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BY GUY BOOTHBY

Author of "A Beautiful White
Devil," "A Bid For For-
tune," "The Marriage
of Esther," "Dr.
Nikola," Etc

(Continued From Saturday)

When he had watched him enter off across
the plain returned to the room where
I lay. Evidently his conscience was re-
proving him, for he stood by my bed
for some minutes looking down at me
in silence. Then he heaved a little sigh
and said under his breath, "You miser-
able beggar, how little you know what
is happening, but I'm bothered if I
don't think after all that you're a
dashed sight happier than I am. I'm
beginning to wish I had not given you
away to that devil. The remembrance
of it will haunt me all my life long."

I woke up with his last speech ring-
ing in my ears, and for a moment
could scarcely believe my own eyes.
I had imagined myself back in the
bush, and to wake up in the smoking
room of a London hotel was a sur-
prise for which I was not prepared.
The clock over the door was just
striking eleven as I rose to my feet
and went out into the hall. Taking my
coat down from a peg I put it on, and
then, donning my hat and turning up
my collar, went out into the street.
Snow was still falling, and the night
was bitterly cold. As I walked I
thought again of the dream from
which I had just awakened. It seemed
more like a vision intended for my
guidance than the mere imagining of
an over-excited brain. How much
would I not have given to know if it
was only imagination, or whether I had
been permitted to see a representation
of what had really happened? This
question, however, I could not of
course answer.

On reaching the Strand I hailed a
hansom and bade the driver convey
me with all speed to 23, Great Gunter
Street, Soho.

"Twenty-three, Great Gunter
Street," repeated the man, staring at
me in surprise. "You don't surely mean
that, sir?"

"I do," I answered. "If you don't
like the job I can easily find another
man."

"Oh, I'll take you there, never fear,
sir," replied the man. "I was aware
what sort of a crib it is. It's not the
shop gentlemen goes to as a general
rule at night time, except maybe
they're after a dog as has been stole,
or the like."

"So it's that sort of place is it?" I
answered. "Well, I don't know that it
matters. I'm able to take care of my-
self."

As I said this I got into the vehicle,
and in half a minute we were driving
down the Strand in the direction of
Soho. In something under a quarter of
an hour we had left Leicester Square
behind us, crossed Shaftesbury Ave-
nue, and turned into Great Gunter
Street. The driver, who was a Jewish
man, had insinuated, neither a
respectable nor a savory neighbor-
hood; and when I saw it and its in-
habitants I ceased to wonder at his
hesitation. When he had proceeded
half a dozen paces down the street he
pulled his horse up before the entrance to
what looked like a dark alley leading
into a court. Realizing that this must
be my destination I opened the apron
and sprang out.

"Number 23 is somewhere here-
abouts, sir," said the driver, who seem-
ed to satisfy a certain amount of satis-
faction from his ignorance of the local-
ity. "I don't doubt but what one of
these boys will be able to tell you ex-
actly."

I paid him his fare and sixpence
over for his civility, and then turned
to question a filthy little gutter ur-
chin, who, with bare feet and chatter-
ing teeth, was standing beside me.

"Can you take me to it?" I inquired.

"Twenty-three?" said the boy.
"That's where Crooked Billy lives, sir.
You come along with me and I'll show
you the way."

"Go ahead then," I answered, and
the boy thereupon bolted into the dark-
ness of the alley before which we
had been standing. I followed him
as quickly as I could, but it was a
matter of some difficulty, as the
alley was so narrow and the boy was
as black as the pit of Tophet, and seemed
to twist and turn in every conceivable
direction. A more unprepossessing
place it would have been difficult to
find. Halfway down I heard the boy
cry out "Hold up, mother!" and before
I could stop I found myself in "collis-
ion" with a woman who, besides being
unsteady on her legs, reeked abomi-
nably of gin. Disengaging myself, I
sped after my leader, and a moment
later emerged into the open court it-
self. The snow had ceased, and the
three-quarter moon, sailing along
through swift flying clouds, showed
me the surrounding houses. In one or
two windows, lights were burning, re-
vealing sights which almost made my
flesh creep with loathing. In one I
could see a woman sewing as if for
her very life by the light of a soli-
tary candle, which worked on a table
two little children lay asleep, half
clad, on a heap of straw and rags in
the corner. On my right I had a
glimpse of another room, where the
dead body of a man was stretched
out on a table on the floor, and two
old hags seated at a table beside it,
drinking gin from a black bottle, turn-
ing and turning about. The wind whistled
mournfully among the roof tops; the
snow had been trodden into a dis-
gusting slush everywhere, save a close
against the walls, where it still show-
ed white as silver; while the reflection
of the moon gleamed in the icy puddles
golden as a spade guinea.

"Success does not always mean the
amassing of wealth." It is narrow-
ness that uses dollars as the only
standard of greatness.

"This is number 23," said my con-
ductor, pointing to the door before
which he stood.

I rewarded him, and then turned
my attention to the door indicated.

Having tapped with my knuckles
upon the panel, I waited for it to be
opened to me. But those inside were
in no hurry, and for this reason some
minutes elapsed before I heard anyone
moving about; then there came the
sound of shuffling feet, and next mo-
ment the door was opened an inch or
two, and a female voice inquired with
an oath—which I will omit—what was
wanted and who was waiting it.

To the first query I replied by ask-
ing if Levi Solomon lived there, and,
if he did, whether I could see him.

The second I shirked altogether. In
answer I was informed that Levi Solom-
on did reside there, and that if I was
the gentleman who had called to see
him about a hansom cab I was to come
in at once.

The door was opened to me, and I
immediately stepped into the grim-
iest, most evil smelling passage it has
ever been my luck to set foot in. The
walls were soiled and stained al-
most beyond recognition; the floor
was littered with orange peel, paper,
cabbage leaves, and garbage of all
sorts and descriptions, while the
stench that greeted me baffled de-
scription. I have never smelled any-
thing like it before, and I hope I may
never do so again.

The most I can say for the old lady
who admitted me is that she matched
her surroundings. She was short al-
most to dwarfishness, well-nigh bald,
and had lost her left eye. Her dress
consisted of a ragged skirt, and in
place of a body—I believe that is the
technical expression—she wore a
man's coat, which gave a finishing
touch of comicality to the peculiar
outline of her figure. As soon as she
saw that I had entered, she bade me
shut the door behind me and follow
her. This I did by means of a dilapi-
dated staircase, in which almost every
step was taken at the risk of one's
life, to the second floor. Having ar-
rived there, she knocked upon a door
facing her; and I noticed that it was
not until she had been ordered to en-
ter that she ventured to turn the handle.

"The gentleman what has come
about the 'ansom keb," she said, as
she ushered me into the room.

The apartment was lit by two can-
dles stuck in their sockets upon a
little deal table, and by their rays I
could distinguish the man I had come
in search of standing by the fireplace
awaiting me. He did not greet me un-
til he had made certain, by listening
at the keyhole, that the woman had
gone downstairs. He was a quaint
little fellow, Jewish from the soles of
his feet to the top of his head. He had
the nose of his race, little beady eyes
as sharp as gimlets, and a long beard
which a little washing might have
made white. He was dressed in a
black frock coat two sizes too large
for him, black trousers that would
have fitted a man three times his size,
and boots that had been patched and
otherwise repaired till their original
maker would not have known them
again.

"Mr. Pennethorne, I presume," he
began, rubbing his hands together and
speaking as if he had a bad cold in
his head. "I am delighted to see you.
I am sorry that I cannot ask you to
sit down, but I have no chair to give
you. For the same reason I cannot
offer you refreshment. Have you had
a good look at me?"

My surprise at this abrupt question
prevented my replying for a moment;
then I insinuated that I thought I
should know him again, after which,
with a muttered "That's all right," he
blew out one of the candles, remem-
bering that, as we now knew each other,
we could conduct our business quite
as well with half the light.

"I received word from our mutual
acquaintance Dr. Nikola this morn-
ing," he began, when the illumination
had been thus curtailed. "That you
would be coming to see me. Of course
I did not ask the business, for Dr.
Nikola is my friend, and I obey and
trust him to the letter. By his instruc-
tion I am to be to you a disguise,
and then to take you to the place
where you will discover a certain han-
som cab awaiting you."

I nodded. At the very mention of
the cab my old hatred of Bartrand
sprang up again, and I began to ques-
tion the Jew as to where we were to
find it and what I was to do when I
had got it. But this impetuosity did
not meet with his approval.

"My young friend, you must not be
in such a hurry," he said, wagging
his head deprecatingly at me. "We
shall have to be sure we make no mis-
take otherwise the doctor would not
be pleased, and I should not like to
risk that. Have you known Dr. Nikola
very long?"

"I met him this morning for the
first time in my life," I answered,
realizing on what intimate terms we
now stood, considering the length of
our acquaintance.

"It is that so you have much to
learn regarding him," the Jew replied.
"Let us be very careful that we do
not risk his displeasure. Now we will
get to work, for it is nearly time for
us to be going."

As he spoke he crossed to a cup-
board in the corner of the room, and
took from it some garments which
he placed upon the table in the centre.
"Here we have the very identical
things," he said, "and when you've
got them on, you'll be as good as a cab-
by as any that mounts his box in the
streets of London. Try this and see
how it suits you."

He handed me a bushy black beard,
which worked on springs, and assist-
ed me to fasten it to my face. When
it was made secure he stepped back
and examined it critically; then with a
muttered "that will do," turned to
the garments on the table, and select-
ed from the heap a tattered cap, such
as cabmen wear in wet weather. This
I fixed round my shoulders. A sou'-
wester was next placed upon my
head, and when this was done, as far
as I was concerned, we were ready to
go off. My curious acquaintance was
not long in making his toilet, and five
minutes later found us passing out of
the filthy alley into Great Gunter
Street once more.

"I'll go first," said the Jew. "You
follow two or three paces behind me.
It's just as well we should not be seen
together."

I accordingly took my position a
few steps in the rear, and in this fas-

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tion dodged along behind him, until
we reached the corner of Wardour and
Pultney Streets. Here my guide stop-
ped and looked about him. Evidently
what he wanted was not forthcoming,
for he began to grow uneasy, and
stamped up and down the pavement,
looking eagerly in each direction. All
the time I did not venture to approach
him. I was considering what I was
about to do. I thought of my father,
and my brother and sisters, and won-
dered what they would have thought
if they could have known to what a
pass I had fallen. What would my poor
mother have said if she had lived?
But she, as far as I could learn from
those who had known her, had been a
gentle Christian woman, and if she
had lived I should in all probability
never have left England. In that case
I should not have known Bartrand,
and this revenge would then not have
been necessary. By what small chan-
ces are our destinies shaped out for
us!

At last the rattle of wheels sounded,
and a moment later a smart hansom
cab, which I recognized as that shown
me by Nikola at his house that morn-
ing, drove down the street and pulled
up at the corner where we stood. The
lamps glowed brightly in the frosty
air, and it was evident the horse was
one of spirit, for he tossed his head
and pawed the ground with impatience
to be off again.

To Be Continued.

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