

A MUMMER'S THRONE

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and the lights of the city twinkled out one by one. His past life rose in view before him. His determination hardened. Who were these people? And why did they stand in his way like this? Surely, it could matter little or nothing to Europe in general whom he married. The map of the world would not be altered because he had allied himself to youth and beauty, instead of rank and commonplace femininity. His face hardened as he thought of Schentein and his satellites.

He rose presently and went in search of Florizel. But the latter had already left the hotel. It seemed almost impossible that he could sit quietly down there and wait upon events. He must be doing something, he must be moving towards his goal. He would go down to the theatre and see Nita. He slipped a revolver in the pocket of his overcoat, and set out upon his way. He walked quietly along the boulevards in the direction of the "Oderon" lost in his own thoughts, till presently a messenger boy touched him on the shoulder. The mannikin in uniform had a letter in his hand which appeared to be in Florizel's handwriting. The envelope contained a few words scribbled on a visiting card, which

were curt and to the point. Directly on receipt of the letter the king was to go to a certain address without delay, and there wait the arrival of his friend. He nodded curtly. He crushed the paper in his hand and passed on, suspecting nothing.

But something like a gleam of prudence came to him presently as he found himself in an unfamiliar part of the city. He began to ask himself questions now. He hesitated in the deserted roadway. It was cowardly, perhaps, but he decided to go no farther.

He had hardly turned before three figures materialised from the shadows and he found his path cut off. The figures were masked, though it seemed to the king that one of them was familiar to him. Without a word they closed upon him. He had not passed five of the best years of his life in an English public school for nothing. His left hand shot out swiftly, and one of the ruffians went down crashing into the roadway. Before the other two could advance the king had whipped out his revolver and stood with it in his hand.

"Stand where you are," he whispered, "if you value your lives!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

VENUS BY THE AID OF A COMET

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planet Venus. I said that I believed it did, but I had been studying the matter for twenty years before I made that statement. I said that I would not believe it to be otherwise unless I proved it to be so. The only way I could prove it would be to go to the planet and see for myself. I came to this conclusion ten years ago and at the same time the idea first presented itself of how to accomplish the journey. Do you remember that theory I explained to you, concerning comets' tails? I told you that it interested me, but I did not tell you that I had proved it to be correct. By the aid of the spectroscope, I found that a chemical existed in comets, which only in the minutest quantities appeared in the sun, or any of the planets with one exception. That exception was Venus. In her this chemical abounds. Now, do you see the only deduction? As far as we know, there is but one planet that possesses any attraction, or gravitation, for that vapourised chemical, thrown off by the comet. That is the planet Venus." He paused and looked at me, then continued:

"Next May, the earth is to pass through the tail of Halley's comet. I shall then obtain enough of this substance to float my so-called 'airship' and go to Venus."

We sat still for a few minutes, and then he went over his words again, with fuller explanations, until I had fully grasped his meaning, dazed though I was with the stupendous scheme.

"Now," he concluded, "I have told you, and you are the man I have selected to take with me. You have six months in which to decide whether you will come or not. Think it over, and I will not ask for your decision now. But I should like to know something of your mind before you go back to the city."

As you may imagine, there was not much sleep for me that night, but by the morning I had my wits collected and was able to quietly consider the matter. There was no one to keep me from going. My father and mother were both dead; my uncle—

well, he was a good old chap, but all our family are singularly devoid of affection, and he did not waste any of his on me. Moreover, as I was his ward, my fortune would be his, and it would be considerable compensation for my loss. My greatest friend was the Professor himself, so why should I not cast in my lot with him? Even if we should lose our lives, at least it would be in the cause of science. But why should I suppose we should lose our lives? The Professor was absolutely confident. He had tested his facts and theories so well, that he was certain of their results. In my own mind I went over his words of the evening before, and considered them well. Then I decided that, as he had shown so much confidence in me, I would not fail him. Still I wished to satisfy myself on one or two points, before giving him my final decision, so I went over that evening to have another talk with him. He seemed satisfied with my attitude, and was quite ready to answer my questions.

"Will this chemical," I asked, "be more attractive to Venus than the airship and ourselves will be to the earth? For I presume, whichever has the strongest attraction will hold the field, so to speak."

"You are quite right," he said, "but this chemical, you see, possesses no quality over which the earth has any sway. Therefore while the earth rushes on her path at the rate of eighteen miles a second, its propensity will be to remain behind in space. Now, I shall place this chemical in my ship, and it will be tremendously hard to retain her on the earth, and as soon as I loose her bonds, away the world will go, and leave us behind. Our apparent ascent will not be as rapid as I may have led you to suppose—I mean, the earth will not shoot away from us at the rate of eighteen miles a second. She will be able to exercise a slight control over the construction of the machine, but that attraction will grow less and less until finally it will cease altogether. Then the other planet, that has attraction for both airship and chemi-



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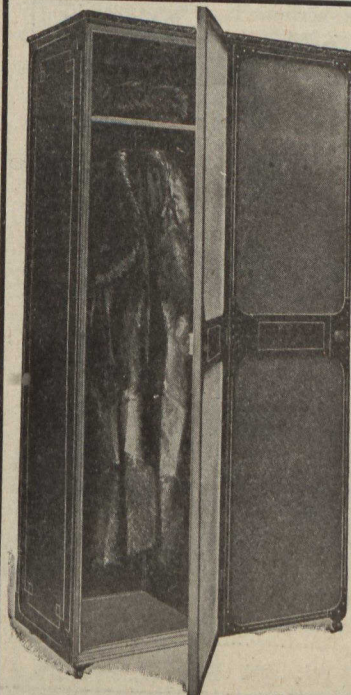
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