

she said. "Three hundred dollars a plate, something like that, is it not? What do they call you in New York, 'Spendthrift Monroe'?"

"Jove," answered Wainwright, a bit alarmed. "You don't say that they call me spendthrift."

"What do you call yourself?" she asked. And then some new queer earnest look struggled to the fore. "What are you anyway?"

MONROE did not answer her. His face was flushed, not with Bellamy's wine, because none had yet been opened, but with the distinct and strange allurements in the eyes of the girl—something that was there appealed to him more strongly than had anything in his hitherto brief metropolitan career. She held his gaze quite frankly, and it was with an effort almost visible that Wainwright tore his glance from hers. He glanced up and down the room to find some commonplace topic of conversation that might relieve the strange emotion that obsessed him. Suddenly he found it.

"Old-fashioned Southern Christmas dinner," he exclaimed, half aloud. "I should think it was. Look at the darky waiters; look at the head waiter, great Scott."

For the first time, apparently, the girl looked, and, as she glanced at the head waiter, she involuntarily shivered. "Where did he get such a man?" she demanded suddenly of Monroe. "What caterer would employ him?"

Monroe, too, kept his eyes fixed to the countenance of this negro. The man had the proportions of a giant and the face of an orang-outang. All the brute in the negro nature was summed up and crystallized in him.

"Well," ejaculated Monroe, "the rest of them are not much better," which was quite true.

Bellamy had provided a dozen waiters for perhaps fifty guests, and, as the low-voiced exclamations of Wainwright Monroe and the girl were repeated around the table, the fifty guests began to realize that they were in the presence of the strangest set of waiters they had ever seen. There was nothing about them except that they seemed to be aboriginal negroes, almost untouched by civilization, trained, perhaps, in some west side restaurant, and even as the fifty guests watched the twelve—for they could not help but watch them—the sullen savagery of the twelve began to manifest itself.

The waiter at Bellamy's end of the table, who was serving Bellamy and his two right-hand guests, threw himself, purposely or by accident, in the way of the big head waiter, as the latter directed the carving of the turkey and the nice adjustment of the dressing on each plate. His burly white teeth and uttering some unintelligible jargon. This ill-will grew as the dinner progressed, and once Monroe detected in the air, as his negro served him, the genteel aroma of firewater.

The girl beside Monroe was shivering. She saw that something impended. Suddenly the waiters seemed to divide into two factions. They took sides for and against their chief. This was evidenced only by their mutterings and by the hostile jostling of each other, as they passed in and out the door.

Monroe, who knew the negro thoroughly, began to be alarmed. His alarm crept along the table and around on the other side until

all the guests were affected by it. In fact, the time came when everybody in the room, save Bellamy himself, wondered what dire thing would happen next. And then it happened.

Monroe's waiter, purposely or by accident, spilled a plate of salad down the shirt front of his chief. Without a word, that huge savage, waving his arms wildly in the air, swooped down upon his lighter aide. The latter, less burly, was more agile. He leaped suddenly out of the way, switched his arm backward to his hip pocket and drew forth, not a revolver, but a razor. And then the fight was on.

Immediately seven of the waiters leaped to one side of the room, each with an open razor in his hand, and confronted four others headed by the chief. The rest was pandemonium.

In the midst of it all Wainwright Monroe was aware that he had arisen from his seat, that he had caught the half-fainting Jocelyn Jeffreys about the waist and had dragged her into comparative safety in a far corner of the room. He was aware of something else—that, as he held her in his arms, he found suddenly that her lips were lifted with infinite allurements to his—found that he had kissed her. In the confusion that followed, he forgot the negroes—forgot everything save that one tremendous fact—that he had kissed her.

entertaining after-dinner speech.

The negroes were nowhere to be seen. Monroe drew the girl back to her seat, grateful that the diners had never noticed them, and, no sooner had the company restored itself to semi-mirth, then back into the room poured the most orderly set of darkies that could be imagined, each with a grin upon his face a mile wide.

The diners rose and cheered them. The chief waiter looked as sheepish at this unexpected salvo as he now looked harmless, and again the guests turned to Bellamy and raised their glasses in a silent tribute to his genius.

Monroe grunted in disgust. "We're con-foundedly slow," he said to Jocelyn Jeffreys. "I ought to have known it all the time. That razor fight was just one of Bellamy's sensations. He always has them at everything he gives."

The girl was still shivering. "It was worse than a joke," she exclaimed. "It looked too real to be a joke."

He held her hand for an instant underneath the table, and then suddenly a thought struck him, and, obeying an irresistible impulse, he rose in his place and extended his glance—a lone figure—toward Bellamy. "Bravo, Bellamy," he exclaimed, as though from the bottom of his soul.

The diners tittered at his belated acknowledgment, and he slumped into his seat again beside the girl.

"What's the matter with you?" she whispered.

He waited until his fellow guests had subsided into their customary consumption of food and drink. Then he turned once more to her.

"You don't seem to understand, Miss Jeffreys," he exclaimed, "that trick of Bellamy's got me what I wanted—a kiss from you."

The girl whitened perceptibly and turned the conversation back into its original channel.

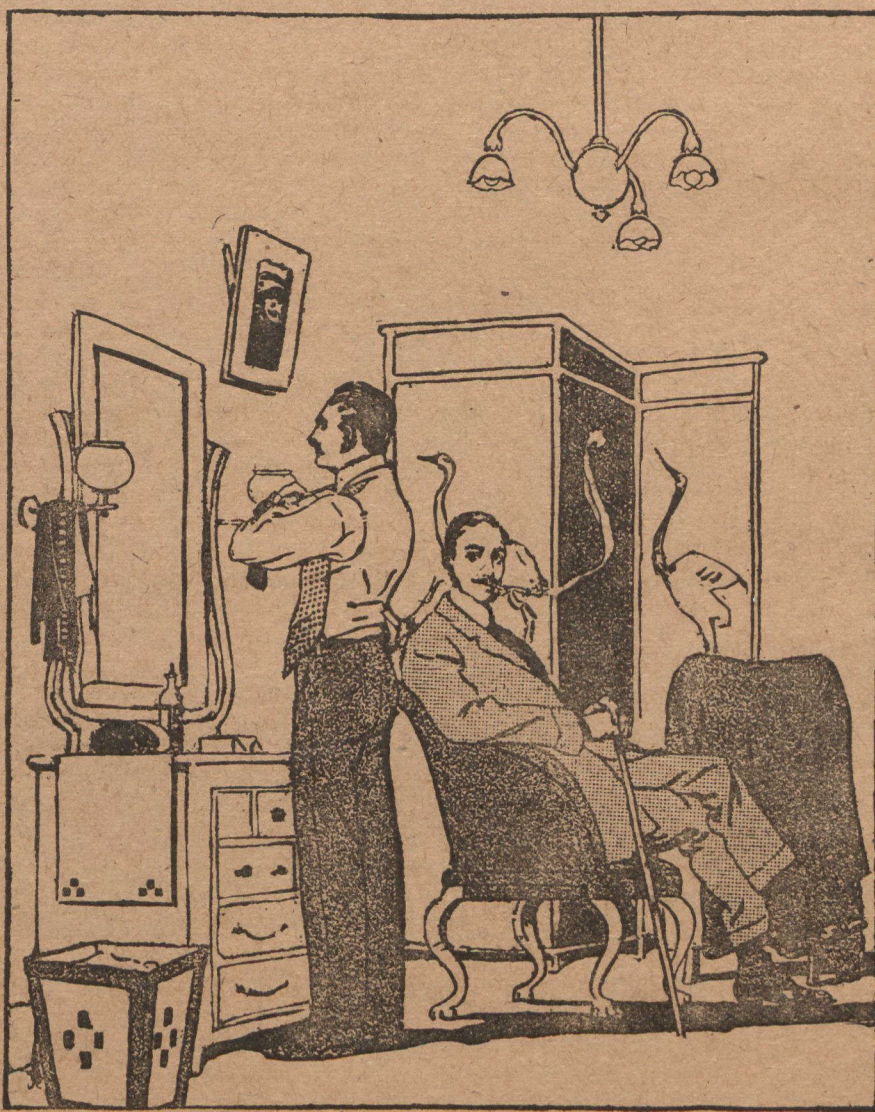
"Would you ever give a dinner for me, Mr. Spendthrift Monroe?" she inquired. "How much a plate do you think I am worth?"

MONROE was tremendously impulsive and tremendously energetic as well. Two days had not elapsed before he had gained an entree to Miss Jocelyn Jeffreys' up-to-date apartments in the Belvedere, before he was chummy with her companion, Miss Leonora Smith, a young woman quite as ungainly as Jocelyn was comely, and, in fact, it was on the evening of the second day after the Bellamy dinner that he had the temerity and the boldness to hand to Jocelyn Jeffreys a little leather case from Tiffany's.

"A belated Christmas present," he remarked genially, though with some strange fear in his heart that he was doing quite the wrong thing.

They were sitting, he and she, in her living-room at the Belvedere. In the next room, reading the latest novel, sat the discreet Miss Smith, always austere, always ugly and always on hand, but she was too far away to hear and the curtains between the rooms were so adjusted that she could be scarcely seen.

It was late, after the performance at the Gaiety, and Monroe had driven Jocelyn home in his car. She was leaning wearily back in an easy chair, her wraps thrown carelessly aside, fatigued with the night's work and the day's, too, for she had had a matinee, but her eyes showed that she was frankly pleased and freshened by his presence and his attention, and she started from her chair and met him



"Well," mused Monroe, "I suppose I've to come. Who's going to be there anyway?"

How long they remained thus, he with his arm about her and she with her hand laid in some sort of frantic appeal upon his shoulder, looking into each other's eyes—how long this lasted they, neither of them, knew. They were brought to their senses by a universal burst of laughter and by the shrill voices of women and the strong voices of men crying out:

"BRAVO, Bellamy, good boy, Archie." And then they saw that the fifty guests, convulsed with laughter, were reseating themselves at the table, which they had left but a few moments before in alarm, and that Archie was bowing his acknowledgments with beaming face as though he had just perpetrated an