

pistol I'll talk to you. At present you're a disgusting object and not fit to be reasoned with."

"Another minute and I'll shoot," growled Jim.

"Shoot away then, and be damned to you," said Sherrit; "but you need not make such a blasted fuss over it. I could have shot six men while you've been talking of it," and lighting a cigarette he took up a paper and began to read.

Jim Fitz-Urse had not reckoned on such a contingency. Thinking it over on his way to the barracks, he had conceived it to be quite possible that Sherrit would try to rush him, or would call for help. In either case he had made up his mind to shoot without hesitation. On the whole, however, he had thought it most likely that Sherrit would come with him. Jim, you see, had lived in places where the pistol was a power; where a request from the man who happened to have the drop for the time being was rarely disputed; and he was quite knocked off his centre by Sherrit's indifference, which was plainly real.

Sherrit, on the other hand, though undoubtedly a man of great nerve, hardly realized his danger. Few men know what a pistol means unless they have seen one used in anger. But a park of artillery would not have driven him into such a marriage with Fanny Fitz-Urse. He was a man that would die any day rather than make himself ridiculous. So he sat there smoking his cigarette and skimming his paper as though Jim Fitz-Urse and his pistol were in Tai-o-hac.

Jim was fairly nonplussed. Twice his grasp tightened on the handle and his finger on the trigger; but he did not pull. Sherrit's behavior so impressed him that he began to think, and when a man in that position begins to think, it is all over with the shooting. Just then there was a clank of ammunition-boots in the passage. Jim half cocked the pistol and returned it to his pocket. As he did so the door was thrust open by a red-headed man in mufti:

"You blundering lout," said Sherrit to the new comer, "how often have I told you to knock before you come into my room?"

"Plaze, sor, I didn't know you wor in, sor," protested the servant.

"You had better make sure in future, if you don't want to go back to duty. Now, what do you want?" said Sherrit.

"No—nothin' sor."

"Well, then, go away."

As the door closed, Fitz-Urse said to Sherrit: "That was handsomely done, Captain."