

# THE BANDBOX\*

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## XXII

HER initial impetus carried Eleanor well round the corner to the front of the building. Here, as suddenly as she had started running, she stopped, common sense reasserting itself to reassure her that there was nothing to be gained by running until exhausted. The man was not pursuing her. It was evident that she was to be left to her own devices, so long as they did not impel her to attempt escape from the island—so long as, in his words, she made herself docile to his will.

She stood for a long minute, very erect, head up and shoulders back, eyes closed and lips tight, her hands close-clenched at her sides. Then, drawing a long breath, she relaxed and moved on, with a quiet composure admirably self-enforced, setting herself to explore and consider her surroundings.

The abandoned hotel faced to the south, overlooking the greater breadth of Long Island Sound. In the period of its prosperity the land in front of it, to the water's edge, and indeed for a considerable space on all sides, had been clear—laid out, no doubt, in grassy lawns, croquet-grounds, and tennis-courts. In the long years of its practical abandonment these had reverted to the primitive character of the main portion of the island—to a tangle of undergrowth and shrubbery, sprinkled with scrub oak and stunted pines. Only a meager kitchen-garden was still under cultivation.

Southward, at the shore, a row of weather-beaten and ramshackle bath-houses stood beside the rotting remnants of a dock. The piles of the pier, long bereft of their connecting platform of planks, ran out into the water in a dreary double rank.

Westward a patch of woodland—pro-

genitor, by every characteristic, of the tangle in the former clearing—shut off that extremity of the island, where it ran out into a sandy point. Eastward lay an extensive acreage of low, rounded sand-dunes, held together by rank beach-grass, and bordered by a broad, slowly shelving beach of sand and pebbles.

To the north, at the back of the hotel, lay a long stretch of low ground, finally merging into a small salt marsh. Across this wandered a thin plank walk on stilts, which, over the clear water beyond the marsh, became a rickety-looking dock. At some distance out from the dock a long, slender, slate-colored motor-boat rode at its moorings, with a rowboat swinging from its stern. In the larger craft Eleanor could see the head and shoulders of a man bending over the engine—undoubtedly Mr. Ephraim Clover.

While she watched him, he straightened up, rose, and, going to the stern of the motor-boat, began to pull the dory in by its painter. Having brought it alongside, he transhipped himself awkwardly, then began to drive the small dory in to the dock.

Eleanor remarked the fact that he stood up to the task, pushing the boat forward by means of a single oar, which he thrust downward until it struck bottom. The water was evidently quite shallow; even where the motor-boat was moored, the oar disappeared for no more than half its length beneath the surface.

Presently, having gained the dock, the man clambered upon it, threw a couple of half-hitches in the painter round one of the piles, shouldered the oars, and began to shamble toward the hotel. He appeared as a tall, ungainly figure blackly silhouetted against the steel blue of the evening sky.

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Eleanor waited where she was, near the beginning of the plank walk, to get a better look at him. In time he passed her, with a shy nod and sidelong glance. He seemed to be well past middle age, and of no pretensions whatever to physical loveliness. She would have pronounced him incurably lazy and stupid; his face was dull and heavy, and the whole carriage of the man was eloquent of a nature of sluggish ineptitude.

He disappeared round the house. A moment later she heard Mrs. Clover haranguing him in a shrill voice of impatience, little resembling the tone she had employed when talking to the girl.

For an instant Eleanor dreamed of making a wild attempt to escape by running down to the dock, throwing herself into the rowboat, and casting it off to drift where it would. But the folly of this was too easily apparent. Even if she could be sure that the tide would carry her away from the island, the water was so shallow that a man could wade out to the motor-boat, climb into it, and run her down with discouraging facility.

As for the motor-boat—she hadn't the least idea of the art of running a motor. Besides, she would be overhauled before she could get to it; for she had no doubt whatever that she was being very closely watched, and would be until the boats had left the island. After that—a vista of days of grinding loneliness and hopeless despair opened out before her disheartened mental vision.

She resumed her aimless tour of inspection, little caring where she wandered so long as she kept far from the house, as far as possible from—*him*.

Sensibly the dismal desolation of the spot saturated her spirit. No case that she had ever heard of seemed to her so desperate as that of the lonely, helpless girl marooned upon this wave-bound patch of earth and sand, cut off from all means of communication with her kind, her destiny at the disposal of the maleficent wretch who called himself her father, her sole companions two supposed criminals, whose depravity, if what she had heard were true, was only subordinate to his by reason of their mental inferiority.

She could have wept, but would not. The emotion that oppressed her was not one that tears would soothe, her plight not one that tears could mend.

Her only comfort resided in the fact that she was apparently to be let alone, free to keep to herself within the boundaries of her prison.

Sunset found her sitting on a little sandy hillock on the western end of Wreck Island—sitting with her chin in her hands, gazing seaward with eyes in which rebellion smoldered. She would not give in, would not abandon hope and accept the situation at its face value—that is, as irremediable. Upon this was she firmly determined; the night should not pass unmarked by some sort of an attempt to escape or summon aid.

She even found herself willing to consider arson as a last resort. The hotel afire would make a famous torch to bring assistance from the mainland. But she shrank from the attempt, her soul curdling at the sinister menace of the vitriol.

The day was dying in soft airs that swept the face of the waters with a touch so light as to be barely perceptible. With sundown fell stark calm; the Sound became a perfect mirror for the somber conflagration in the west. The slightest sounds reverberated afar through the still, moveless void. She could hear Mrs. Clover stridently counseling her Ephraim at the house a quarter of a mile away.

Later, she heard the hollow tramp of two pairs of feet, one heavy and one light, on the plank walk; the creak of rowlocks, with the dip and splash of oars; and, after a little pause, the sudden, sharp, explosive rattle of a motor exhaust, as rapid, loud, and staccato as the barking of a Gatling, yet quickly hushed. Almost as soon as it shattered the silence, it was muffled to a thick, steady drumming.

Eleanor rose and turned to look northward. The wood-lot hid from her sight the dock and mooring, and all but the gables of the hotel; but she soon espied the motor-boat standing out from the island on a straight course for the mainland. It was driven at a speed that seemed to her nearly incredible. There was a smother of foam at its stern; long purple ripples widened away from the jet of white water at the stem; a smooth, high swell of dark water pursued as if it meant to catch up and overwhelm the boat and its occupants. These latter occupied the extremes of the little vessel—Ephraim astern, beside the motor, the slighter figure in the bows, handling the wheel.

Slowly the girl took her way back to the hotel, watching the motor-boat draw away, straight and swift of flight as an arrow, momentarily dwindling and losing definite form against the deepening blue-black surface of the Sound.

Weary and despondent, she ascended the pair of steps to the kitchen porch. Mrs. Clover was busy within, washing the supper dishes. She called out a cheery greeting, to which Eleanor responded briefly but with as pleasant a tone as she could muster. She could not but distrust the woman, could not but fear that something vile and terrible lurked beneath that good-natured exterior; else why should she have made herself *his* creature?

"You ain't hungry again?"

"No," said Eleanor, lingering on the porch, reluctant to enter.

"Lonely?"

"No."

"You needn't be; your pa'll be home by three o'clock, he says."

Eleanor said nothing. Abruptly a thought had entered her mind, bringing hope. Something she had almost overlooked had recurred with tremendous significance.

"Tired? I'll go fix up your room soon's I'm done here, if you want to lay down again."

"No; I'm in no hurry. I—I think I'll go for another little walk round the island."

"Help yourself!" the woman called after her heartily. "I'll be busy for about half an hour, and then we can take our chairs out on the porch for a while, and watch the moon come up, and have a good, old-fashioned gossip."

Eleanor lost the sound of Mrs. Clover's voice as she turned swiftly back round the house. Then she stopped, catching her breath with quick delight. It was true—splendidly true! The rowboat had been left behind.

It rode about twenty yards out from the end of the dock, made fast to the motor-boat's mooring. The oars were in it; Ephraim had left them carelessly disposed, their blades projecting a little beyond the stern. And she recalled vividly the fact that the water was so shallow there that the man had been able to pole in with a single oar, immersing it but half its length.

An oar, she surmised, was about six feet long; that argued an extreme depth of water of three feet—say at the worst three and

a half, up to her armpits. Surely she might dare to wade out, unmoor the boat, drag it in to shallower water, and climb in!

But her heart sank as she considered the odds against her should she make such an attempt. If only the night were to be dark! If only Mrs. Clover were not to wait up for her husband and employer! If only the woman were not her superior physically, so strong that Eleanor would be like a child in her hands! If only there were not that awful menace of vitriol!

Nevertheless, in the face of these frightful deterrents, she steeled her resolution. Whatever the consequences, she owed it to herself to be vigilant to seize her chance. She promised herself to be wakeful and watchful. Possibly Mrs. Clover might nap while she sat up; and the girl had two avenues by which to leave the house—not considering the windows. She could go out either through the kitchen, or by the front door to the main and disused portion of the hotel.

She had only to steal noiselessly along the corridor from her bedroom door and down the broad main staircase, and—the front door was not even locked. She remembered distinctly that *he* had simply pulled it to when he went out. Still, it would be well to make certain that he had not returned to lock it.

Strolling idly, with a casual air of utter ennui—assumed for the benefit of her jailer, in case she should become inquisitive—Eleanor went round the eastern end of the building to the front. Here a broad veranda ran from wing to wing, its rotting, weather-eaten floor fenced in by a dilapidated railing, save where steps led up to the front door. Its roof had caved in at one spot, and elsewhere wore a sorry look of baldness, where whole tiers of shingles had fallen away.

Cautiously Eleanor mounted the rickety steps and crossed to the doors. To her delight, they opened readily to a turn of the knob. She stood for a moment, hesitant, peering into the hallway, now dark with evening shadow.

Then curiosity overbore her reluctance. There was nothing to fear; the voice of Mrs. Clover singing over her dish-pan in the kitchen came clearly through the ground-floor corridor, plainly advertising her pre-occupation. And Eleanor wanted desperately to know what it was that the man had hidden in the socket of the newel-post.

She shut the door and felt her way, step by step, over to the foot of the staircase. Happily the floor was sound; there was no creaking to betray her. There would be none when, in the dead of night, she would come down this way to break for freedom.

Mrs. Clover continued to sing contentedly.

Eleanor removed the knob of the post, and looked down into the socket. It was dark in there; she could see nothing; so she inserted her hand and groped until her fingers closed upon a small, rough bar of metal. Removing this, she found that she held a key—a heavy, old-fashioned iron key of curious design.

It puzzled her a little until she recalled the clang of metal that had prefaced the man's appearance in the hall that afternoon. This, then, she inferred, would be the key to his private cache—the secret spot where he hid his loot between forays.

Suddenly Mrs. Clover stopped singing, and the girl, in panic, returned the key to its hiding-place, the knob to its socket. But it had been a false alarm. In another moment the woman's voice was again upraised in song.

Eleanor considered, staring about her. When she saw the man, he had come into sight from beneath the staircase. She reconnoitered stealthily in that direction, and discovered a portion of the hall fenced off by a railing and counter—evidently the office of the old hotel. There was an open door to a room behind the counter. With some slight qualms she passed through the enclosure and entered it.

### XXIII

THE little room was darker than the outer hall, from which it got most of its light. The single window, looking northward, was closely shuttered on the outside; only a feeble twilight filtered through the slanted slats. But there was light enough for Eleanor to recognize the contours and masses of a flat-topped desk with two pedestals of drawers, a revolving chair with a cane seat and back, a brown paper-pulp cuspidor of generous proportions, and—a huge, solid, antiquated iron safe.

This last was a "strong box" of the nineteenth century's middle decades, substantial as a rock, tremendously heavy, and contemptuously innocent of any such innovations as combination dials, time-locks, and the like. A single keyhole, almost

large enough to admit a child's hand, and certainly calculated to admit the key in the newel-post, demonstrated that the safe depended for the security of its contents on nothing more than its massive and unwieldy lock.

It demonstrated something more—that the owner based his confidence in its isolation and the loyalty of his employees, or else had satisfied himself, through practical experiment, that one safe was as good as another, ancient or modern, when subjected to the test of modern methods of burglary.

And—Eleanor was sure—the Cadogan collar was there! It was in the safe, unless the man had taken it away with him—which didn't seem likely, all things considered. A great part of the immense value of the article resided in its perfection, in its integrity; as a whole, it would be an exceedingly difficult thing to dispose of until long after the furor aroused by its disappearance had died down; broken up, its marvelously matched pearls separated and sold one by one, it would not realize a third of its value.

And the girl would have known the truth in five minutes more—she was, in fact, already moving back toward the newel-post—had not Mrs. Clover chosen that moment to leave the kitchen and come walking heavily down the corridor.

What her business might be in that part of the house Eleanor could not imagine, unless it were connected with herself—unless the woman had heard some noise of which Eleanor herself had been unconscious, and was coming to investigate.

In panic terror, the girl turned back into the little room and crouched down behind the safe, making herself as small as possible, actually holding her breath for fear its sound would betray her.

Nearer came that steady, unhurried tread, and nearer. The girl thought her heart would burst with its burden of suspense. She was obliged to gasp for breath, and the noise of it rang as loudly and hoarsely in her ears as the exhaust of a steam-engine. She pressed a handkerchief against her quivering lips.

Directly to the counter came the footsteps, and stopped. There was a sound of something being placed upon the shelf. Then, deliberately, the woman turned and marched back to her quarters.

It was some time before the girl managed to regain sufficient control of her nerves to



rise from her hiding-place and creep out through the office enclosure to the hall. Mrs. Clover had resumed her chanting in the kitchen, but Eleanor was in no mood to run further chances yet awhile. She needed to get away, to find time to compose herself thoroughly.

Pausing only long enough to see for herself what the woman had left on the counter—it was a common oil-lamp, filled and trimmed, with a box of matches beside it, in readiness, presumably, for the home-coming of the master with a new consignment of booty—she flitted swiftly to and through the door, closed it, and ran down the steps to the honest, kindly earth.

Here she was safe. None knew of her adventure and discovery. She quieted from her excitement, and for a long time paced slowly to and fro, pondering ways and means.

The fire ebbed from the heart of the western sky—twilight merged imperceptibly into a night extraordinarily clear and luminous with the gentle radiance of a wonderful sky of stars. The calm held unbroken. The barking of a dog on the mainland carried, thin but sharp, across the waters. On the Sound, lights moved sedately east and west, red lights and green and white lacing the waters with long, wavering ribbons.

Sometimes the girl could hear voices of men talking at a great distance. Once a passenger-steamer crept out of the west, seeming to quicken its pace as it drew abreast the island, and swept away like some floating palace of fairy lamps. As it passed, the strains of its string-orchestra were softly clear in the night. Other steamers followed it—several in a widely spaced procession. But no boat came near Wreck Island. If one had, Eleanor could almost have found heart to call for help.

In due time Mrs. Clover came in search of her prisoner, bringing a lantern to guide her heavy footsteps.

"Land sakes!" she cried, catching sight of the girl. "Wherever have you been all this time?"

"Just walking up and down," said Eleanor quietly.

"Thank goodness I found you!" the woman panted. "Give me quite a turn, you did! I didn't know but what you might be trying some foolish idea about leaving us, like your pa said you might. One never knows when to trust you nervous prostrationists, or what you'll be up to next!"

Eleanor glanced at her sharply, wondering if by any chance the woman's mind could be as guileless as her words, or as the bland and childish simplicity of her eyes in the lantern-light. The girl said nothing.

"Wish you'd come up on the stoop and keep me company," continued Mrs. Clover. "I'm plumb tired of sitting round all alone. Moon'll be up pretty soon; it's a pretty sight shining on the water."

"Thank you," said Eleanor, "I'm afraid I'm too tired. It must be later than I thought. If you don't mind, I'll go to my room."

"Oh, please yourself," said the woman, disappointment lending her tone an unpleasant edge. "You'll find it hot and stuffy up there, though. If you can't get comfortable, come down-stairs. I'll be up till the boss gets home."

"Very well," said Eleanor.

She said good night to the woman on the kitchen porch and left her there. Going up to her room, she threw herself, fully dressed, upon the bed.

For some time the woman down-stairs rocked slowly on the porch, humming sonorously. The sound was infinitely soothing. Eleanor had some difficulty in keeping awake, and only managed to do so by dint of continually exciting her imagination with thoughts of the Cadogan collar in the safe, of the key in the newel-post, of the dory swinging at its moorings in water little more than waist deep.

In spite of all this she did drift into a half-waking nap as the slow hours lagged. How long it lasted she couldn't guess when she wakened; but it had not been too long. A glance at the dial of her wrist-watch, in a slant of moonlight that fell through her window, reassured her as to the flight of time. It was nearly midnight; she had three hours left—three hours' leeway before the return of her persecutor.

She lay without moving, listening attentively. The house was anything but still; the ghosts of forgotten footsteps haunted all its stairs and corridors; but the girl could hear no sound ascribable to human agency. Mrs. Clover no longer sang, her rocking-chair no longer creaked.

With infinite precautions, Eleanor got up and slipped out of the room. Once in the hallway, she did hear a sound of which she easily guessed the source; and the celestial choring of angels could have been no more

sweet in the girl's hearing. Mrs. Clover was snoring.

By kneeling at the head of the staircase in the little hall, and bending over with an arm round the banister for support, Eleanor could see a portion of the kitchen. What she saw only confirmed the testimony of the snoring. The woman had moved indoors to read. An oil-lamp stood by her shoulder, on the table. Her chair was tilted well back, her head resting against it. An old magazine lay open on her lap. Her chin had fallen, and from her mouth, at regular intervals, issued dissonant chords of contentment.

Eleanor drew back, rose, and felt her way to the long corridor. Down this she stole as silently as any ghost, wholly indifferent to the eery nature of the desolate place, spectrally illuminated as it was with checkers of moonlight falling through the dingy windows, alive as it was with the groans and complaints of uneasy planks and timbers and the *frou-frou*, like that of silken skirts, of rats and mice scuttling between the walls.

These counted for nothing to her, but all her soul hung on the continuance of that noise of snoring in the kitchen. Time and again she paused and listened, breathless, until she made sure that it held on uninterrupted.

Gaining at length the head of the stairs, she picked her way down very gently, her heart thumping madly as the burden of her weight wrung from each individual step its personal protest, loud enough—so she felt—to wake the dead in their graves; but not loud enough, it seemed, to disturb the slumbers of the excellent, if from one point of view untrustworthy, Mrs. Clover.

At length she had won to the newel-post and abstracted the key. The foretaste of success was sweet on her tongue. Pausing only long enough to unlatch the front door, for a quick way of escape, she darted through the hall, behind the counter, into the little room.

And still Mrs. Clover slept.

Kneeling, Eleanor fitted the key to the lock. Happily it had been kept well oiled, and was in good working order. The tumblers gave to the insistence of the wards with the softest of dull clicks. She grasped the handle, and the heavy door swung wide without a murmur.

And then she paused, at a loss. It was densely dark in the little room, and she

needed light to see what she was about, if she were to pick out the Cadogan collar.

It was risky, a hazardous chance, but she determined to run it. The lamp that Mrs. Clover had left for her employer was too convenient to be rejected. Eleanor brought it into the room, and carefully shut the door, to prevent the light from being seen in the hall should Mrs. Clover wake and miss her. Then she placed the lamp on the floor before the safe, and lighted it.

As its soft illumination showed the interior of the strong box, the girl uttered a low cry of dismay. To pick out what she sought from that accumulation, even if it were really there, would be the work of hours—barring a most happy and unlikely stroke of fortune.

The interior of the safe was divided into some twelve pigeonholes, each of which was closely packed with parcels of various sizes—brown-paper parcels, neatly wrapped and tied with cord, neatly labeled in ink with an indecipherable hieroglyphic—presumably a means of identification to one acquainted with the code. But Eleanor was not acquainted with the code, and possessed no means of telling one package from another; they were all so similar to one another in everything save size, in which they differed only slightly.

None the less, having dared so much, she wasn't of the stuff to give up the attempt without at least an effort to find the thing for which she had come. Impulsively she selected the first package that fell under her hand, with nervous fingers unwrapped it, and found herself admiring an extremely handsome diamond brooch.

As if it had been a handful of pebbles, she cast it from her, to blaze despised upon the mean plank flooring, and selected another package.

It contained rings—three gold rings set with solitaire diamonds. They shared the fate of the brooch.

The next packet held a watch. She dropped it, too, contemptuously, and hurried on.

She had no method other than to take the uppermost packets from each pigeon-hole, on the theory that the necklace had been one of the last articles entrusted to the safe. That there was some sense in this method was demonstrated when she opened the ninth package—or, for that matter, it may have been the twelfth, for she was too busy and excited to keep any sort of count.

This last packet, however, revealed the Cadogan collar.

With a little thankful sigh the girl secreted the thing in the bosom of her dress, and prepared to rise.

Behind her a board creaked and the door-latch clicked. Still sitting—heart in her mouth, breath at a standstill, blood chilling with fright—she turned in time to see the door open and reveal the face and figure of her father. He stood looking down at her, his eyes blinking in the sudden glare of light that shot a gleam along the polished barrel of the weapon in his hand.

#### XXIV

In spite of the somewhat abrupt and cavalier fashion in which Staff had parted from Alison at the St. Simon, he was obliged to meet her again that afternoon at the offices of Jules Max, their business with the manager being to discuss and select the cast for "A Single Woman." The memories which each retained of their earlier meeting naturally rankled, and the amenities suffered proportionately.

In justice to Staff it must be set down that he wasn't the aggressor. His contract with Max stipulated that he should have the deciding word in the selection of the cast—aside from the leading rôle, of course. When Alison chose—and she invariably did choose—to try to usurp that function, the author merely stood calmly and with imperturbable courtesy upon his rights. In consequence, it was Alison who made the conference such a stormy one that Max more than once threatened to tear his hair, and as a matter of fact did make futile grabs at the meager fringe surrounding his ample bald spot.

So the meeting eventually ended in an armed truce, with no business accomplished, Staff offering to release Max from his contract to produce the play, the manager frantically begging him to do nothing of the sort, and Alison making vague but more or less disquieting remarks about her inclination to "rest."

Staff dined alone, with disgust with his trade for a sauce to his food. But a playwright so frequently feels just like that—on an average of ten times to every production he makes—that he didn't really take himself seriously when he insisted, to himself, that he was going to give up dramatic work and go back to story-writing. A novelist had the advantage of being able to get even

forever with a refractory leading woman by endowing her with a squint, or a low-browed husband, or a fatal taste for drink, or any one of a number of punitive misfortunes. It seemed a positive shame that, being a playwright, the most poignant injury he could inflict upon Alison resided merely in insisting that the leading man should have the opportunity to speak the lines originally written for him.

And, being a man—which is as much as to say a creature without the least glimmer of understanding of his own private emotional existence—he wagged his head in solemn amazement because he had once thought he could love a woman like that.

Now Eleanor Searle was a different sort of a girl altogether! Not that he had any right to think of her in that light; only, Alison had chosen to seem jealous of the girl. Heaven alone—he called it honestly to witness—knew why!

Not that he cared whether Alison were jealous or not; but he was surprised at his solicitude for Miss Searle, now that Alison had made him think of her. He was really more anxious about her than he had suspected. She had seemed to like him, the few times they had met, and he had liked her very well indeed. It's so refreshing to meet a woman in whom beauty and sensibility are combined; the combination is piquant, when you come to think about it.

He didn't believe for an instant that she had meant to run away with the Cadogan collar; and he hoped fervently that she hadn't been involved in any serious trouble by the qualified thing. Furthermore, he candidly wished that he might be permitted to help extricate her, if she were tangled up in any unpleasantness.

Such, at all events, was the general tone of his meditations throughout dinner, and his homeward stroll down Fifth Avenue from Forty-Fourth Street. As he walked, he cast himself for the part of the misprized hero, and made himself look it to the life by sticking his hands in his pockets, carrying his cane at a despondent angle beneath one arm, resting his chin on his chest—or as nearly there as was practicable, if he wished to escape strangulation by his collar—and permitting a cigarette to dangle dejectedly from his lips.

He arrived in front of his lodgings at nine o'clock, or something later. As he started to ascend the brown-stone stoop, he became aware of a disconsolate little figure

seated in a hunched-up pose on the topmost step. It was Iff.

The little man had his chin in his hands and his hat pulled down over his eyes. He rose as Staff came up the steps, and gave him good evening in a spiritless tone, which he promptly remedied by the acid observation:

"It's a pity you wouldn't try to be home when I call! Here you've kept me waiting the best part of an hour."

"Sorry," said Staff gravely; "but why stand on ceremony at this late day? My bedroom windows are still open. I left 'em so, fancying you might prefer to come in that way."

"It's a pity," commented Iff, following him up-stairs, "you can't do something for that oratorical tendency of yours. Ever try choking it back? Or did it make you ill?" With which he seemed content to abandon persiflage, satisfied that his average for acerbity was still high. "Besides," he said peaceably, "I'm all dressed up pretty now, and it doesn't look right for a respectable member of society to be pulling off second-story-man stunts."

Staff let him into the study, followed him, turned on the lights, and then looked his guest over.

So far as his person was involved, it was evident that Iff had employed Staff's American money to advantage. He had the look of one fresh from a thorough grooming at a Turkish bath, and wore a new dark suit of clothes. But when he had thrown aside the soft felt hat which had shaded his eyes, his face showed drawn, pinched, and haggard—the face of a man whose sufferings are of the spirit rather than of the body. Loss of sleep might account for some of that expression, but not for all of it.

"What's the matter?" demanded Staff, deeply concerned.

"You ask me that!" said Iff impatiently. He threw himself at length upon the divan. "Haven't you been to the St. Simon? Don't you know what has happened? Well, so have I and so do I."

"Well?"

Iff raised himself on his elbow to stare at Staff as if questioning his sanity.

"You know that she's gone—that she's in *his* hands—and still you have the face to stand there and say 'Wel-1?' to me!" he snapped.

"Might I ask what Miss Searle is to you, that you should get so excited about her dis-

appearance, even assuming what we're not sure of—that she has gone with Ismay?"

"She's only everything to me," said Iff quietly. "She's my daughter."

Staff suddenly sank into a chair.

"You're serious about that?" he gasped.

"It's not a matter I care to joke about," said the little man gloomily.

"But why didn't you tell a fellow?"

"Why should I—until now? You mustn't forget that you sat in this room not twenty-four hours ago and heard me retail what I admit sounded like the biggest far-rago of lies that was ever invented since the world began. Because you were a good fellow and a gentleman, you stood for it—gave me the benefit of the doubt. And at that I hadn't told you half. Why? Why, because I felt I had put sufficient strain upon your credulity for one session, at least."

"Yes—I know," Staff agreed, bewildered, "but—but Miss Searle—your daughter—"

"That's a stiff one for you to swallow—what? I don't blame you. But it's true. And that's why I'm all worked up—half crazed by knowing that that infamous blackguard has managed to deceive her and make her believe he is me—myself—her father!"

"But what makes you think that?"

"Oh, I've his word for it. Read that!" Iff whipped an envelope from his pocket and flipped it over to Staff. "He knew, of course, where I hang out when in town, and took a chance of that catching me there and poisoning the sunlight for me."

Staff turned the envelope over in his hands, remarking the name and address and the postmark, which was half obliterated by its impression on a special-delivery stamp.

"Mailed at Hartford, Connecticut, at nine this morning," he commented.

"Read it!" insisted Iff irritably.

Staff withdrew the enclosure, a single sheet of note-paper with a few words scrawled on one side.

"I've got her," he read aloud. "'She thinks I'm you. Is this sufficient warning to you to keep out of this game? If not—you know what to expect.'" He looked from the note to Iff. "What does he mean by that?"

"How can I tell? It's a threat, and that's enough for me. He's capable of anything sufficiently fiendish to amuse him." Iff



shook his clenched fists impotently above his head. "Oh, if ever again I get within arm's length of the hound!"

"Look here," said Staff, "I'm a good deal in the dark about this business. You've got to calm yourself and help me out. Now, you say Miss Searle's your daughter, yet you were on the ship together and didn't recognize each other—at least, so far as I could see."

"You don't see everything," said Iff; "but at that, you're right—she didn't recognize me. She hasn't for years—seven years, to be exact. It was seven years ago that she ran away from me and changed her name. And it was all his doing! I've told you that Ismay has, in his jocular way, made a practise of casting suspicion on me. Well, the thing got so bad that he made her believe I was the criminal in the family. So, being the right sort of a girl, she couldn't live with me any longer, and she just naturally shook me—went to Paris to study singing, and to fit herself to earn a living. I followed her, pleaded with her, but she couldn't be made to understand; so I gave it up. That was when I registered my oath to follow this cur to the four corners of the earth, if need be, and wait my chance to trip him up, expose him, and clear myself. Now he's finding the going a bit rough, thanks to my public-spirited endeavors, and he takes this means of tying my hands!"

"I should think," said Staff, "you'd have shot him long before this."

"Precisely," agreed Iff mockingly. "That's just where the bone-headedness comes in that endears you so much to your friends. If I killed him, where would be my chance to prove I hadn't been guilty of the crimes he's laid at my door. He's realized that, all along. I passed him on deck one night, coming over; it was midnight, and we were alone. The temptation to lay hands on him and drop him overboard was almost irresistible—and he knew it and laughed in my face. That's the true reason why I didn't accuse him when I was charged with the theft of the necklace—because I couldn't prove anything against him, and a trumped-up accusation that fell through would only have made my case so much the worse in Nelly's sight. But I'll get him yet!"

"Have you thought of looking for him in Hartford?"

"I'm no such fool. If that letter was

posted in Hartford this morning, it means that Ismay's in Philadelphia."

"But isn't he wise enough to know you'd think just that?"

Iff sat up with a flush of excitement.

"By George!" he cried. "That's quite right!"

"It's a chance," said Staff thoughtfully.

The little man jumped up and began to pace the floor. To and fro, from the hall door to the windows, he strode. At perhaps the seventh turn at the windows he paused, looked out, and moved quickly back to Staff's side.

"Taxicab stopping outside," he said in a low voice; "woman getting out—Miss Landis, I think. If you don't mind, I'll dodge into your bedroom."

"By all means," assented his host, rising.

Iff silently swung out of sight into the back room as Staff went over to the hall door and opened it.

## XXV

ALISON had just gained the head of the stairs. She came to the study door, moving with her indolent grace, and acknowledged Staff's greeting with an insolent, cool nod.

"Not too late, I trust?" she said enigmatically, as she entered.

"For what?" asked Staff, puzzled.

"For this appointment," she said, extending a folded bit of paper.

"Appointment?" he repeated with the rising inflection, taking the paper.

"It was delivered at my hotel half an hour ago," she told him. "I presumed you knew."

"No," said Staff. "Half a minute!"

He shut the door and unfolded the note. The paper and the chirography, he noticed, were identical with those of the note received by Iff from Hartford. With this in mind, he read the contents aloud, raising his voice a trifle for the benefit of the listener in the back room.

"If Miss Landis wishes to arrange for the return of the Cadogan collar, will she be kind enough to call at Mr. Staff's rooms in Thirtieth Street at a quarter to ten to-night. N. B.—Any attempt to bring the police or private detectives or other outsiders into the negotiations will be instantly known to the writer, and—there won't be any party." Unsigned," concluded Staff reflectively.

"Well?" demanded Alison, as she seated herself.

"That's curious!" remarked Staff, still thinking.

"Well?" she iterated less patiently. "Is it a practical joke?"

"No," he said, smiling; "to me it looks like business."

"You mean that the thief intends to come here—to bargain with me?"

"I should fancy so, from what he says. And," Staff added, crossing to his desk, "forewarned is forearmed!"

He bent over and pulled out the drawer containing his revolver. At the same moment he heard Alison catch her breath sharply, and a man's voice replied to his platitude.

"Not always," it said crisply. "Be good enough to let that gun alone. Just hold up your hands where I can see them, and come away from that desk."

Staff laughed shortly and swung smartly round, exposing his empty hands. In the brief instant in which his back had turned, a man had let himself into the study from the hall. He stood now with his back to the door, covering Staff with an automatic pistol.

"Come away!" he said in a peremptory tone, emphasizing his meaning with a flourish of the weapon. "Over here—by Miss Landis, if you please!"

Quietly Staff obeyed. He had knocked about the world long enough to recognize the tone of a man talking business with a gun. He placed himself beside Alison's chair and waited, wondering.

Indeed, he was very much perplexed and disturbed. For the first time since Iff had won his confidence against his better judgment, his faith in the little man was being shattered. This high-handed intruder was so close a counterpart of Iff that one had to look twice to distinguish the difference, and then one found the points of variance negligible—so much so that the fellow might well be Iff in different clothing and another manner.

Iff could easily have slipped out of the bedroom by its hall door—only, to change his clothes so quickly, he would have to be a lightning-change artist of exceptional ability.

On the whole, Staff decided, this couldn't be Iff. And yet—and yet—

"You may put up that pistol," he said coolly. "I'm not going to jump you, so it's unnecessary. Besides, it's bad form with a lady present. And furthermore, if you

should happen to let it off, the racket would bring the police down on you more quickly than you'd like, I fancy."

The man grinned and shoved the weapon into a trousers pocket, from which its grip projected handily.

"Something in what you say," he assented. "Besides, I'm quick, surprisingly quick, with my hands."

"The accomplishment is part of your professional equipment, no doubt," commented Staff indifferently.

"Admit it," said the other easily. He turned his attention to Alison. "Well, Miss Landis?"

"Well, Mr. Iff?" she returned in the same tone.

"No," he corrected; "not Iff—Ismay."

"So you've changed identities again?"

"Surely you don't mind," he said, grinning over the evasion.

"But you denied being Ismay aboard the Autocratic."

"My dear lady, you couldn't reasonably expect me to plead guilty to a crime of which I was not yet guilty!"

"Oh, get down to business!" Staff interrupted impatiently. "You're wasting time—yours as well as ours."

"Peevish person, your young friend," Ismay commented confidentially to Alison. "Still, there's something in what he says. Shall we—ah—get down to business?"

"I think you may as well," she agreed coldly.

"Very well, then. The case is simple enough. I'm here to offer to secure to you the return of the Cadogan collar for an appropriate reward."

"Ten thousand dollars has been offered," she began.

"Not half enough, my dear lady," he interposed. "You insult the necklace by naming such a meager sum—to say nothing of undervaluing my intelligence."

"So that's it!" she said reflectively.

"That is it, precisely. I am in communication with the person who stole your necklace. She's willing to return it for a reward of reasonable size."

"She? You mean Miss Searle?"

The man made a deprecating gesture.

"Please don't ask me to name the lady."

"I knew it!" Alison cried triumphantly.

"You miserable coward!" Staff exclaimed. "Haven't you the common manhood to shoulder the responsibility for your crimes yourself?"

"Tush!" said the man gently. "Tush! Not a pretty way to talk at all—calling names! I'm surprised. Besides, I ought to know better than you, acting as I do as agent for the lady in question."

"That's a flat lie!" said Staff. "If you repeat it—I warn you—I'll jump you, as sure's my name's Benjamin Staff, pistol or no pistol!"

"Aren't you rather excited in your defence of this woman?" Alison inquired, turning on him with a curling lip.

"I've a right to my emotions," he retorted—"to betray them as I see fit."

"And I," Ismay put it, "to my freedom of speech—"

"Not in my rooms," Staff interrupted hotly. "I've warned you. Drop this nonsense about Miss Searle, if you want to stop here another minute without a fight. Drop it—say what you want to say to Miss Landis, and get out!"

He was thoroughly enraged, and his manner of expressing himself seemed to convince the thief. With a slight shrug of his shoulders he again addressed himself directly to Alison.

"In the matter of the reward," he said, "we're of the opinion that you've offered too little by half. Twenty thousand at the least—"

"You forget I have the duty to pay."

"My dear lady, if you had not been anxious to evade payment of the duty, you would be enjoying the ownership of your necklace to-day."

As he spoke the telephone-bell rang. Staff turned away to his desk, Ismay's voice pursuing him with the caution:

"Don't forget about that open drawer—keep your hands away from it!"

"Oh, be quiet," returned Staff contemptuously. Standing with his back to them, he took up the instrument and lifted off the receiver. "Hello?" he said irritably.

He was glad that his face was not visible to his guests. He could restrain a start of surprise, but was afraid his expression would have betrayed him when he recognized the voice at the other end of the line as Iff's.

"Don't repeat my name," it said quickly, in a tone low but clear. "It is Iff. Is Ismay still there?"

"Yes," said Staff instantly; "it's I, Harry. How are you?"

"Get rid of him as quick as you can," Iff continued, "and join me here at the

Waldorf. I dodged down the fire-escape and caught his motor-car; the chauffeur thinks I'm him. I'll wait in the street—Thirty-Third Street side, with the car. Now talk."

"All right!" said Staff heartily. "Glad to—I'll be there."

"Chauffeur knows where Nelly is, I think; but he's too big for me to handle alone, in case my foot slips and he gets suspicious. That's why I need you. Bring your gun."

"Right," Staff agreed promptly. "The club, in half an hour. Yes, I'll come. Good-by!"

He turned back toward Ismay and Alison, his doubts resolved, all his vague misgivings as to this case of double identity finally settled.

"Alison," he said, breaking in roughly upon something that Ismay was saying to the girl, "you've a cab waiting outside, haven't you?"

Alison stared in surprise.

"Yes," she said in a tone of wonder.

Staff paused beside the divan, one hand resting upon the topmost of a little heap of silken cushions.

"Mind if I borrow it?" he asked, ignoring the man.

"No, but—"

"It's business—important," said Staff. "I'll have to leave you here at once. Only"—he watched Ismay closely out of the corners of his eyes—"if I were you I wouldn't waste any more time on this fellow. He's bluffing—can't carry out anything he promises."

Ismay turned toward him, expostulant.

"What d'you mean by that?" he demanded.

"Miss Searle has escaped," said Staff deliberately.

"No!" cried Ismay, startled and thrown off his guard by the fear that it might be true. "Impossible!"

"Think so?"

As he spoke, Staff dexterously snatched up the uppermost pillow, and with a twist of his hand sent it whirling into the thief's face. It took him utterly unawares. His arms flew up to ward it off—too late, however—and he staggered back a pace.

"Lots of impossible things keep happening all the time!" chuckled Staff, as he closed in upon the man.

There was hardly a struggle. Staff's left arm clipped the fellow about the waist, at

the same time that his right hand deftly abstracted the pistol from its convenient pocket. Then, dropping the weapon into his own pocket, he transferred his hold to Ismay's collar, and spun him round with a snap that fairly jarred his teeth.

"There, confound you!" he said, exploring his conquered foe's pockets for other lethal weapons, and finding nothing but three loaded clips ready to be inserted in the hollow butt of the pistol that he had already confiscated. "Now, what am I going to do with you, you confounded little pest?"

The question was more to himself than to Ismay, but the latter, recovering with astonishing quickness, solved it for Staff by suddenly wriggling out of his coat and leaving the garment in his assailant's hands as he swiftly ducked to the door and flung himself out.

Staff could not refrain from breaking into a laugh as the patter of the little man's feet was heard on the stairs.

"Resourceful little beggar!" he commented, going to the window, and rolling up the coat as he went.

He reached the window just in time to see the thief dodge out below. The coat, opening as it descended, fell like a blanket round Ismay's head. He stumbled, tripped, and fell headlong down the steps, sprawling and cursing.

"Thought you might need it," Staff apologized, as the man picked himself up and darted away toward Lexington Avenue.

*(To be concluded)*

He turned to confront an infuriated edition of Alison.

"Why did you do that?" she demanded with a stamp of her foot. "What right had you to interfere? I was beating him down; in another minute we'd have come to terms—"

"Oh, don't be silly, my dear," said Staff, taking his revolver from the desk drawer and placing it in the traditional hip-pocket. "To begin with, I don't mind telling you I don't give much of a hang whether you ever get that necklace back or not." He grabbed his hat and started for the door. "What I'm interested in is the rescue of Miss Searle, if you must know; and that's going to happen before long, or I miss my guess!" He paused at the open door. "If we get her, we get the necklace, of course—and you'll be welcome to that. Would you mind turning out the lights before you go?"

"Staff!"

Her tone was so peremptory that he hesitated in the doorway for an unwelcome moment longer.

"Well?" he asked civilly, wondering what on earth she had found to send her into such a rage.

"You know what this means?"

"You tell me," he smiled.

"It means a break! I won't play 'A Single Woman'!" she snapped.

"That's the best guess you've made yet," he laughed. "You win. Good night and—good-by!"

## YOUR TEARS

I LOVE you for the tears you sometimes weep

In secrecy. I hear them in my heart—

Your voice a lute that sobs at sudden smart,

Whose languor lingers like the chords that sweep

From master-stricken lyres. And in your sleep

Full often dream-tears tease the lids apart

That hold your dream-drenched eyes in ward. No art

Can grace those tears, or praise the lids they steep.

And when swift-waking thought of love's arrears

Mantles your dawn-kissed, damask cheek with rose,

Your eyes look out and laugh to pay the score,

Expectant of the lips that bid them close

For kissing, yet unmindful they are more

Love-lustrous for that memory of tears!

*Herbert Wyndham-Gittens*



# FINANCIAL DEPARTMENT

BY JOHN GRANT DATER, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF  
THE MUNSEY PUBLICATIONS

## THE BUSINESS OUTLOOK

THE factors and forces controlling the country's industrial and financial activities have undergone little or no change in recent months. It must be apparent, even to a casual observer, that restraining influences, particularly such as spring from political uncertainties, bid fair to linger for some time longer.

Undoubtedly, however, we have accomplished something during the interval of two years and more, which has been devoted to economy and conservative operations. As a result, even though the present situation leaves something to be desired, the business community has shown a disposition to take a hopeful view of the outlook.

The worst-duped of men is he who deceives himself. It never serves any good purpose to ignore actual conditions or clearly defined tendencies. It would be ill-advised at the present time, for instance, to overlook the fact that the country has certain basic problems of economic and political importance to settle before we can look for any very decided forward movement.

We are very much given, in the United States, to thinking that we have more than our share of agitation and unrest, arising out of political maneuverings, tariff, and trust disturbances, and the like. As a matter of fact, we have no monopoly in respect to these things. Recent developments the world over—political, industrial, and social—have been radical and unsettling. Scarcely a land has escaped the infection, from hoary-headed China, the most ancient of races, down to Cuba, the newest member of the great family of nations. No important country of Europe has been free from some more or less disturbing manifestation, and it is not too much to say that the present phenomena of unrest are practically universal.

Quite naturally, at such a time, it has required special inducements to tempt capital into large enterprises. This is particularly true in this country with regard to new undertakings, or to such as contain the element of speculation or uncertainty. But while recognizing the restraining influences which an unsettled situation imposes upon industrial endeavor, it is not well to lose sight of some actual accomplishments and certain conditions which soften or minimize their effects.

One may recall the familiar German saying:

"We never eat our soup quite as hot as it is served to us."

As has been pointed out, we have accomplished much through the economy and conservatism of the last two or three years. Assuredly, the business community will not have to retrace ground already traversed, and we are nearer, measurably nearer, the inevitable turn for the better.

If we still have difficulties to deal with, we should not forget that we have already met and solved problems which seemed fully as disturbing as those now before us. Furthermore, we are in a better position to deal with these new ones, because of the liquidation which has taken place in all departments, with the possible exception of labor.

Assuredly, the vexed question of the industrial trusts should be the easier to handle because of the country's experience with the dissolution of the Standard Oil and the American Tobacco Company. The question of railway rates cannot be as difficult or as unsettling as it was before the Commerce Commission established the principles on which it has based its rulings. It is well to recall that bankruptcies of leading corporations, so freely predicted by some of our railway officials if rates were not advanced, have not materialized, nor does