

than the whole of these stones scattered all over your table. I guess I shall have to come along another time and make up my mind what I am going to buy for Sadie."

Mr. Tunncliffe was by no means satisfied with this arrangement. He began to see an excellent stroke of business receding into the background. He was quite aware of the fact that there were other business houses in the West End of London besides that of Tunncliffe and Co. The fly must not be allowed to escape now.

"Might I make a suggestion," he said in his most velvety voice. "I shall be only too happy to call at your house or send one of my assistants at any time with a selection of jewels so that you can pick out whatever you require. It will be no trouble at all, I assure you."

McDougall yawned as if the subject had no further interest for him. He seemed to be absorbed in the contemplation of his plans for the piling up of still more dollars. —He came out of his reverie with a start presently and opined that the suggestion was good.

"Very well," he said. "Now let me see. Suppose you come round or send to-morrow afternoon about three o'clock. I shall be in then and we'll go over the thing at our leisure. Talking about flowers, I fancy I can show you something the like of which you have never seen before. So far as I am concerned, I would rather have a handful of them than all the gems in your shop."

Mr. Tunncliffe expressed his pleasure at the treat about to come. He was a wealthy man himself, and in the intervals of money making the culture of flowers was his pet hobby. The American would have to have something very fine indeed in the way of blooms if he expected to eclipse the contents of Mr. Tunncliffe's greenhouses at Streatham. On the whole, Tunncliffe decided that he would call in person at Toddington Terrace.

He found himself in due course seated in the back dining-room where a footman had conducted him, and where, for the time being, he had the magnificent old furniture and the equally magnificent conservatory to himself. From the very first moment Mr. Tunncliffe was duly and properly impressed. If hitherto he had prided himself upon his knowledge of floriculture, he felt humbled and abased now. Never in his life had he looked upon anything so tropical and luxurious. The whole place was one mass of blossoms of all colours and hues—a veritable bower of delight filled with strange perfumes such as Tunncliffe had never encountered before. He stood there in the humid atmosphere trying to calculate how much it had cost the millionaire to bring all this blaze of glory across the Atlantic. In the midst of this little problem the door opened and McDougall came in. He closed the door carefully behind him. There was something in the aspect of his face which showed that in some way the millionaire had been put out recently.

"I haven't much time to spare," he said, "and I am anxious to make my selections before my wife comes downstairs. You see, I don't want her to know what I am doing; in fact, I don't want her to know anything until the selection is finally made. She will be jealous enough in any case. But she isn't a bad woman at the bottom, and I calculate she'll get her quid pro quo before the week is out. Now just trot out your jewels and let us see what we are going to do. When I have made my selection and given you my cheque I shall be happy to show you the flowers. I guess you have never seen anything like them before on your side of the Atlantic Ocean."

Tunncliffe admitted truthfully enough that he hadn't. But flowers were one thing and business another at that time of the day, so that all thoughts of pleasure were thrust sternly aside and a pile of cases from the black leather bag began to appear on the solid-looking dining-room table, and littered up the priceless brocade table cloth which reached on all sides down to the floor. The bag was empty at length and Tunncliffe was about to open the uppermost of the cases when the door of the dining-room was opened and a pretty vivacious face looked in. With a quickness hardly to be expected in a man of his years, McDougall snatched up a Persian rug from one of the armchairs and threw it over the pile of cases on the table. At the same time he winked significantly at Tunncliffe who nodded slightly in reply. The jeweller perfectly understood that secrecy was the order of the day; besides, the fresh, vivacious looking face in the doorway was not a strange one to him, for he had seen the youthful Mrs. McDougall before. She appeared to recognise Mr. Tunncliffe now, for she smiled at him in the friendliest possible fashion.

"I hope I am not intruding," she said. "Now I won-

der what mischief you are up to with my husband, Mr. Tunncliffe?"

"He came here to see the flowers," McDougall said with every evidence of confusion. "The fact is I was in Bond Street the other day on business, and I discovered that Mr. Tunncliffe was a flower lover like myself. I asked him to come round here so that I could show him what could be done in the way of transferring of flowers when you go about it in the right way."

"They really are wonderful," Tunncliffe murmured.

"Are they not," Mrs. McDougall echoed with apparent simplicity. "But, really, they are nothing to what we have in New York, and I am sure you possess nothing to compare with them in your own greenhouses. Now have you?"

"Indeed, I have not," Tunncliffe admitted. "I shall be quite out of conceit with my own collection now. My wife, too, would be terribly disappointed if she were only here."

Mrs. McDougall walked impulsively into the conservatory and began pulling carelessly at the various ropes and branches of glorious blossom. Very soon she had her arms full of lovely flowers which she proceeded to deposit almost carelessly on the dining-room table. As the various fronds and tangles spread as released from Mrs. McDougall's hands they seemed to cover the table with a whole mass of bloom. Tunncliffe forgot all about business in the enthusiasm of the moment. It seemed to him that he had never seen such a pyramid of luxuriance and beauty before. Here were flowers of all hue and size, flaming scarlet and red, yellow and bronze and blue, all in a delirious tangle with the most refined and exquisite foliage.

"These are for you," Mrs. McDougall said with a dazzling smile. "Oh, no, of course you can't take them with you, but if you will give me your private address I will see that the flowers are carefully packed in cotton wool and sent off to you at once."

Tunncliffe could only murmur his thanks. He appeared to be almost overcome by this conversation on the part of the millionaire's wife. For the moment he had quite forgotten the still more precious articles which underlay the Persian rug sprawling so carelessly across the table. Then Mrs. McDougall turned to her husband and signified that she wished to speak to him for a moment.

"I am just going out," she explained. "Really I cannot stay a moment longer, Jabez. Are you quite certain that Mr. Tunncliffe can spare you for a moment?"

Tunncliffe expressed himself appropriately. As a matter of fact, so long as Mrs. McDougall did everything to expedite business he was not in the least likely to stand in the way. With something like a look of relief on his face the millionaire followed his wife and the door closed softly behind him.

Ten minutes passed pleasantly enough, for the time was not wasted with Tunncliffe. He seemed to need every moment in which to drink in the beauty of those glorious blossoms which filled him at once with envy and delight.

### CHAPTER III.

Surely never since man began to gather flowers about him for his soul's delight, and for the softening of his savage instincts, had anything like that pyramid of blossoms been seen in one spot. And presently, when Mr. Tunncliffe turned to the contemplation of them, he glanced at the clock and saw, to his intense surprise, that it was considerably past four. Making allowance for the time he had passed with McDougall and his wife he had now been alone for the best part of an hour. His feelings of rapture and admiration began to ebb. He was conscious of a certain sensation of mingled mistrust and suspicion. Surely the house had grown strangely still and silent, considering that it was filled with servants. Surely, it was a remarkable thing that McDougall stopped so long away.

Tunncliffe put his suspicions aside as unworthy. McDougall was a man of affairs and might have been detained by a thousand matters. Besides, there lay the Persian rug upon the table and under it the outline of the cases which Tunncliffe had piled there himself. He decided to wait a few minutes longer before ringing the bell and enquiring as to what had become of the master of the house. Still, at the same time, there was no reason why the jeweller should not reassure himself on the subject of the safety of his property. He knew all the ropes. He had heard so many stories of ingenious jewel frauds that one never really could tell. He stepped forward now with the intention of putting the mass of flowers on one side so that he might be certain of his