

# EXCUSE ME!

RUPERT HUGHES  
NOVELIZED FROM THE  
COMEDY OF THE SAME  
NAME. Y Y Y  
ILLUSTRATED FROM  
PHOTOGRAPHS OF  
THE PLAY AS PRODUCED  
BY HENRY W. SAVAGE.  
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(Continued from last week)

And so they worked from each end of the car toward the middle. Their hands ran swiftly over bodies with a loathsome familiarity that could only be resented, not revenged. Their hands dived into pockets, and up sleeves, and into women's hair, everywhere that a jewel or a bill might be secreted. And always a rough growl or a swing of the revolver silenced any protest.

Their heinous fingers had hardly begun to ply, when the solemn stillness was broken by a chuckle and low hoot of laughter, a darkey's unctuous laughter. At such a place it was more shocking than at a funeral.

"What alls you?" was the nearest robber's demand.

The porter tried to wipe his streaming eyes without lowering his hands, as he chuckled on: "I—just thought of sumsum funny."

"Funny!" was the universal groan. "I was just thinking," the porter sneezed, "what mighty poor pickings you-all are goin' to get out of me. Whilst if you had 'at wailed till I got to 'Drisco, I'd jest natched him 'noin' money."

The robber relieved him of a few times and quarters and ordered him to turn round, but the black face whirled back as he heard from the other end of the car Wedgewood's indignant complaint: "I say, this is an outrage!"

"Ab, close your trap and turn round, or I'll—"

"The porter's smile died away. 'Good Lawd,' he stammered, 'they're goin' to skin that British lion! And I just wore myself out on him.'"

And now another touch of light relieved the gloom. Kathleen was next in line, and she had been forcing her lips into their most attractive smile, and keeping her eyes wisely mellow, for the robber's benefit. Marjorie could not see the smile; she could only see that Kathleen was next. She whispered to Marjorie:

"They'll get the bracelet! They'll get the bracelet!"

And Marjorie could have danced with glee. But Kathleen leaned coquettishly toward the masked stranger, and threw all her art into her tone as she murmured:

"I'm sure you're too brave to take my things. I've always admired men with the courage of Claude Duval."

The robber was taken a trifle aback, but he growled: "I don't know the party you speak of—but cough up!"

"Listen to her," Marjorie whispered in horror; "she's flirting with the train-robber."

"What won't some women flirt with!" Marjorie exclaimed.

The robber studied Kathleen a little more attentively, as he whipped off her necklace and her rings. She looked good to him, and so willing, that he muttered: "Say, lady, if you'll give me a kiss, I'll give you that diamond ring you got on."

"All right!" laughed Kathleen, with triumphant complacency.

This reminder sobered the weeping thief at once, and he went back to work ruthlessly. "Oh, all right, Jake, Sorry, ma'am, but business is business." And he dumped Mrs. Temple's trinkets into the satchel. It was too much for the little old lady's little old husband. He fairly shrieked:

"Young man, you're a damned scoundrel whose lot best argument I ever saw for hell-fire!"

Mrs. Temple's grief changed to horror at such a bolt from the blue: "Walter!" she gasped, "such language!"

But her husband answered in self-defense: "Even a minister has a right to swear once in his lifetime."

Mallory almost dropped in his tracks, and Marjorie keeled over on him, as he gasped: "Good Lord, Dr. Temple, you are a—"

"Yes, my boy," the old man confessed, glad that the robbers had relieved him of his guilty secret along with the rest of his private properties. Mallory looked at the collapsing Marjorie and groaned: "And he was in the next berth all this time!"

The unmasking of the old fraud made a second sensation. Mrs. Fosdick called from far down the aisle: "Dr. Temple, you're not a detective?"

Mrs. Temple shouted back furiously: "How dare you ask me that!"

But Mrs. Fosdick was crying to her luscious-eyed mate: "Oh, Arthur, he's not a detective. Embrace me!"

And they embraced, while the robbers looked on aghast at the sudden oblivion into which the old man had focussed the attention on themselves again, however, with a ferocious: "Here, hands up!"

But Jake, who had chosen Marjorie's left hand, roared: "Say, you cheated! All I got is this measly plain gold band."

"Oh, don't take that!" Marjorie gasped, clenching her hand.

Mallory's heart ached at the thought of this final sacrifice. He had the license, and the minister at last—and now the funds were going to carry off the wedding ring. He controlled himself with a desperate effort, and stooped to plead: "Say, old man, don't take that. That's not fair."

"Shut up both of you," Jake growled, and jabbed him again with the gun.

He gave the ring a jerk, but Marjorie, in the very face of the weapon, would not let go. She struggled and tugged, weeping and imploring: "Oh, don't, don't take that! It's my wedding ring."

"Agh, what do I care!" the ruffian snarled, and wrenched her finger so viciously that she gave a little cry of pain.

That broke Mallory's heart. With a wild, bellowing, "Damn you!" he hurled himself at the man, with only his bare hands for weapons.

CHAPTER XL  
A Hero in Spite of Himself.

Passion sent Mallory into the unequal fight with two armed and desperate outlaws. But reason had planned the way. He had been studying the robber's little figure, as if he were a villain, was a war-map, studying his gestures, his way of turning, and how he held the revolver. He had noted that the man, as he frisked the passengers, did not keep his finger on the trigger, but on the guard.

Marjorie's little battle threw the desperado off his balance a trifle; as he recovered, Mallory struck him, and swept him on over against the back of a seat. At the same instant, Mallory's right hand went like lightning to the trigger guard, and gripped the fingers in a vise of steel, while he drove the man's elbow back against his side. Mallory's left hand meanwhile flung around his enemy's neck, and gave him a spinning fall that sent his left hand out for balance. It fell across the back of the seat, and Mallory plinked it with elbow and knee before he could escape.

All in the same crowded moment, his left knuckles jolted the man's chin in the air, and so bewildered him that his muscles relaxed enough for Mallory's right fingers to seize their prey. The trigger, and the gun at the other robber, and finally to get entire control of it.

The thing had happened in such a flash that the second outlaw could hardly believe his eyes. The shriek of the astonished passengers, and the grunts of Mallory's men, as they crashed backward, woke him to the need for action. He caught his other gun from his holster, and made for a double volley, but there was nothing to aim at. Mallory was crouched in the seat, almost perfectly covered by a human shield.

Still, from force of habit and foolhardy pluck, Bill aimed at Mallory's right eyebrow, just about Jake's right ear, and shouted his old motto: "Hands up, you!"

"Hands up yourself!" answered Mallory, and his victim, shuddering at the fierce look in his comrade's eyes, gasped: "For God's sake, don't shoot, Bill!"

Even then the fellow stood his ground, and debated the issue, till Mallory threw such ringing determination into one last: "Hands up, or by God, I'll fire!" that he caved in, lifted his fingers from the triggers, turned the guns up, and slowly raised both hands above his head.

A profound "Ah!" of relief soured through the car, and Mallory, still keeping his eye on Bill, got down cautiously from the seat. The moment he released Jake's left hand, it darted to the holster where his second gun was waiting. But before he could clutch the butt of it, Mallory jabbed the muzzle of his own revolver in the man's back, and growled: "Put 'em up!"

And the robber's left hand, which had been raised to his forehead, fell to his side, while Mallory's left hand lifted the revolver.

Mallory stood for a moment, breathing hard and a little incredulous at his own swift, sweet triumph. Then he made an effort to speak as if this sort of thing were quite common with him, as if he overpowered a pair of outlaws every morning before breakfast, but his voice cracked as he said, in a drawing-room tone:

"Dr. Temple, would you mind relieving that man of those guns?"

"What shall we do with these damned sinners?"

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