POOR DOCUMENT

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THE HOUSE OF DECEIT - BY BROUGHTON BRANDENBURG

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"I would surely shoot if there was anything to shoot. But there ain't nothin,' and, I tell you, I am scared. Yes, sir; I wil fight a grizzly with a pine shingle, but now I am scared through and through."

It was a big, bold voice that was speaking. Some one had come into my office while I was out, and this I heard just as I was about to open the door on my return. Two men turned toward me as I entered. One was a little bespectacled man, with a beard like an Airedale terrier, and the other was a tall, lank fellow in baggy clothes, plainly a Westerner. He had beetling brows, piercing black eyes, hair closely pasted down, bold cheek bones and nose. The color of his face was a ruddy brown and huge tanned hands protruded from his sleeves, toying with a broad brimmed white hat.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," said I.

"Good afternoon, sir," stammered the little man; "I suppose you are Mr. Duncan. My name is Tollaby—Doctor Horace Nightingale Tollaby, physician and surgeon, and this is Mr. James Bellows"——

"Jim Bellows, of the Shoshone, foreman of the Bow outfit, and I'll be tickled to split if I ever git back to the open and kin git my mind back."

"Absurd, Bellows, absurd; you haven't lost your mind"——

"Now, don't try to fool me; you know I have, and you've jest brought me in here to git me off your hands."

There were none of the usual signs of insanity about him—in fact, he was about as fine and healthy a physical specimen as one would care to see.

"Pray pardon this unbusinesslike and unprofessional approach to the subject, Mr. Duncan. Mr. Bellows has had a very unusual experience—indeed, an alarming, an inexplicable experience. He came in to consult me about his health a few minutes ago, and I brought him here to you, as it is not his mind or body that is affected. It is all so very queer, yes, yes, so very queer, I hardly know what to say. Suppose you tell Mr. Duncan just what has happened to you, Mr. Bellows.

"Well, sir, now, I hadn't had a drink, and I'm purty steady of eye and hand any time. If cartridges didn't cost so durn much I could make a livin' splittin' kindlin' wood with a gun. But, by the jumpin' Judas, when you set talkin' to a purty woman she steps behind you and the next second you see her comin' down stairs in front of you. When you see her go up them same stairs, the only stairs in the house, and as soon as she's out of sight, she's standing beside you. When you start to leave the house, gittin' out as quick as you kin, and you have to go down stairs to git out when you didn't go up no stairs to git in, I reckon there's something bust loose with you, now ain't there?"

I took a second look at him. His eye was bright and clear, and there was not the minutest sign of a mental ailment.

"How is that?" said I, a thrill of interest sweeping over me, "what sort of a puzzle are you telling me?"

"Forgive my suggesting, my dear Bellows, that you begin at the beginning—let us say when you got to New York. It is most amazing, most amazing, Mr. Duncan."

"Well, sir, mister, I come to New York to git a wife. A Mrs. John Johnson, a widder, living at two hundred Tompkins square, advertised in the paper for a man and I writ her. We hit it up rather lively in the writin' line in the past three months, all the boys helpin' me fix up poems and flowery things and contributin' to a tin can all what they used to buck the tiger with, to send to her to buy herself knick-knacks with. I come on to git her and marry her on St. Valentine's Day. She'd sent her picture and I tell ye what, she a hummer. I got into the depot at night, got a shave and changed my collar and driv down to her house in a hack. A nigger girl let me in and told me to sit down in the parlor. I set there and was gittin' kinda anxious, not hearin' or seein' nobody and not havin' said who I was, what I come for or who I wanted to see, and I got to walkin' around. The stairs come right down with a twist into the front room and it 'peared all dark and quiet upstairs where the nigger girl had gone. The back room was a little one beside the great big front one, and it was a mighty dark, gloomy place, and there was no doors or winders to it, only the one goin' in from the front room.

"Well, sir, after I'd took in most everything and was 'lowin' the Widder Johnson must have quite a bit of proppputty I goes and sets down facin' the door to the little room, which I'd just come out of, and which I knowed there warn't nobody in.

"'Good evenin', sir,' says somebody.

"By the holy mackerel, just comin' out of the little room was a fine tall girl in a black dress, low cut, with no sleeves, and she was enough to take your wind jest to look at her, let alone her comin' out of the room she wasn't in a minit before and didn't have no way of gittin' into. I know she didn't slip into the door and then come out again.

"'I come to see Mrs. Johnson. Is she at home?' says I with a feelin' in my throat as if I'd jest drawed four kings to an ace.

"'Why, no, you must have the wrong number; this is 200 Tompkins square; there is no Mrs. Johnson here, and never has been.'

"I begun to git a little oneasy and then a little hot under the collar.

"'By jimminy crickets,' I've sent forty letters here to her and got forty lovin' answers, and them letters has brung purty clost to two thousand dollars from me and the boys. Now, lady, I want to have a half minnit talk with the Widder John Johnson.'

"Then she gits mad and we have it up and down, but first thing you know she laughs and tells me she is very sorry but somebody has been foolin' me and if I will excuse her a minute she will git me the address of a friend of hers who wilk find the Widder Johnson and git my money back. Beefore I can say yes or no she steps into the little room, droppin' the curtain over the door, and I hear her walkin' acrost the floor, and then quick as that I hear somebody at the top of the stairs behind me and swing around to see her comin' down with a card in her hand. Reckon I must have looked queer, mebbe a little bumfuzzled, for says she:—'What's the matter, Mister Bellows?'

"'How the Lord Harry did you git upstairs from that room that's only got that one door?'

"She looks at me kinda funny, as if she was scared too, and says:—

"'Why, my dear sir, you are mistook. walked down again.'

"'You're a liar!' says I.' beggin' your I walked upstairs before your eyes and pardon for plain talk.'

"'Sir,' says she, 'leave this house instantly or I shall call the police.'

"'I was thinkin' of gittin' a constable myself,' says I. 'You can't pull no wool over my eyes."

"'You are a contemptible bully, just a big rowdy,' says she. 'Step into this room and I will show you that there is absolutely no way I could have got upstairs.'

"In we goes, and she and me takes a good, careful look. Them walls was solid and blank, jest brick and plaster, and there was only the one door, I kept feelin' funnier and funnier.

"'Now, don't you feel ashamed of yourself,' she says, actin' as if she was goin' to cry. I got to thinkin' that the Widder Johnson wasn't one, two, ayteen 'longside of her, an' I reckon I said somethin' of the sort and mebbe a little bit more. She didn' sass me back, but turns round square to face me and lookin' me in the eye the way I never seen no woman look before she says:

"'You are the first real man I have seen in a long time.'

"The devil only knows what I might a said jes then, but she held back the curtain as if she was goin' out and by the jumpin' Judas we was upstairs.

"I knowed right well I hadn' come up no stairs and somethin' told me it was time to be goin' and out I piles and down the stairs, I seen my hat on a cheer, where I'd left it down stairs and out a doors I goes and I hit it away up the street.

"I run till I begun to wonder where I was goin' to, then I seen a gin mill in front of me and I went in. The barkeep ducked when he seen me come in the front door. I must have been bad to look at. The lookin' glass behind the bar showed me up white as a sheep and worse scared. I got about seven sections of the juice of paralysis into my system and was feelin' enough better to begin to tell the barkeep some of my affliction, and first think I knowed I was cayntin' down the line spendin' the ticket money back to the Shonhone for the Widder Johnson and me. And now this is queer. Somewhere and somehow I run acrost her picter. All I know is that it was as big as that winder and had a lot of light on it. Dang my foolhide if I'd only a been straight enough to spot the place, but all I know is that I seen it. I woke up in a police station this morning. They give my gun and some of my money back to me, and I went out and set down on the curbstone to think. I never heard such an awful argument with myself before, but when I looked up I seen Doc Tollaby's sign acrost the street and here I be."

There was a strange conviction about the man's story. He was of a type which I have found to be honest as the day is long and though I must admit that I was incredulous at first, each succeeding incident that he related, while it mystified me all the more deeply, made me more and more certain that I was being ushered into one of the most remarkable affairs of my professional experience.

Bellows was watching me, with anxiety depicted in every feature. I was revolving the facts in my mind before I spoke.

"Didn't I tell ye, Doc," said the big fellow turning to the doctor and breaking the silence himself. "He knows I'm crazy if you don't."

"Surely, Mr. Duncan——" Dr. Tollaby began to protest.

"Wait, wait, gentlemen! This matter you have laid before me is too astounding for me to jump at conclusions. My associates are out of the city. I must act in this independently, but I will say that in my opinion you are not insane, Mr. Bellows, and I am also sure that you have told the truth, but I believe you have been outrageously tricked. I shall be very busy until this evening, but if you will meet me here at eight o'clock tonight we will investigate this lady and her house. Can you come, Dr. Tollaby?

"I! I come? Dear me, I must have a dozen engagements that would prevent ——" The old gentleman was obviously on the verge of terror at the thought. Even Bellows grinned.

"Very well, Mr. Bellows, here is my card. You can find your way here no doubt. Get something to eat and get calmed down. We will see what is behind this mystery."

After a gruelling day I went up to the club, had my dinner and returned to the office. The pressure of other affairs had forced the Tompkins square case out of my mind, but now that I was facing it the strange tangle began to mock me. The whole thing was absurd, impossible, and yet I was tingling with eagerness to assure myself that it was so.

Half-past eight came and Bellows had not appeared. At nine o'clock I determined to wait for him no longer. He was drinking again doubtless. In twenty minutes I was in Tompkins square looking for No. 200.

It was a row of fine old three-story houses, with stoops, and faced the deserted park, from whose walks and playgrounds the February night's winds had driven the thousands that congregate there is seasonable weather. A postman, his collecting bag over his shoulder, was just emptying a box across the street. Perhaps he might tell me something of the house. I approached him, showed him my federal service credentials and walked on with him.

"Yes, I know a little about the house," said he. "I am a day carrier every month and I know Mrs. Androne and her two colored girls, Rosa and Bertha."

"Mrs. Androne, you say? Have you never delivered any letters there for a Mrs. Johnson?"

"Never a letter, Mr. Duncan. Mrs. Androne visits quite a bit in Philadelphia. She is a very quiet woman and a very nice woman. Somebody told me she married a Cuban tobacco importer, who died and left her a lot of money."

"And you have never noticed or heard of anything queer about this house?"

"Nothing whatsoever, sir. So far as No. 200 goes, I don't know of a crooked thing about that house."

I thanked him, arranged for him to send me word of anything he picked up and turned back. A dim light was burning on the first floor and a brighter one on the second floor of the house of mystery. I looked it over from top to bottom and was soon convinced that it was merely an old fashioned residence of the period when Tompkins square was a fashionable quarter, and it seemed to be well furnished and well kept.

On what pretext could I call on Mrs. Androne at that hour of night? After what the postman had told me what right had I to believe that Jim Bellows had not imagined the entire affair. There was absolutely no one on the street or in sight in the park, but as I looked at the house I saw a woman's graceful figure outlined against a second-story window for a bare instant as she looked out.

With a few steps I was at the door and rang the bell. It was only after a several minutes' wait, as a trim, well trained negro girl opened the door, that my pretext flashed into my mind.

"I am from the drug store on the corner. An express messenger left a package marked 'Jewelry' with me tonight sent to a Mrs. Androne and asked us to find her, as the address is blurred. We collect for several of the companies, and as I heard that a Mrs. Androne lived here I came down to inquire."

"You had better see the missus," said the girl, and ushered me into just the sort of a drawing room Bellows had described. As she went up stairs I stepped softly to the door to the back room, which was evidently entirely at the back of the house, the drawing room was so deep, and drew the curtain. The little room Bellows had described! It was plainly but richly done in Flemish, and I had abundant time to ascertain that the only aperture even for ventilation was the door by which I had entered. The heavy card paper on the walls made it absolutely impossible for there to be any concealed doors without cracks showing. I walked back and took my seat just as I heard the servant's footsteps above.

"Mrs. Androne is not well and will you please come up?"

I ascended the stairs and followed the maid along a dark hall to a room about the centre of the house, where she paused at the doorway, drew back the curtain, and as I entered I found myself looking directly into the large bewildering eyes of a very handsome woman sitting at a reading desk in a huge, luxurious reclining chair. She had the electric light so shaded that a white circle fell on her arms, her book, and—as she now leaned forward—on her exquisite face. The remainder of the room was in absolute darkness.

"I am very sorry to intrude upon you at this hour, Mrs. Androne," I began, "but I could not get away until my hour to leave the store."

"Really, I am very grateful to you for your trouble, but from what Rosa has said I do not understand the matter at all. Won't you sit down and tell me what it is all about?"

There was a low chair at her side and she moved it so that it faced her and as I sat down I, too, was in the circle of light. Perhaps I might be wrong, but I fancied that she gave a little start when she saw my face. I entered on a brief rehearsal of my lie about the misaddressed package, the battery of her eyes turned full upon me. I congratulated myself that I told my tale without a break.

She smiled and said that she would send for it in the morning, and I rose to go.

"Will you please touch that button just behind you," she said. "It is so dark in here that people unaccustomed to the house often stumble over the furniture."

I turned as bidden, but my hand struck the portiere of the door and to my utter astonishment I was looking out into the parlor of the first floor.

Before I could restrain myself I rushed bewildered into the centre of the room, looking about as if dazed.

There was a quick step in the hall. The maid Rosa passed the door to the drawing room, and thinking she was about to lock the front door and trap me, I leaped to intercept her, but she merely opened it and passed out, without having seen me, apparently. My attention was not diverted for more than half a minute and my action seemed to have the result of clearing my head. I turned back to the little room where I had just left Mrs. Androne with the full intention of throwing down the gauntlet and getting an explanation or calling in the police. There was no means of her leaving the room except by the door which I guarded, and yet she had vanished absolutely from inside its four solid walls. With my ears set to trap any sounds of movement or life, and with every sense keyed to the highest pitch of trained accurate observation, I examined the place carefully, foot by foot. There was only the one means of entrance or exit and I knew she had not used that. But she was gone.

At the end of half an hour of careful search I went up to the second floor, turning on the lights everywhere. On the second floor I found everything just as I had first seen it in the room in which she had been reading, yet I had left that room and walked into the drawing room on the first floor.

I caught sight of my face in a mirror. I was pale and haggard and my eyes were burning with an intense fire. It was easy to imagine that I should look just so if I were demented or hypnotized.

Carefully I searched the house from top to bottom, even going into the cellar. It was a pretty place, and all over it were appealing little feminine touches. Everything was in good taste. There were no indicative letters or papers. The servant's room, on the top floor, showed occupancy by but one person. Evidently the one girl went home at night. Scratched on the window facing of the top floor bath room was "Missus Johnnie Johnson," but save for that one bit the house was in every detail merely the handsome residence of a refined woman living alone with two maid servants.

In the house there was no sign of life, The maid had not returned and my mysterious lady had completely vanished. I sat down to wait on the second floor landing, a spot from which I could hear or see the greater part of the interior of the house, and perhaps I waited three hours in the appalling silence of the place, unrewarded. To wait longer seemed foolish. It would soon be morning, and doubtless my birds had flown for good, so I arose and walked through the second floor once more. Just then before the house, certainly not in it, there broke forth a shrill cry, that of a woman in awful pain or insane frenzy. It stopped short off as I leaped to the front window. Nowhere in the street or in the park was there a living soul except a milkman driving along and a policeman about a block away. He was standing as if listening and watching, and the milkman was craning his head from the side of his wagon, but neither of them appeared to hear or see anything. In a few minutes they passed on. It is impossible for me to tell the strength of the grip I was compelled to hold on myself as I got my hat and coat and left the house. I was stunned with the general mystery and cold with the horror of that sourceless harrowing cry.

Going directly home, I locked every door and window, as if shutting out some unseen terror, then sat down, laughed and swore, threw books at my good old setter Rex, who was gravely concerned at my state of mind, and about dawn I threw myself into bed and slept uneasily till mid-forenoon.

Before I breakfasted, I telephoned the office, and my stenographer told me that business was piling up and many clients waiting to see me, but a number of the visitors were newspaper men who wished to know what connection I had with a James Bellows who had given my name as his next best friend when arrested the night before. She did not know why he had been arrested or any details of the case. Perhaps the morning papers might tell me. Sure enough. The first thing that caught my eye on the first page of the first paper I picked up was:

LURE OF THE LIGHTS
TOO MUCH FOR JIM

And it went on to relate that, having been unduly dazed by the glitter of Broadway, Jim Bellows, of the Shoshone, had conceived the idea that he had come on to marry Miss Vivian Russell, the star of a musical comedy at the Casino. Swearing she was engaged to him and that he had sent her two thousand dollars for a trousseau, he had seen her pictures outside the theatre and waited for her at the stage door.

When she arrived for the evening performance he had attempted to assert the rights of a fiance, according to rules and regulations matrimonial on the Shoshone, and it had taken four policemen to get him to the Tenderloin station, where he was searched and a bundle of letters from New York signed "Mary," "Mary Johnson" and "Mrs. John Johnson" were found tied with a lavender ribbon to a stock photograph of Miss Vivian Russell, across which was written, "To my sweetheart from his loving Mary." As Bellows was sober, very sincere, had done no damage, and evidently had been badly buncoed by somebody, he was let go after midnight, when Miss Russell was safely away from the theatre.

Poor Jim! I laughed till I cried over the matter, and the humor of his situation lessened the tension of my own, and for the first time since the moment I stepped from a doorway into a room one flight lower in a house than I had every cause of physical sense and abstract logic to believe it was I could consider the whole situation with the logical calm that my position demanded.

If I had known where to send for Bellows I should have endeavored to see him at once, for it was plain that he had now found the "Widder," and if he was satisfied then there was no reason for any going on with the probing of the mystery in Tompkins square except to satisfy my own curiosity. Perhaps the skein would never be unravelled, for I might never encounter the charming Mrs. Androne again.

More developments followed at the office. I was struggling manfully to get some of the accumulated work out of the way when my stenographer came in about mid afternoon and said that there was a man outside who said he must see me immediately and that I would not recognize his name even if he gave it. I was struggling to keep my mind from the tantalizing puzzle of Tompkins square, and shuddering now and then in the midst of a letter or an expense account as something recalled the dreadful cry which I had heard the night before after Mrs. Androne had vanished in thin air, and so this insistent caller found me in a very bad humor. I had him shown in though, and was very glad that I did so. It was my friend the postman of the night before.

"Good morning, Mr. Rand. I have some nice news for you. I found it at the station, all filed and complete. For some three years letters addressed to Mrs. John Johnson and Mrs. Mary Johnson, No. 200 Tompkins square, have been going through the "Change of Address" departments to St. George, Staten Island. The station distributors were so familiar with them that they never got to the carriers, and that is why none have ever passed through my hands. Last week, on the complaint of some Southern planter, Mrs. Johnson was arrested for using the mails for fraudulent purposes and was quickly convicted. She used an actress' photograph as her own, and swindled hundreds by a matrimonial scheme. She gave No. 200 as an address, as she had been a servant there for a Mrs. Charlton, a wealthy old lady who died about the time the Johnson woman left the house.

"It is not likely that the Johnson woman and Mrs. Androne have ever seen each other. The Johnson woman is now in jail, and if she is not freed on the appeal of her case, will go to the penitentiary. The complaint of the Southern planter was the first received by the Post Office Department or her game would have been terminated a long time previously. Her victims, as was shown by the letters found in her house and the addresses in her letter book, were all rural gentlemen located at such a distance from New York as to make personal visits from them unlikely. So far as our end of the matter is concerned the case is all but closed and there is no way that Mrs. Johnson's doings are to be connected with the peculiar things that have gone on in Tompkins square."

When he was gone I threw down all work, lit a cigar and abandoned myself entirely to the mystery. The pretty and clever mistress of the mansion was not a matrimonial swindler, and I had ascertained from our back numbers of standard financial reference books that her husband had left her abundant means. It was hardly probable that she was in some dark game for a livelihood, and even if she were, what possible explanation could there be for the slightly different but equally terrifying and disconcerting events in which I had participated?

I telephoned for my car and went for a spin in the park, for I have found that sort of thing very efficacious in clearing one's mind and enabling one to get new points of view. Some fatal fascination seemed to draw me to Tompkins square, and very late in the afternoon I yielded to it and in fifteen minutes had turned into the street on which the house faced. Fool that I was! A man driving his own car is more or less conspicuous, and just as I passed the house a trim electric brougham drew up in front of it and there stepped out of it—Mrs. Androne. She turned and looked me full in the face and her eyes flashed. Drug store clerks do not drive automobiles. My hand was shown and hers not yet disclosed.

The more I thought the more I realized how foolish and footless my own acts had been and the more the puzzle of impossibilities made possible in that cursed house burned into my brain like instruments of maddening torture. I ate little dinner and later I left the best show in town in the middle of the performance and walked in a drizzling rain to Tompkins square, pausing a dozen times to compel myself to turn about and go home.

There were no lights visible in the front of the house, and in a half hour's loitering about that part of the square I saw nothing. Suddenly my eye lighted on a skulking man's figure that darted out of a shadowed corner, hurried along the street to No. 200 and seemingly disappeared in the basement areaway. I made my way to the spot rapidly. The heavy iron screen door was ajar. Some ill fortune had caused me to forget my Luger pistol. I was unarmed, but I determined to take my chances. What was in front of me I had no means of guessing even, but I was willing to risk anything that would answer the questions ringing in my ears. Softly I stepped inside. A small ray from an electric lantern suddenly shot down the basement hall, but it missed me. The intruder had heard me close the door, but his suspicions were allayed. Now I could hear him mounting the stairs, and up I went, only a few feet behind him. I was thankful that I had a chance to study every step, every turn the night before. His actions seemed to be those of a thief, and I kept close enough behind him that if he did discover my presence I could hurl myself on him before he could shoot.

While I crouched in the shelter of the head of the stairs he swun his lantern ray around the hall and around the front room. Then he crossed the length of the front room and entered the little room in the back. I darted from my hiding place to another, a niche behind the draperies at the foot of the stairs. Scarcely had I got ensconced when I felt the presence of some other person near me. The faint air from some one in motion struck the back of my head. I could see the intruder was searching the little room carefully. It was evidently empty of both occupants and spoils, or at least whatever he was seeking.

The movement about me was caused by some one stealing down the stairs. Whoever it was came close to my niche and I really beneve was about to come inside. Tense as strung steel, but with the cold perspiration starting from my brow and palms I stood ready for desperate action. Suddenly the man with the lantern came out. The unknown person near me darted across the floor and threw on the electric lights. A masked burglar and Mme. Androne stood confronting each other.

For several seconds they stood, each as if graven, then the intruder's right hand slowly drew from its convenient pocket an ugly pistol and raised it. Mme. Androne seemed to shrink before its levelled menace, but kept the robber fixed with her eyes.

Startling in its suddenness, but not loud, in fact very soft and mellow, a trumpet broke out somewhere overhead, sounding a measured solemn strain. It seemed to come from the air just over the head of the motionless woman. It ceased and still further and fainter came a holy chant in men's voices—

"Pax vobiscum! Pax vobiscum!"

A great organ began to play and slowly increased to such tremendous volume that the very air seemed to quiver.

The masked man seemed smitten helpless with amazement. Even in my own state of tension in the midst of such an unheard of succession of events I was fascinated by what signs he gave of the dramatic effect on him. His mask concealed his features, but he was trembling visibly, and after glancing wildly about several times lowered his shaking weapon and seemed about to take to flight. It must have been the woman's eyes that held him in his place. She never swerved her gaze in the least, and at last, as the organ abated to a heavenly strain, she began to sing with a gentle sweetness and soon I saw she was moving forward more and more rapidly. With her eyes still fixed on the stupefied man before, she passed him and backed into the little room to the rear. The instant the portiere fell and shut her from view the organ broke off short. There was a moment of intense silence. The masked man seemed to be collecting his routed faculties. Suddenly he darted for the doorway through which she had gone, threw back the curtain, and was confronted by a gigantic figure just emerging—Jim Bellows of the Shoshone.

The tall Westerner seemed amazed in his turn, but he saw the mask and the pistol, and with a roar of rage he hurled himself on the stranger, and they went to the floor with a crash. The smaller man was cursing in broken English and Spanish. His weapon, knocked from his hands, came skidding over to my feet, and I caught it up with pleased eagerness. Now the under man wriggled loose, and with inconceivable quickness got to the front door and got it open before Jim Bellows could catch up with him. Locked in a desperate embrace they went rolling down the front steps. I followed them, realizing that it was time for me to act. I shouted at Jim, he recognized me, and between us we had our unknown enemy helpless in a few seconds, and were just beginning to debate the question of what to do with him, when a woman, followed by a policeman, came running from the other side of the square. It was Mrs. Androne.

The problem of how she had got out of the house was no more puzzling than a dozen other things that had happened in the last hour, and without making any attempt to account for my presence I said abruptly:

"Mrs. Androne, this man is under control. You do not need the police for safety. Do you want him arrested? Say quickly before the neighborhood rouses enough to realize that there is a scene in the street before your house."

"Take him away and I will appear against him for burglary in the morning."

She was perfectly cool and collected, though breathing rapidly from her running. The officer demurred and asked for explanations, but I shoved my card into his hand and said I would guarantee that the case was all right. Protesting even to the point of tears, the man was led away to the nearest patrol box, and as the officer and his prisoner vanished down the street Mrs. Androne turned to me and said:

"Thank you most heartily, Mr. Duncan—late of the corner drug store. Come, let us get off the street. Jim, do put those awful revolvers in your pocket."

She led the way indoors and threw on the lights in the hall and then from a cubby switchboard illuminated the entire house. She saw the signs of my recent occupancy about my hiding place. I anticipated her question.

"Yes," said I, "I saw that man force the basement door, followed him in, hid there and was behind you all the time."

"Oh, how interesting. And all during the concert?"

"I do not believe I can ever enjoy sacred music again," I answered grimly.

"Really, Mr. Duncan, it is a shame—all this that you have been through, and after you have been so kind and good to Jim, too. But a few words will clear away your troubles. This house is full of tricks."

"Too gol ding damn full," snorted Jim Bellows.

"It was planned and all its clever things carried out by an old Mrs. Charlton, who lived here and was some sort of an occult fakir. I understand that she fooled people dreadfully for many years—a select circle she gathered about her. My late husband took a fancy to the house and somehow got into Mrs. Charlton's confidence. I am afraid poor Androne was unfortunately involved in the cause of the Cuban patriots. He was always in fear of his life from some of his enemies, and m any times they have endeavored to obtain possession of secret papers which he had. I am afraid that he did not do as he should do with some money committed to his care. When he died he begged me to secure this house from Mrs. Charlton on account of its location, its construction and the fact that, knowing its tricks, I could escape from any one who came to hound me, and it has proved true as it said. No amount of guarding or police protection will save the victim from the dagger of the vendetta. Five times the exercise of this house's tricks and of my own wits has served me amply. The electrical trumpet and the mechanism for the singer's voice are hidden in the ceiling.

"The big organ is part of the second floor stairway. I was just showing Jim some of the buttons for operating these things when this fellow below stole down here and some blind fate impelled him to set the things in motion. It was a close shave for me. The only thing I could have done was to have tricked him into allowing me to go alone into the little back room there. Then I should have 'vanished' and been safe."

"Yes, but please let me understand now, Mrs. Androne," said I.

Jim Bellows was rolling in silent merriment at my bewilderment.

"Come here, let us go into the room and I will show you. Hidden behind the wall in the cellar is a plant of powerful machinery which, of course, you could not find last night when you ransacked my house for hours. Now, see we are in the little room—but look, it is the room in which you first saw me reading and was then on the second floor. The back room which you first saw, and which belongs behind the reception room, is now in the basement. See, I touch this secret and we are rapidly, silently sh the second floor as if in an el There was not a single jar. know you were in motion, n There are four rooms solic a shaft, one above the other. is in its proper place the top little square sheeted steel st looks like a water tank on the was where I was last night.

"When the second floor room first floor the first floor room basement. When the rooms are proper place nothing whatever was in the basement. The house is also fitted with little secret listening 'phones. I can go into this room, lay my ear against this bookcase and by touching these buttons one after the other hear more or less of what is going on all over the house, room after room. That is how I followed you in your search last night. There, that s all. I am very tired of it and am most anxious to get away."

"And she's agoin' to, mighty quick," interrupted Jim Bellows.

"Now, Jim."

"Go ahead and tell him all about it."

"Well, in brief, Mr. Duncan, I think I have found a real man and I think I am going to be safe from any enemies on the Shoshone."

"Wait, till you hear what the boys have got to say about the Shoshone bein' safe for you," answered Jim, with mighty emphasis.

"A MASKED BURGLAR AND MME. ANDRONE STOOD CONFRONTING EACH OTHER."

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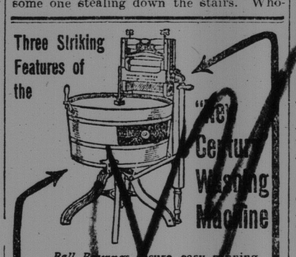

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