

Billy Kane—White and Unmarried*

A ROMANCE OF THE PARISIAN UNDERWORLD

By John D. Swain

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE E. WOLFE

X

A BATTERED old taxi-auto sped along the Boulevard Rochechouart at the hour of twilight that same day. Despite its decrepit looks, an expert would have heard with approval the organ-like note of its sweet engine. It could have passed with ease any of the luxurious cars which at this hour were bearing to their homes the industrious rich. Kane had directed little Victor to produce a chauffeur who could be relied upon, for a price, to go anywhere and ask no questions.

The man whom in a surprisingly short time he brought to the Café Royal, where Kane awaited them, did not inspire anything like a warm glow of confidence. He had a hard-boiled look, wore a green patch over one empty eye-socket, and was as squat and hairy as a gorilla—a resemblance heightened by the ape-like swiftness of his salute as he touched his greasy cap with a thick and very dirty forefinger.

Victor swore by the name of a name of a sacred pipe that François would, if properly paid, drive them to hell and not even comment on the temperature. There was nothing to do but to take him, and, with the boy as interpreter, Kane directed him where to go.

Victor was as uneasy as if the lumpy cushions were red hot. To-night was the climax of his youthful dreams. Kane had been averse to fetching him along; but it was vital to have some one who could speak the language in which he only groped. And Victor, crossing and recross-

ing himself and taking terrible and mouth-filling oaths, had readily promised absolute obedience.

As always when he had cast the die, Kane was as indifferent as one of the grenade-sipping idlers who watched the traffic from the hundreds of little café tables they passed. His face was almost inane as he lounged at ease, an amused eye upon his small companion's wriggling body and eloquent hands and eyebrows.

He wore a dark blue serge suit, with flannel shirt of the same color, dark cap, and rubber-soled shoes. Nowhere about him was there anything that could show gleaming white or sparkling ornament. In one coat pocket reposed the faithful automatic, with an extra clip of cartridges; in another a small but powerful flash-light, and, as an afterthought, a heavy knuckleduster made to slip over his left hand.

If no emotion showed in his face, deep content abode in his heart. It was like old times, this setting forth with the tools of his trade, to turn a neat trick all on his own!

The reward he had in view was greater than any he had ever played for; the danger at least as great. Because he had so easily put Chicoq away that time, he did not in the least underrate the Apache's cunning and courage. The police, too, would hardly sanction Kane's notions of private enterprise. It was a lone hand, where it was necessary not merely to win, but also to avoid publicity.

The flimsy car, forced onward by its tremendous engine under guidance of the sin-

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ister François, continued from the Boulevard Rochechouart into the Boulevard de la Chapelle, past the Gare du Nord, and at the Custom-House swung down the Boulevard de la Villette, with the picturesque Buttes Chaumont on their left. Lamps were being lighted as they swerved sharply to the left into the Rue de Belleville, and by the time they passed out through the old Porte de Romainville, and headed for the village of that name, it was growing dark.

As explained by Dorothea, it was in an old farmstead on the outskirts of the village, near Pré St. Gervais, that Chicoq and Maréchal had hidden Andrée. The house was known as the Chouard farm. Beyond this, Kane could learn nothing. It was upon Victor that he relied for more definite directions.

Obedient orders, their chauffeur drew up a little short of the square of Romainville, on a side street; and Victor scrambled out to investigate.

He returned in about fifteen minutes. He had posed as one seeking relatives who lived, so he had said, "out near the old Chouard farm." His hearers—street loafers, a pork butcher, a peasant woman with a brace of live ducks under her arms—could not, of course, tell him anything concerning his mythical relatives, for whom he had chosen a very unlikely name; but they readily described the Chouard house, empty for a long time past, but for the last few days occupied by "foreigners" from the city.

The taxi-auto resumed its journey, now wholly under the direction of Victor.

"Remember, kid, not too near," warned Kane. "They'd get wise *pronto* if a strange car stopped within sight or sound. I'll hoof it the last quarter."

They slowed down now, feeling their way along country lanes which it was difficult to believe were hardly out of sound of the roar of Paris. The houses were farther apart now, and little vineyards, orchards, and gardens, cultivated to the last leaf, separated them. They met a number of people—young folks arm in arm or roosting on the walls, old peasants clattering home from market, the village *curé*, his flapping black *soutane* scarce visible in the dusk. But as they drew out of Romainville and toward Pré St. Gervais, the roads were deserted, and there were long stretches between the houses.

Two or three times they drew up, and Victor descended to scout about for landmarks. On his last trip he reported the Chouard farm about five minutes' walk ahead.

"Close enough!" grunted Kane.

He oversaw François park his car beside the road, beneath a clump of poplars, with all lights extinguished. Then he made a final inventory of his slender equipment, finding all in order. He retied his shoe-strings—a little thing like a loose shoe-lace may mean a twenty-year stretch!—and finally removed his coat and laid it on the seat in the tonneau.

"Tell François to wait here, whatever he sees or hears," he ordered.

Victor did so in a torrent of passionate argot; and a moment later Kane was following the little *chasseur* up the dark road.

The old Chouard farm, with its wretched half-acre of market-garden last worked by the stepmother of Maréchal, differed from its neighbors only in its state of ruin. Built strongly of stone, it presented a fairly creditable appearance from the outside, its closed wooden shutters concealing a plentiful lack of glass, its rotten thatch the home of many wind-blown seedlings, whose gay blossoms won the admiring comment of passing tourists. A stone wall surrounded it, but the gate had long since gone for fuel.

A hundred yards from the entrance, a large oak-tree shaded the road with its low-flung branches; and in their obscurity Kane bade the unwilling Victor remain.

"I may send Andrée out ahead of me," he explained. "It is necessary that some one should await her, to conduct her to the car. If she comes, take her there as fast as she can run. Wait ten minutes for me—or until you see Chicoq or his men in pursuit—and then return to Paris as fast as that devil of a François can go."

Victor wriggled uneasily.

"But you, *monsieur*?"

"If I'm not here ten minutes after Andrée, I sha'n't come at all. Do as I tell you, or I shall be sorry I brought you. I have trusted you a good deal for a boy. Show me!"

Victor muttered disconsolately, but betook himself to the shadows under the oak-tree. Kane moved up the road alone.

Reconnoitering a house was nothing new to him. Dozens of times he had done it, but never under just such circumstances.

The occupants, for one thing, would be to some extent on the lookout. They could not know that their hiding-place had been discovered, but as lawbreakers they were always furtive, apprehensive, ready for trouble. A watch of some sort would be kept.

Kane's eyes, already beginning to regain something of their old power of nocturnal vision, scanned every possible lurking-place

for an outpost. As a result, he was a long time in covering the stretch of road from the oak-tree to the corner of the stone wall which bounded the house.

Step by step he moved round this wall, pausing at each corner to assure himself that nobody was lying in wait for him with swift knife or heavy club. At length he came to the gaping entrance where the old gate had once stood.

Here, if the abductors were at all suspicious, a guard might be looked for. Kane dropped to the ground, and inch by inch his head crept through and beyond the opening, his eyes turned upward. From this position, with the clear, star-sown sky for a background, any lurking figure would be visible to him, while its own eyes would be ranging on a higher level.

For three full minutes, prone in the grass, Kane surveyed all that was visible of the yard with its half-



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dozen stunted trees, and the façade of the house. Light sifted from chinks in the wooden shutters, and the murmuring of at least two voices came to him.

At the end of his survey he rose and slipped inside, clinging to the wall, and following it round until he stood at the rear, behind the cow-shed, which formed an ell. There was nobody in the shed, no breathing creature, nor any in the yard. In their fancied seclusion, the Apaches were all within doors.

This was a point gained! Still, Kane was on the outside of a building containing an unknown number of armed desperadoes, and he was an unauthorized agent acting entirely on his own risk.

His instinct brought him at length beneath a small, dark window at the rear of the house. It was unshuttered, and his fingers made out that its glass panes were unbroken; also, that it was locked.

Listening intently, and failing to hear any sound within, save the now almost inaudible murmur of the voices from the other side of the house, Kane drew from a pocket a ring set with a diamond solitaire. Firmly, and with only the faintest dry scratching, he cut a little half-moon in the glass directly over the upper middle half of the window.

He next produced a little strip of surgeon's plaster, which he breathed upon and attached to the glass, so that it covered the deep circular groove he had made. A sharp tap with his knuckles, and the moon-shaped segment of glass swung loosely, attached to the rubber tape. Through the opening he inserted thumb and finger, and cautiously turned the catch.

All this was much quicker and easier than raising the window itself. Quite evidently this latter operation had not been done for a long time. The frame was warped, and stuck obstinately. Even to raise it at all was no easy task; and he had to do so with the minimum of noise. Of course, with the beautiful little folding jimmy of duralumin which he had, with other compact and high-speed tools of his craft, dropped into the North River before leaving New York, it would have been easy enough. With his bare hands, it was not.

Much knowledge of the anatomy of windows, coupled with patience and unusual strength, won at length. Kane stood presently upon the stone floor of a damp and empty kitchen.

The room extended the width of the house. It contained an enormous table, some rude chairs, and a great cold fireplace. Not daring to use his flash-light at first, it took him some time to cover it all foot by foot. Not until he had done so did he venture, holding the flash-light extended far to one side, to snap it on. Its beams added nothing to his information. Many cobwebs, some old battered stew-pans hanging on the wall, shelves containing broken crockery—nothing else.

He pocketed his light, and moved toward the door which led to the front of the house.

To his immense relief, it was unlocked. He had straightened out and filed down a button-hook in his room at the hotel, fashioning a rudely effective skeleton key; but a glance at the immense iron lock on the thick plank before him showed how futile this would have been against the fabrication of some departed village smith.

With little difficulty he turned the latch and slipped through. He left the door ajar, that it and his forced window might form an emergency line of retreat. He even returned and placed some of the heavy chairs directly in front of the door, to form a temporary obstacle to any pursuers rushing after him from the lighted room, and certain to blunder into the chairs in the dark. He fixed their position in his own mind; then, for the first time slipping the brass knuckles over his left hand, and with the little automatic in his right, he returned to the hall, to that part of the house which contained the object of his visit.

Standing there, he rapidly scanned the layout.

Evidently there were but two rooms on the ground floor. From the one in front, through a half-opened door, the voices he had before heard indistinctly were now plainly audible. He could make out only an occasional word, however, since the talk was in that Apache jargon which is comprehensible to few Parisians.

As before, there seemed to be two men speaking. He caught his own name once or twice; but—and the blood raced in his steady arteries—there was now in addition an occasional phrase, more like a broken sob than words, from a woman, and the voice was Andrée's!

Leading up from the hall at the end of which he stood was a short flight of stairs.

He very much wished that he might explore this upper region, to learn if it were tenanted, and by whom. Kane detested leaving any loose ends. Engaged below, in the front room, as he soon would be, he did not wish his attention divided by the possibility of reinforcements down that stairway.

It was hardly to be expected that he could steal past the door undetected, but he proposed to try. If he failed, it would merely precipitate the climax. Not a sound came from above; but for all he knew, there might be three or four of Chicoq's assassins asleep up there. Silent as a cat on his rubber soles, he began to edge down the dimly lighted hall.

Could he have understood the conversation taking place in the front room, he would have been greatly intrigued. Chicoq sat in there with Andrée and two of his tribe. Enraged at the girl's steadfast scorn of himself, the hatred which always glowed in her eyes when he was in her presence, he was consumed by the desire to hurt her. He could have done that in a physical sense easily enough, at any time; but he was cunning enough to realize that there were keener weapons in his armory.

While Kane stood almost within arm's reach of the door, the Apache leader, seated before Andrée, his hot breath in her face, was telling her in great detail of the manner in which he had made away with him!

Because his hatred was so living a thing that he only awaited opportunity to do exactly what he chose to say he had already done, he was able to make his account exceedingly realistic. He almost convinced himself, as he thrust toward the trembling girl the razor-keen knife which he swore he had turned in the American's cursed entrails.

Andrée believed him. She knew Chicoq had done this sort of thing before, and she could not see how a lone foreigner, however brave and resourceful, could escape Apache vengeance in its own jungle.

On either side, smoking mostly in silence, save as one man from time to time corroborated Chicoq in some horrible detail, sat two others, only less repulsive objects than their leader.

At the very instant when, hatred giving way to horror in her eyes, Andrée lifted them in anguish to the sooty ceiling of her

prison, convinced that her lover—she called him that in her heart—was slain, she beheld, framed in the partly opened doorway, a pale and mask-like duplicate of his fondly recalled features.

Under such circumstances, it is small wonder that she believed that she gazed upon his apparition, and that her lips parted to utter a terrified scream. That none came was because her throat was literally paralyzed with fear; but her expression was as eloquent as any scream.

Chicoq and his two cutthroats wheeled as one and beheld Kane standing in the doorway, automatic in hand.

"Stick 'em up!" he barked.

The words were not familiar, but their meaning was. Three pairs of hands shot heavenward.

XI

WITH that strategic stairway in the back of his mind, Kane stepped inside the room, half turning so that he could catch from the tail of his eye any descending figure. Without looking at the girl, he spoke rapidly to her.

"Quick now, Andrée! Go out by the front door, leaving it open behind you. Hurry down the road toward Romainville. Victor is watching for you. He will take you to safety. I'll follow at once!"

For an instant she hesitated. It seemed to her that her legs must crumple like lead-foil were she to rise.

"Hurry," he repeated, "unless you want me to be murdered!"

Andrée leaped from her chair, her strength restored by his words. Girls bred on the steep slopes of Montmartre do not easily faint, nor are they lacking in courage and quick wit. She did not utter a word, but sped past him, her eyes devouring his face.

Not for an instant did Kane's eyes leave the three Apaches. The noseless one, his features more inhuman than ever in his fury, was still too self-possessed to invite certain death. Poised on the balls of his feet, he awaited the slightest opening, the least incaution on the American's part.

Andrée brushed past him, through the doorway, and down the hall. Already her hand was reaching for the latch, when the luck that had borne Kane company suddenly deserted him. Another and invisible hand lifted the wrought-iron hasp, and the heavy door swung open from without, forc-

ing Andrée to step back. Maréchal, dressed in sporty English tweeds, entered the house.

Kane recognized him, and the calamitous nature of his arrival, without turning his head or shifting his eyes. The Apaches could not see him, but from Andrée's scream, rather than from any change in Kane's emotionless face, they guessed what had intervened.

Maréchal himself grasped the situation in a flash. Beyond Andrée's shoulder he caught sight of Kane, automatic in hand, and he pictured the scene in the room beyond his vision.

He swept Andrée into his embrace, her body acting as a shield in case Kane were to shoot at him. He tried to drag the girl backward, up the stairs, and partially succeeded; but the lithe, wiry creature fought like a young devil, scratching, trying to bite his hands, kicking futilely with her little boots.

At the racket they made, apprehensive lest Maréchal should actually be trying to kill the girl, Kane found it impossible to avoid a single glance backward at them; and on the instant, poised for just such an opportunity, Chicoq brought up a heavy shoe and kicked over the table upon which stood the one oil-lamp that lighted the house.

His purpose of plunging the room into darkness was foiled by the ignition of the oil from the broken lamp, which spread in a pool over the uneven floor; but the leaping flames, while rendering all the occupants visible, so clothed them with wavering shadows and half-lights that the eyes were baffled.

Kane fired instantly at Chicoq, and removed part of an ear; but the next instant he was obliged to meet the wild rush of one of the other Apaches.

As the fellow lunged at him, knife extended, and whining like an animal in his eagerness, Kane swung upward and over his knife hand, the heavy brass knuckles laying open his entire jaw, so that the blood spurted warmly over Kane's left wrist. The Apache dropped without a sound. Henceforth he would be sufficiently marked for police identification!

There had been only a little oil in the lamp, and the last pool flickered out in a black, odorous smudge as the Apache fell. Had the building been a rich museum of world treasures, or the home of a multi-

millionaire, it would no doubt have burned to the ground; but since it was a worthless shell of a house, its seasoned woodwork did not catch fire.

Behind him, in the hall, Kane could tell that Maréchal was succeeding in overcoming Andrée's resistance. In pitch darkness, no longer fearful of Kane's gun, and able to devote himself entirely to the dancing-girl, he was dragging her up-stairs. There was no possibility of going to her aid until Chicoq had been settled with; and Kane savagely turned toward his two remaining enemies.

The technic of the game would have included the frisking of the Apaches for weapons by Andrée. Kane understood that perfectly; but his fear for her safety, his anxiety to get her out at all costs and with the least possible delay, had led him deliberately to omit this formality. As it had turned out, nothing would have been gained, anyhow, for Maréchal's unexpected entry had altered everything. Two or three minutes to spare, and she would have been well outside. In any case, she would very likely have walked straight into his arms down the road.

So far as Kane was concerned, his situation was not at all desperate. He had only to slip out of the house in the dark; but with Andrée in Maréchal's hands, he must settle with the two Apaches in the quickest way, and go up-stairs to her aid.

The lone hand has certain obvious advantages. Merely by posting himself at the door, Kane could despatch them at his ease as they tried to come out. They were obliged to exert some caution in order not to mistake each other for him; while he had only to strike at any moving body, regardless of which it was.

But there was no time for any long-drawn affair. He must clean up below-stairs, and do it now!

Perfectly aware of the danger, he turned on his flash-light for the merest fraction of a second. He held it far out in his left hand—the one still adorned with brass knuckles.

Transient as was the beam which exposed the bare room, the response was immediate. On Kane's retina was focused the overturned table and its shattered lamp, the still inert form of the Apache on whose jaw he had swung, and the other two crouched together on the far side of the room. From the hand of one—not Chi-

coq, who held only the knife of his choice—traveled a thin spurt of smoke, and a bullet glanced from Kane's brass knuckle even as he snapped off the light.

Close shooting—better than he had credited them with—thought Kane, as he fired three times in return. There came a yell, a smothered cry, and the fall of a heavy body, which scabbled on the rough flooring; then silence.

Kane felt sure that he now had only Chicoq to deal with, below-stairs.

This resourceful gentleman had not lost a second in getting into action. He had kicked off his sabots, and with the wink of Kane's flash-light he leaped forward. The first indication of the attack, to Kane, came when his right hand was seized in a grip of astonishing power. Instinctively and luckily, his left caught Chicoq's in a similar lock. Thus the gun of one and the knife of the other were blocked, and the men were left straining and panting in the pitchy darkness.

Kane found that he could do no more than hold his own against the Apache's animal-like strength. Even as he twisted and turned, seeking to trip Chicoq, and fighting off his efforts to bury his teeth in Kane's wrists, a door slammed on the landing above, a key rasped in its lock, and the ancient stairs creaked beneath descending steps. Maréchal, unable longer to bear the suspense, had locked Andrée in and was coming down, a lighted candle in one hand and a revolver in the other.

Kane knew that his life was being measured in terms of seconds. His sole hope rested on staking all on a single chance. He could not free his gun hand. Chicoq, squat and secure on his feet as a tree, refused to yield to his grape-vines and back-heels. Suddenly he released the Apache's knife hand, at the same time flinging it violently aside. He dared not trust to a blow in the dark; for if it were not a knockout, if it merely hurt without disabling, Chicoq would plunge his knife to the hilt in Kane's body, before he could strike again.

What he did was not an uncommon sight in the London prize-ring of a couple of centuries ago. Catching Chicoq's thick neck with his free hand, he yanked him violently forward, at the same time butting him in the face with the top of his head.

Chicoq had no finely chiseled features to be ruined by the stunning crash; but his

entire face seemed to yield and crumble. His rudimentary nose, his teeth, his very cheek-bones, seemed to be driven back into his brain. Kane felt the relaxing fingers on his gun hand, and wrenched free. Chicoq's knife clattered to the floor, and his body followed.

Maréchal, nearing the foot of the stairs, covered the doorway with his gun. Kane cautiously advanced with his own, with the chances in his favor, as he was in shadow.

At this moment the front door opened again, and a small boy stood blinking in the candle-light.

Young Victor had truly suffered infant damnation! Thoroughly intending to obey Kane, at the sound of the shots and imprecations, coupled with Andrée's screams, he had found his legs propelling him toward the old house, as a somnambulist finds himself walking without volition. Powerless to stop, he had at length crept to the very door-step. He had dropped beside it when Maréchal turned in from the road and entered the house. For the past few minutes his ear had been glued to the keyhole. He thrust open the door now, and entered.

He saw Maréchal close before him, with a revolver menacing the dark doorway down the hall. From that doorway he saw Kane emerge, his own gun extended.

With a snarl like a tiger cub, Victor threw himself at Maréchal's legs. The dapper Frenchman, the veneer badly worn now, glared at the boy in surprise, and kicked him brutally in the stomach. Victor dropped in a forlorn little heap, and while Maréchal's leg was still in air, a steel-jacketed bullet drilled a neat hole through the knee.

The Frenchman dropped in his turn, his candle fell to the floor and expired, and in the darkness he and Kane emptied their guns, firing by the flashes.

When Kane's clip was empty, he turned back to the room, recovered the flash-light he had dropped in the struggle with Chicoq, put a fresh clip in his gun, and returned to the hall. Hanging over the banisters was Maréchal, who had received not less than four fatal shots and several disabling ones. One of them had passed through his head from temple to temple.

Beneath him lay Victor. Kane lifted him up and listened at his thin chest. Victor's wind had been very completely knocked out of his body, and that was all.

AT THE INSTANT WHEN ANDRÉE BECAME CONVINCED THAT HER LOVER WAS SLAIN SHE BEHELD A PALE AND MASK-LIKE DUPLICATE OF HIS FEATURES



"The plucky little beggar!" Kane grunted, carefully laying him down on his back.

Returning to the front room, he found his first victim breathing, but still unconscious. His face was a dreadful sight, but

rather pleasing compared to Chicoq's, from which he turned with loathing. Both of them might live to be guillotined, he decided; but the other Apache had two bullets through his heart.

Up-stairs now, and a key turned, and a dark-



HER LIPS PARTED TO UTTER A
TERRIFIED SCREAM

haired little beauty shedding tears of joy and bestowing upon valor the age-old spoils of the conqueror!

Somehow, Kane felt old and tired. Endearments left him unmoved. His nerves simply refused to react further, for the

time being. Nevertheless, he kissed Andrée tenderly, and gently unclasped her arms, warning her they must hurry away from that place of horrors.

"You 'ave keeled zem all, *hein?*" she asked.

"There's a couple of 'em might come to if we stick here and spoon all night," he admitted. "Besides, poor little Victor's knocked out."

The words sent her flying down the stairs. She stepped shudderingly past Maréchal, still grotesquely draped over the rail, and knelt beside the boy, calling him by many endearing diminutives which he would have repudiated with great indignation had he been conscious.

Kane fetched a dipper of water from the kitchen and dashed some drops into Victor's face; and he opened his eyes.

"Come on, old sport! We've cleaned up," Kane said.

"You are then alive, *monsieur?* And Andrée?"

"We all are, old-timer!"

Kane lifted the boy to his feet, and then upon his shoulder. Victor refused to be carried, however, and demonstrated the fact that he could walk.

XII

FIVE minutes later their stolid chauffeur, his face betraying no interest whatever in them or in the battle whose sounds had for a long time come to his ears, was proving the worth of his engine as they swept back to the Porte de Romainville.

Much as Kane desired to be present at the reunion, he left them near the Hotel de Ville, from which point he ordered Victor to return with Andrée to her attic and the two little sisters, promising to see them upon the morrow.

"Good-by, or rather *au revoir*, little sweetheart!" he whispered, taking Andrée into his arms, and knowing that she was his own forever and ay.

She was troubled over his defection, and he had difficulty in preventing her from leaving the crazy taxi-auto and coming with him.

When they were at last out of sight, he proceeded to the Prefecture and nonchalantly related his story.

There followed certain interesting formalities which cast a light upon national psychology.

First of all, Kane's story was investi-

gated, and his casualties fetched in to morgue and hospital. The delight felt by the police, who had long yearned for the heart's blood of both Chicoq and the equally dangerous but subtler Maréchal, was admirably concealed. The American was made to feel how very gravely he had offended the majesty of France by taking her prerogatives into his unofficial if efficient hands. He yawned, and smoked many cigarettes.

A cablegram was sent to New York for his record.

Word was returned that William Kane was a gentleman of leisure and independent means, against whom the police of his native land had nothing whatever. The message was signed by no less a personage than Deputy Assistant Commissioner Aloysius Ryan.

There followed, in its own dignified time, court proceedings, at which Kane was represented by an able and very expensive gentleman known as Maître Vignol.

Ultimately, Paris preserved justice and the proprieties in her own inimitable way. Kane was fined one thousand francs for carrying dangerous weapons without permission, and for striking a citizen in the face with his bare hand, and was warned solemnly to keep the peace. Afterward, at the Boulevard du Palais, the general headquarters of police, he was kissed rapturously on both cheeks by the prefect, the sub-prefect, and the chief of police; and, observing suspicious symptoms of similar intentions on the part of several minor officials, he made a clean getaway with all his old-time skill and nerve!

You may, in sailing down the Seine in a "vapor boat" some fine afternoon, have observed just below the bridge of Clichy the flag of flags waving proudly over one of the prettiest little villas to be seen thereabout.

If, moved by the spectacle of Old Glory caressed by the hospitable breezes, you were to disembark and crunch up the neatly graveled walk and tap the big brass eagle which forms the villa's door-knocker, a small boy with more shiny buttons than it would at first appear there was cloth enough to fasten them to, would answer your summons.

It would be safe to address him as Victor.

Were you to present your card, as an

American visitor you would be welcomed most heartily by the master of the house and his pretty and vivacious wife, and tea would be urged upon you, with all that tea implies and not a little that it strictly doesn't.

And if you were to wonder by what name to address the charming and rosy-cheeked maid who would wheel in the tea-wagon, you would have two equally probable guesses. One would be Louise; the other, Henriette.

THE END

The Chance of a Lifetime

BY ROLF BENNETT

Illustrated by Dudley Gloyne Summers

"THEM that go down into the sea in ships see some strange sights," observed the seafaring man with the black patch over his eye. "I misremember where I read that," he went on, "but it's one of the truest things that was ever said or wrote. Yes, sir, sailors do see some strange sights—things you wouldn't believe unless you saw them properly printed in a newspaper."

He paused and meditatively rubbed up some tobacco between his horny palms. We were resting casually upon a seat in the park—the seafaring man with the black patch over his eye, a young man with a lost expression, and myself. The seafaring man, having rubbed up the tobacco, proceeded to fill a pipe of ripe and ancient aspect.

"Properly printed in a newspaper," he repeated thoughtfully, at the same time producing a match from one of his pockets. "Then you'd believe it; every one would believe it. It's natural!"

He paused again, struck the match on his trousers, and lighted his pipe. When the latter was drawing freely—as I have said, it was ancient and it was ripe—he turned suddenly to the young man with the lost expression and fixed his one available eye balefully upon him. The young man shifted uneasily in his seat.

"What would you say," demanded the seafaring man, tapping his victim on the knee with the stem of his pipe—"what would you say if, all of a sudden and contrary to what was natural and right, you found yourself in mid air? Suspended, in a manner of speaking?"

The young man coughed nervously and looked round as if seeking some way of escape from this puzzling problem; but the solitary eye held him fast with its unswerving, fishlike stare.

"I—I don't know," he said at last, and coughed to hide his confusion.

The seafaring man grinned maliciously and turned to me.

"What would *you* say, mate?" he sternly demanded.

"It wouldn't bear repeating," I told him. "But why do you want to know? Have you ever been suspended in mid air contrary to what was natural and right?"

"I'll tell you," he said. "One time I sailed with a skipper of the name of Jonas Higham. It was a queer name; I allow, but he hadn't got any other, so he put up with it. And he was highly respected, being a truthful, sober man with children of his own and a wife. Well, Jonas owned a schooner called the Sunbeam, that used to trade between Frisco and Hawaii. Mostly it was Hawaii, but sometimes he'd get a cargo for some other place. Now, on this trip that I'm telling you about, we'd discharged at Honolulu and were waiting for another cargo. Well, we got a cargo for Samoa, which is more than two thousand miles south of Hawaii—nearer three thousand, maybe.

"Jonas wrote a letter to his wife and children, telling 'em where he was going. He was always very particular about writing home, was Jonas. It was a habit he'd got. So we pulled up our hook, hoisted our sails, and away we went. We were all