

she saw him all the time—he had a hideous impression that she even saw what was passing in his mind.

"I wouldn't think about my revolver. You won't be able to fire it, you know."

He had been thinking about his revolver, a faint notion had been growing up in his mind that he would have just oneshot at her. Miss Jones made this remark in the most tranquil tone of voice, as she was engaged in extinguishing the match with which she had lighted her cigarette.

"And I wouldn't worry about that chloroform—it is chloroform, isn't it?—in the right-hand pocket of your coat."

As she said this, Miss Jones threw the extinguished match from her unto the bedroom floor. A great cloud of horror was settling down on Mr. Bennett's brain. Was this fair creature a thing of earth at all? Was she a witch, or a fairy queen? Mr. Bennett was a tolerably well-educated man, and he had read of fairy queens. He gave a sudden start. Miss Jones had lighted the cigarette to her satisfaction, and had fixed her eyes upon his face again.

"I suppose you were hardly prepared for this sort of thing?"

"Hardly."

The word came from Mr. Bennett's stammering lips.

"When you heard about the defenselessness of Acacia Villa and about Miss Jones—who was peculiar—and that sort of thing, you doubtless took it for granted that it was to be all plain sailing?"

"Something of the kind."

Not the least odd part of the affair was that Mr. Bennett found himself answering Miss Jones without the least intention of doing anything of the sort.

"Those diamonds you were looking for are at the bottom of the drawer—at the back. Just get them out and bring them here. In a red leather case, you know."

Mechanically Mr. Bennett did as he was told. When his back was turned to the lady, and he ceased to be compelled to meet her eyes, quite a spasm of relief went over him. A taint desire was again born within his breast to assert his manhood. The lady's quiet voice immediately interposed.

"I wouldn't worry myself with such thoughts if I were you. You are quite subjective."

He was quite subjective—though still Mr. Bennett had not the faintest notion what she meant. He found the red leather box. He brought it to her on the bed. He came so close to her that she puffed the smoke between her rosy lips up into his face.

"It is not locked. It opens with a spring, like this."

She stretched out her hand. As she did so, she grazed slightly one of his. He trembled at her touch. She pressed some hidden spring in the box, and the lid flew open. It was full of diamonds which gleamed and sparkled like liquid light.

"Not bad stones, are they? There's a hundred thousand pounds' worth at the least. There are the tin boxes, you see, five on either side the chest of drawers." Mr. Bennett followed the direction of Miss Jones's hand—he saw them plainly enough. "A hundred thousand pounds' worth of diamonds in your hand ten thousand pounds in front of you—not a bad plunder for a single night's work. And only a young woman to reckon with—it is not twelve months since I turned twenty-one. Yet I don't think you will get much out of this little job—do you?"

The tears actually stood in Mr. Bennett's eyes.

"I don't think I shall," he moaned.

"And yet there is no magic about it—not the least. It is simply an illustration of the latest phase in scientific development." Miss Jones learned back against the pillows enjoying her cigarette with the etheralized satisfaction of the true lover of the weed. With her left hand—what a little white and dainty hand it was!—she toyed with her long fair hair. "At an extremely early age I discovered that I could exercise at will remarkable powers over my fellow creatures. I lost no opportunity to develop those powers. At twenty-one I became my own mistress. I realized my fortune,—as Hannah told you—and retired to Acacia Villa. You understand I had ideas of my own. I was peculiar, if you choose to have it so. I continued to develop my powers. I experimented upon Hannah. Now I am experimenting upon you. I am enjoying this experiment very much indeed. I hope you are enjoying it a quarter as much as I am—are you?" Some slightly inarticulate remark dropped from Mr. Bennett, which was apparently to the effect that he was not.

"I am sorry to hear that. Perhaps you will enjoy it more a little later on. Now, what shall I do with you? I know."

Miss Jones pressed a little ivory button, which was one of a row set in a frame of wood against the wall.

"That rings an electric bell in Hannah's room. I often ring her down in the middle of the night to be experimented on. She comes directly. Here she is, you see."

There was a slight tapping against the bedroom door.

"Come in!" exclaimed Miss Jones.

The door opened and Miss Welsh came in. She was not exactly in full dress—in fact, rather the other way. Mr. Bennett, who through it all was conscious in a horrid, nightmare sort of way, thought that he

had never seen any one look so extremely unprepossessing as Miss Welsh looked in disarray. The instant she was inside the room Miss Jones raised her hand. Miss Welsh stood still. Miss Jones turned to Mr. Bennett.

"I have her entirely under control. Some of the results I have obtained with her are really quite remarkable. But you shall see for yourself, and judge." The young lady addressed Miss Welsh.

"Well, Hannah, here is Mr. Bennett, you see."

It was evident that Hannah did see. She seemed struggling to give expression to her feelings in speech. Miss Jones went calmly on;

"He is here on business—he is committing burglary, in fact. You were right in supposing that was his profession. The mistake you made was in imagining that he would have shared the spoil with you. I think, Mr. Bennett, I was right in saying that you would not have given Hannah much?"

"Not a sou."

"Probably you did not even intend to marry her?"

"I would have seen her hanged first."

Mr. Bennett made this plain statement with quite curious ferocity. Miss Welsh rubbed her eyes with the sleeve of what we will suppose, for courtesy's sake, was her nightdress.

"That makes nine of 'em," she said.

"That makes nine of them, as Hannah says. Hannah, Mr. Bennett, is a woman of experience. She has had nine promises of marriage, but not one of them came off. But I didn't think, Hannah, that you ever had a promise from a burglar before?"

"Never before."

"Then, at least, that is a new experience, and a new experience is so precious. Is there any remark you would like to make, Hannah, appropriate to the occasion?"

For a moment it did not appear as though there was. Then it seemed that there at least was one.

"I should like to scratch his eyes out," observed the damsel—*à la* forty-five or so.

Miss Cecilia smiled. Mr. Bennett immediately smiled too. But there was this difference—that while the lady's smile was a thing of beauty, the gentleman's was a peculiar ghastly grin. Miss Jones remarked Mr. Bennett's facial contortions with an appearance of considerable interest.

"I never had them smile quite so sympathetically before. In that respect, Mr. Bennett, you are unique. Charmed to have met you, I am sure." The young lady knocked the ash off her cigarette with her dainty finger and turned her attention to Miss Welsh. "I don't think, Hannah, that we will have any scratching out of eyes."

When she had thus delivered herself, Miss Jones reclined in silence for some moments on her pillows, discharging the smoke of her cigarette through her delicate pink nostrils. When she spoke again, it was to the gentleman she addressed herself.

"Mr. Bennett, would you mind closing that box of diamonds, and replacing them in the drawer?"

Mr. Bennett shut the box with a little snap, and carried it across the room. There was something odd about his demeanor as he did this—an appearance as though he were not engaged in the sort of labor which physics pain. Miss Welsh, standing as though rooted to the ground, followed him with her eyes. The expression of her countenance was one of undisguised amazement. Her face was eloquent with a yearning to relieve herself with words. When Mr. Bennett put the box back where he had found it and shut the door she gave a kind of gasp. From Mr. Bennett there came a distinctly-audible groan. "Turn round, Mr. Bennett, and look at me." Mr. Bennett did as he was bidden. He was not altogether a bad-looking young man—his chief fault, from the physiognomist's point of view, lay in the steely tint of his clear blue eyes. Miss Jones's great big orbs seemed to rest upon him with a degree of pleasure. "I need scarcely point out to you that the burglary is a failure. The principal cause of failure is that you are too subjective. You have quite one of the most subjective organisms I have yet encountered. The ideal criminal must keep himself abreast with the advance of science. In failing to do so, Mr. Bennett, you have been guilty of a blunder which, in your case, is certainly worse than crime. You are a dreadful example of the burglar's blunder. I might label you, preserve you in your hypnotic state, and use you as an illustration of a lecture I am now preparing. But I have other views, and it is not impossible I may encounter you again. Go to my writing table. You will find a sheet of foolscap paper. Write what I dictate."

Mr. Bennett went to the writing table. He found the sheet of foolscap paper. "Write in good, bold characters—"

"I AM GEORGE BENNETT,

The Burglar.

For further particulars apply at Acacia Villa."

Mr. Bennett wrote as she dictated, displaying the above legend in a striking, round hand right across the sheet of paper. Miss Jones addressed Miss Welsh:

"Hannah, in my workbasket you will find a needle and some good stout thread. Get it out." Miss Welsh got it out. "Mr. Bennett, take off that sack which you have wound round your body beneath your coat." Mr. Bennett took it off. "Button up your coat again." Mr. Bennett buttoned it up. "Hannah,

take that sheet of foolscap paper on which Mr. Bennett has written at my dictation and sew it firmly to the front of his buttoned-up coat."

Miss Welsh took the sheet of foolscap paper. She approached Mr. Bennett holding it in her hand. Mr. Bennett's hands dropped to his sides. He regarded her with a look which was the reverse of amiable. She eyed him with what were doubtless intended to be soft, pleading glances. When she reached him she placed her hand timidly against his chest. Mr. Bennett looked particularly glum. She raised the other hand, which held the sheet of foolscap paper, and spread it out upon his breast. It was legible at quite a considerable distance:

"I AM GEORGE BENNETT,

The Burglar.

For further particulars apply at Acacia Villa."

It was hardly the sort of inscription a chivalrous spirit would wish to have displayed upon his breast by the object of his heart's desire, or even by the woman he had promised to marry in the course of the following morning. Miss Welsh, who seemed to feel the truth of this, looked at him with sad, beseeching eyes. But Mr. Bennett's glumness perceptibly increased. Then Miss Welsh proceeded to sew the inscription on. It must be owned that it was a conscientious piece of sewing. She first tacked it round the edges; then she sewed it up and down and across, from corner to corner, with a hundred careful stitches, in such a way that he would have had to tear it to fragments piecemeal in order to get it off. It would have been quite impossible to unbutton his coat while he had that inscription on. The process seemed to make Miss Welsh extremely sad. It made Mr. Bennett sadder still. When she had finished her conscientious piece of work she crossed her hands meekly in front of her and looked up at him with a rapturous gaze. Mr. Bennett did not seem to feel rapturous at all.

"Now, Hannah, take the sack which Mr. Bennett wore beneath his coat, hold it open for him, and enable him to step inside."

The sack was lying on the floor. Miss Welsh, with a half-uttered sigh, picked it up and held the mouth wide open. Mr. Bennett scowled first at the lady, then at the bag. He raised his left foot gingerly and placed it in the opening. Miss Welsh assisted him in thrusting his leg well home. Then there was a pause.

"Perhaps, Mr. Bennett, you had better put your arms round Hannah's neck," observed Miss Jones. She was engaged in lighting a second cigarette at the ashes of the first.

Mr. Bennett put his arms about Miss Welsh's neck and thrust his other leg into the sack.

"Draw it up about his waist," remarked Miss Jones. By now the second cigarette was well alight.

Miss Welsh drew it up about his waist. It was a good-sized sack, so that, although a man of at least the average height, being drawn up it reached his loins.

"Mr. Bennett, hold the sack in that position with your hands." Mr. Bennett held the sack in that position with both his hands. "Hannah, in the bottom of the hanging cupboard you will find some cord. Get it out."

In a mechanically melancholy way Miss Welsh did as she was told. The cord, being produced, took the shape of coil of a rope about the thickness of one's middle finger.

"Make two holes in the front of the sack and pass the cord through them." With the same sad air Miss Welsh acted on Miss Jones's fresh instructions. She made two holes in the front of the sack and passed the two ends of the cord through them.

"Now pass the cord over his shoulders, make two holes in the back of the sack, pass the cord through them, then draw it tight."

Again Miss Welsh obeyed, dolefully yet conscientiously withal. The result was that when the rope was tightened—and Miss Welsh, in the most conscientious manner, drew it as tight as she possibly could—Mr. Bennett's lower portions were imprisoned in the sack in a manner which was hardly dignified. He might have been about to engage in a sack race, only he did not appear to be in a sack-racing frame of mind. Miss Welsh seemed to feel that she was hardly treating him in the way in which one would wish to treat one's young man. It was evident that Mr. Bennett had not the slightest doubt but that he was being used very badly indeed.

"Take the bottle and sponge, which you will find in his right-hand pocket, and the revolver, which you will find in his left, and place them on the bed." Miss Welsh did as her mistress told her. "Now tie him up with the cord so as to render him incapable of moving a limb. There are thirty-two yards of it. With that quantity and the exercise of a little skill you should be able to make him tolerably secure."

As Miss Jones said this it almost seemed that Miss Welsh started. Mr. Bennett certainly did. Miss Welsh looked at him with such piteous eyes; Mr. Bennett favored her with an unmistakable scowl—a scowl, indeed, of singular malignity. Then she proceeded to tie him up. In doing so she showed considerable skill, and conscientiousness to boot. She first passed the rope two or three times right around him, so as to pinion his arms to his sides. Then, putting her foot up against his side, so as to enable her to use it as a lever, she hauled the rope as tight as she could. She did not seem to enjoy the hauling