another and came to the conclusion that he was not nearly as smart as they had feared, in that he might easily have cleared another hundred thousand pounds on the transaction.

It was some minutes after Mr. Boyton left the shop ere the bookseller raised his head. But he had not been reading. He laid down the book, and took up the morning paper, turning the pages till he found the "Commercial Notes."

"Ay, ay," he murmured, presently. "It's just him. I was sure it was, though he didn't recognize me. No wonder—after nearly thirty years, and me with my gray beard. He's a great man now—a millionaire, so they say. . . . Ah! if—if my poor heart Beatrice had married him instead of me, she would have had—" He checked himself, and letting the paper slip to the floor, he dropped his head in his hands.

His shop boy, his only assistant, came in from dinner, whistling, and Carnachan rose, and with a nod to the youth, went slowly up the back stair to his modest dwelling.

"Is your mistress awake?" he asked a small but cheerful-featured maid who met him on the landing.

She replied in the affirmative, and he softly turned the handle of the door nearest him and entered the room smiling.

No passerby on the street below could have dreamed that the dingy building held such a chamber. It was furnished in exquisite taste and with all regard to comfort; bright, yet full of solace; orderly, but not stiffly so. Skillfully concealed were arrangements for regulating the lighting, temperature and ventilation, and noiseless blinds controlled the sunlight to a nicety. Every most modern contrivance for the promotion of human comfort and the prevention of irritation seemed to have a place in this room or in the smaller room adjoining, through the open door of which could be seen a little sturdy table on rubber-tired wheels, covered with a snowy cloth, and daintily set with silver, cystal and flowers, as if awaiting the laying of a repast.

James Carnachan closed the door behind him and crossed the room to the bed where his wife had lain for nigh on ten years.

"Well, old lady," he said cheerily, taking the hand she gave him, and bending to kiss her, "you were sleeping the last time I was up."

She smiled back to him. What a lovely woman she must have been!

"Yes, my dear, I did manage to steal an hour; you're bound to catch me napping now and then, aren't you? Are you ready for your dinner?" she asked, laying her fingers on a bell-button convenient to her hand.

"In five minutes, Beatrice," he replied seating himself by the bedside.

"How's business to-day?" she inquired.

"Capital!" he rubbed his hands together and looked at her with the air of a man who just made a good bargain for himself.

"You're a wonderful man, Jamie," she said, with a sigh of contentment. "I don't know how you've kept things going so splendidly all these years, and I am such a drag upon you."

"Whist!" he murmured quickly. "There is nothing wonderful about it when a man has a good steady business and plenty of wealthy clients."

"And an endless knowledge of books."

"Well, if you like," he allowed, with a laugh. "Of course I ought to know a little by this time," he went on, "enough at any rate, to take advantage of most buyers and sellers."

"I don't believe you've ever taken advantage of anyone in all your life," she said warmly.

"Oh, haven't I? It's all you know, old lady. You've surely forgotten that little bit of business I told you about last week—the library. Eh?"

"No, I haven't forgotten. It was a splendid profit you made, I know; but, all the same, my dear man, I don't believe you took advantage of Mr.—Mr.—"

"Carlton," said Carnachan very quietly.

"Surely that wasn't the name. No, it was Fairley."

Her husband looked a little confused. "So it was. Funny my forgetting," he said hurriedly. "Well, I think I'll have a bite now."

She rang the bell, remarking as she did so: "It is funny your forgetting the name of such a good client. I'm afraid you've too much to think about, Jamie. I'm a sad burden."

Carnachan regarded his wife very tenderly and reproachfully. "Please don't say that again, Beatrice."

Her lip trembled as she stretched her thin hand toward his.

There was a slight sound of dishes in the adjoining room, and presently the maid wheeled in the table.

"Now Jamie," said Mrs. Carnachan, when the maid had gone, "I ordered a small bottle of the good claret, and you've got to take it. You've been looking rather white lately, and I'm a little tired of having all the luxuries myself."

Carnachan protested that he had never felt better and that he did not feel inclined for wine at the moment, also that it was creating unnecessary expense.

"You can well afford it," she returned, "so that's no excuse. Take it to please me."

"Of course I can afford it," he said cheerfully, and he drew the cork forthwith.

The meal was just finished when word was brought that a gentleman wished to see Mr. Carnachan in the shop.

"Here's another thousand a year!" said the bookseller, gayly, as he rose to obey the summons. "I'll be up again at soon as possible, dear." He kissed his wife and left the room briskly.

But going slowly down the stair he thought, "If it's the man from Causton Brothers I can't possibly pay him." At the foot of the stair he halted, and peeped cautiously into the shop. A tall, frock-coated figure, not altogether unfamiliar was standing near the door, apparently engrossed in a box of old sermons. Carnachan beckoned to the lad, who came to him at once.

"Who is the gentleman, Henry?"

"A Mr. Boyton. Said he wanted to see you particular, sir. Didn't mind waiting."

Carnachan's mind went back to the brief but bitter quarrel of thirty years ago that had ended only with his engagement to Beatrice and Boyton's sudden departure to the States. Before the quarrel the two young men had been as David and Jonathan.

"Bill Boyton," sighed the bookseller to himself. "I'm glad he has done so well." And he became lost in a reverie till his lad, wondering, inquired:

"Will you see the gentleman, sir?"

At that moment another person entered the shop and advanced to the counter, where he seated himself and drew from his pocket a slip of bluish paper. The bookseller winced. "Tell Mr. Boyton," he whispered, "that—that I can't see him, but that—that—No, that's all. Just say I can't see him."

Was it shame or pride that decided this answer?

He watched Henry deliver the message, and it seemed as if the tall figure were bowed as it passed through the doorway. When he had at last got rid of his other visitor, who left with a threatening air, he asked Henry if Mr. Boyton had said anything.

"Said he was sorry—very sorry—not to have seen you, sir, as he's going back to New York soon."

"Was that all, Henry?"

"That was all, sir," said the lad.

He kept hanging about his employer, however, until the latter asked if he wanted anything.

"I—I wanted to speak to you, sir, about—about leaving."

"Ah! Go on, Henry."

"It—It's not me that wants to leave you, sir, the lad said, awkwardly; "it's father. He thinks I haven't enough to do here, and I don't get experience."

Mr. Carnachan nodded. "Things have been very quiet lately," he said somewhat apologetically, "but—well, perhaps your father is right, but—but don't leave me for a little while yet, my boy. I won't keep you long, and—you might run out and get me an evening paper."

Henry nodded, an somehow he was compelled to spend several minutes behind a bookcase before he felt fit to be seen on the street.

Carnachan was not left long to himself. A carriage stopped at his door, and soon he was greeting the occupant.

"Ah, doctor; I didn't expect to see you again to-day. Are you going upstairs."

"No. I was passing, and thought I would look you up for a moment. Your wife mentioned this morning that she thought I ought to prescribe you a tonic, but I didn't get the chance of telling you then."

"Oh, I'm not needing a tonic."

"Better let me give you something just to please your wife," said the doctor smiling, but eyeing him carefully.

"Give me a hogshead, then," said Carnachan with a laugh. Then suddenly his face changed, and he led the doctor into the recess at the foot of the stairs. "Doctor," he whispered, in agonized appeal.

As though he were a father dealing with a boy in distress the doctor laid his arm round Carnachan's shoulders. "Don't—don't ask me to say it again, dear fellow," he said huskily.

"Only a few days," murmured Carnachan.

The doctor cleared his throat.

"Make them as happy for her as you have made the past years," he said gently, "and thank God that you've been in the position to make the past years what they have been, for I tell you this, Carnachan, that of all the women I have known, your wife, with all her affliction, stands out as the very happiest."

"Do you mean that, doctor?"

"I do. I can offer you no greater comfort. I have done all I could, but it is as nothing to what you have done to keep her with you, by your loving kindness, and by the way you have surrounded her with every possible comfort and beauty and cheer. Now, I trust you to be strong. Realize that no human being, with all the world's means at his command, could have done more than you have done."

In a little while the doctor returned to his carriage, and Carnachan seated himself behind his desk and stared about him at the shelves which were stocked with volumes of little value, many of them mere rubbish. The strong room was empty. A dozen years ago its contents had been valued at thousands of pounds. To-day business was dead. Year by year it had shrunk and withered, and now the book-seller had nothing to offer either collectors or sellers.

"Thank God, it lasted long enough," he thought. "Perhaps it did help to keep her here a little longer than they said she could stay." His wife had outlived the most definite medical prophecies by nearly three years.

Henry laid the evening paper before him, and he took it with him when he went upstairs to tell his wife another grand stroke of business.

"But I mustn't forget the names again," he said to himself gravely. "I'll make it Hodge this time, and stick to it."

It was the last sweet lie he told her.

Two days later, as he sat by the bedside of his wife, who still lingered, a note was brought to him. It was from the lad downstairs and inclosed was a card. The note informed him that Mr. Boyton had called several times, and the card was penciled on the back with, "Can I be of any assistance in any way."

For the moment Carnachan was tempted to send back a word of friendship, but his pride flashed up.

"He has been making inquiries and has discovered my financial state. It's kind of him, but what can his money do? I don't want it. When all's said and done, I've been the gainer and he the loser in this life. I can't take his charity." And Carnachan sent down a polite message to the effect that he was much obliged, but could not see Mr. Boyton.

A week passed and the beautiful chamber was vacant.

The bookseller sat at his desk, sheets of paper covered with titles and figures before him. He had been there for hours working patiently at a statement of his affairs, and now he had come to the conclusion that he was solvent, but no more. His own figures, however, did not concern him; he had not thought of it.

An hour ago Henry had departed never to return, and it was probable that the shutters he had put up would not be taken down again in James Carnachan's time. His business was at an end.

The light failed, and at last the bookseller laid down his pen and bowed his head in his arms.

"Oh, God, I'm very lonely," he whispered.

It grew dark, save for a glow from a peep of gas near the door, which the boy had lit before he left. The outer door had been shut but not locked, and the breeze had swung it partly open.

A tall figure entered the shop, and the bookseller raised his head.

Mr. Boyton approached the desk almost shyly.

"Forgive me intruding," he said nervously, "and forgive me being so persistent. May I go on?"

Carnachan bowed.

"I—I haven't come to offer help," Boyton continued. "I feel there is nothing I can do to help you at such a time. But I've come to—to ask you for help."

"My help?" muttered the other in astonishment.

"I'm lonely," whispered Boyton.

"Lonely?"

"Yes. I've had no real friend for thirty years, and, oh, Jamie! I haven't the memory that you have—the memory of a good woman—a good wife."

Carnachan hid his face again, and, there was a long silence.

Boyton broke it. "I've been a busy man, a successful man, if you like—and that's all. I've booked my passage for New York by tomorrow's steamer, but I wish I were done with the business there. If I had only one friend — one friend—it's the loneliness, Jamie, the loneliness—"

"Bill!" cried Carnachan in a choked voice, and stretched his hand toward his old friend.—J. J. Bell, in the Sunday Magazine.