

Lambaire is a man of the world, we can't judge him by convent codes, or by schoolgirl codes; if you argue the matter from now until quarter-day you won't budge me. I'm going through with this. It's a chance that will never come again. I'm sure father would have liked it."

He paused expectantly, but she did not accept the lull as an opportunity.

"Now, for goodness sake, Cynthia, do not, I beg of you, sulk."

She turned from her contemplation of the outside world.

"Do you remember how you came home the other night?" she asked suddenly, and the boy's face went red.

"I don't think that's fair," he said hotly, "a man may make a fool of himself—"

"I wasn't going to speak of that," she said, "but I want to remind you that a gentleman brought you home—he knew Lambaire better than you or I know him—yes?—you were going to say something?"

"Go on," said the youth, a note of triumph in his voice, "I have something to say upon that subject."

"He said that Lambaire was something worse than a man about town—that he was a criminal, one of the cleverest of criminals, a man without scruple or pity."

There was a smile on Sutton's face when she finished.

"And do you know who this gentleman was?" he asked in glee. "He's Amber—you've never heard of Amber?"

She shook her head.

"He's a thief, just a low-down thief—you can jolly well shake your head, Cynthia, but he's a fellow who gets his living by his wits; he's been out of gaol exactly a week—that is your Mr. Amber."

"Mr. Amber," repeated a voice at the door, as a maid admitted the imperturbable subject of the conversation.

Amber was in the conventional garb of civilization. His tightly-buttoned morning coat was of the newest cut, his linen was of the shiniest. The hat which he held in his hand shone as only a new silk hat can shine, and spotless white was alike the colour of the spats over his varnished shoes and the skin-tight gloves on his hands.

He might have stepped out of a fashion plate, so immaculate was he. He smiled cheerfully at the uncomfortable youth and held out his hand to the girl.

"Called in," he said easily, "passin' this way: motor buses pass the door—very convenient; what I like about London is the accessibility of everywhere to everywhere else—may I put my hat down?—thank you so much. If ever I make a lot of money I shall live in Park Lane; it's so close to the tube. And how are you?"

Sutton muttered an ungracious platitude and made for the door.

"One moment, Francis," the girl had gone red and white by turn, and the hand that traced patterns on the table had trembled a little when Amber came in: now she was very self-possessed, albeit paler than usual. The boy stopped, one hand on the handle of the door, and frowned warningly at his sister.

"Mr. Amber," she said, ignoring the signal, "I think it is only fair to you to repeat something I have just heard."

"I beg of you, Cynthia!" said Sutton angrily.

"It has been said, Mr. Amber," she continued, "that you are—are a bad character."

"My lady," said Amber, with a grave face, "I am a bad character."

"And—and you have recently been released from prison," she faltered, avoiding his eyes.

"If," said Amber carefully, "by 'recent' you mean nearly a week ago—that also is true."

"I told you," cried Sutton, with an exultant laugh, and Amber whipped round.

"My Democritus, my Abderite," he said reproachfully, "wherefore rollick? It is not so funny, this prison—quid rides my Sutton?" His eyebrows rose questioningly.

Something made the girl look at him. She may have expected to see

him shamefaced; instead she saw only righteous annoyance.

"My past misfortune cannot interest you, My Lady," he said a little sadly, "when, on a memorable night, I faced James, at your wish, entering the portals of an establishment to which I would not willingly invite a self-respecting screw—by which I mean the uniformed instrument of fate, the prison warden—I do not remember that you demanded my credentials, nor set me a test piece of respectability to play."

Then he again addressed himself to the boy.

"Mr. Sutton," he said softly, "Me-thinks you are a little ungracious, a little precipitate: I came here to make, with the delicacy which the matter demanded, all the necessary confession of previous crimes, dodges, acts of venal artfulness, convictions, incarcerations, together with an appendix throwing light upon the facility with which a young and headstrong subaltern of cavalry might descend to the Avernus which awaits the reckless layer of odds on indifferent horses."

He said all this without taking breath, and was seemingly well satisfied with himself and the sketch he gave of his early life. He pulled himself erect, squared his shoulders and set his monocle more firmly in his eye, then with a bow to the girl, and an amused stare at the young man, he turned to the door.

"One moment, Mr. Amber," she found her voice, "I cannot allow you to go like this; we owe you something, Francis and I..."

"Owe me a memory," said Amber in a low voice, "that would be a pleasant reward, Miss Sutton."

Impulsively she stepped forward and held out her hand, and he took it.

"I'm so sorry," was all she said, but she knew by the pressure on her hand that he understood.

As they stood there, for the briefest space of time, hand to hand, Sutton slipped from the room, for he had been expecting visitors, and had heard the distant thrill of a bell.

Neither noticed his absence. The girl's face was upraised to Amber's, and in her eyes was infinite compassion.

"You are too good—too good for that life," she said, and Amber shook his head, smiling with his eyes.

"You don't know," he said gently, "perhaps you are wasting your pity—you make me feel a scoundrel when you pity me."

Before she could reply the door was flung open, and Sutton burst into the room; behind him was Lambaire, soberly arrayed, sleek of hair and perfectly groomed, and no less decorous of appearance was the inevitable Whitey bringing up the rear.

Cynthia Sutton gazed blankly at the new-comers. It was a bold move of her brother's to bring these men to her house. Under any circumstances their reception would have been a stiff one; now, a cold anger took possession of her, for she guessed that they had been brought to complete the rout of Amber.

The first words of Sutton proved this.

"Cynthia," he said, with a satisfaction which he did not attempt to conceal, "these are the gentlemen that Mr. Amber has vilified—perhaps he would care to repeat—"

"Young, very young," said Amber tolerantly. He took the management of the situation from the girl's hands, and for the rest of the time she was only a spectator ne puero gladium—eh?"

He was the virtuous schoolmaster reproaching youth.

"And here we have evidence," he exhibited Lambaire and his companion with a sweep of his hand, "confronted by the men he has so deeply wronged; and now, my Lambaire, what have you to say about us that we have not already revealed?"

"I know you are a thief," said Lambaire.

"True, O King!" admitted Amber genially.

(To be continued.)



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