

SIMON IFF IN AMERICA

No. 9.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR

"I am always bothering you," murmured Miss Mollie Madison, apologetically.

"You are," admitted Simon Iff; "but I suppose I am old enough to like it."

It is possible that he might have tolerated her even had he been young. There was never hair so plentiful, so irrepressible, or so golden red as hers; and it framed a face warm, creamy flushed, round and innocent and laughing as a Greuze, with an impudent nose, and a mouth, perpetually pouting, which was redder even than the hair. Her body was slim and snakelike, every gesture sinuous and seductive. And she had no trace of self-consciousness or vanity. She never put a price upon herself, but gave freely as a queen should.

"You frequently impress me as being a human being," continued the mystic; "and real human beings never really bother me. What is it this time?"

"It's a very small matter, Cephas," which was her pet name for Simon. "I had a dear friend at Vassar, Agnes Mills, and her mother's in trouble, and I thought you would advise her."

"All right," said Simon, resignedly, "but I shall be very insulted if it isn't the Eye of an Indian Idol, at the very least."

"I'm afraid it's a perfectly ordinary business matter; only she says she can't trust any one but a . . ."

"A stranger," suggested Simon, half playfully. But Mollie looked daggers at him. She never forgot the President in her ancestry.

"Another breach of the Monroe Doctrine?" he smiled, almost impudently.

She decided to ignore him. She had frequently found it safer.

"Mrs. Mills is waiting downstairs," she said, as stiffly as so little and luscious a little lady could be expected to do.

He rang down to tell the janitor to ask her to come up.

"Why on earth didn't you bring her up with you? You know, or you ought to know by now, that I never say no to a Distressed Widow."

"How did you know she was a widow?"

"Why wouldn't she be going to her husband for advice?"

"Oh they might be separated or divorced."

"Dear me, no!" If there had been any scandle about it, you would have told me, first thing!"

It was perhaps lucky for Simon Iff that the curriculum at Vassar had included a special course in training young ladies not to throw anything at anybody.

Mrs. Mills entered the room. She was the kind of individual who doesn't matter to anybody. She had everything in a mild form. Simon Iff was reminded of Mrs. Nickleby, but one without enough imagination to be flustered over The Gentleman Next Door. He had to use all his tact and acumen to disinter her story from the grave yard of General Reminiscences.

Rather than inflict this excellent lady upon others, Simon decided to champion her cause. The circumstances were thus inscribed by Mollie from dictation (aside) whenever he extricated what appeared to be a relevant fact.

She had lost her poor husband in 1895. His sole important asset had been the Ruddigore Copper Mine near Glanders, Montana, of the stock of which he had held 51 per cent. The mine was a paying proposition, though never a bonanza. The average yearly dividend - as Iff found on reference to Mollie - had been 1-1/4 per cent. This was a good income for Mrs. Mills and Agnes, the face value of the stock being over 400,000 dollars. Her trustee, Mr. Samuel Grass, had no interest in the mine. The active managers were Mr. Kuhn and Mr. Arnheim; they held nearly the whole balance of the stock between them. Both men were enormously wealthy, and extremely competent in business. Kuhn, in particular, was noted for his sly secretive methods. He was called "Pussy" on the street. Arnheim was of a more obvious type; he was associated with Kuhn in many great enterprises. Next to Paul Powys, there was no financier in New York City so dreaded as Theophilus Kuhn; and there had been great enmity between them. With Arnheim's assistance Kuhn stood a fair chance of pulling down the great little Welshman; indeed, he had always held his own, and come out of many a battle with not too unfavourable a draw. But Powys was master of a power not his own; he represented the conservative element, and could always rally the forces of sanity to his banner.

The manager of the mine was a Scotsman named Craig, a dear friend and protege of the late Mills. Agnes was informally engaged to be married to him. He was a man of thirty-five, exceptionally shrewd and competent, his character simple, honest and affectionate.

Neither Arnheim nor Kuhn had taken any very active interest in the mine; it was a very small matter compared with their gigantic interests elsewhere. Kuhn's nephew Caspar had the position of chief engineer, but it was admittedly a probation to train him for more important work. Mills, on his deathbed, had implored his wife never to part with her control of the mine, and never allow the supersession of Craig.

Such were the disjointed avowals of the discursive lady, and this last was

point of her visit. For she was sorely tempted to sell her interest.

The last annual report, conceived in a more concise style than that of Mrs. Mills, threw considerable light upon this point. No dividend had been declared. Misfortune after misfortune had fallen upon the mine.

Miss Mollie Madison, knowing Simon Iff's little ways, had supplemented this with a report obtained from Craig, through Agnes, of the events at Glanders.

The first incident had been a fall of rock in Gallery 13 - the deepest level - which had in consequence become flooded. Mr. Caspar Kuhn had attacked the problem with characteristic skill and energy, but his pumps had failed again and again. The machinery had jammed and broken. Kuhn had suspected malicious interference on the part of one of his men, and discharged him. His mates had taken offence at this action, and declared a strike.

Mr. Kuhn, senior, had travelled from New York to investigate conditions, and his tact had succeeded in composing the quarrel; but work had hardly recommenced when a gang of irreconcilables had waylaid the engineer, and beaten him so seriously that he was confined to his bed for ten days.

Three days after his return to work, the mine had been deliberately dynamited, wrecking the main shaft. Experts reported that three months at least would be required before another ounce of ore could be extracted.

The police were entirely at a loss to explain the conditions. Craig had shared in the hatred aroused by young Kuhn's first action, for he had heartily supported his engineer. On two occasions he had been shot at. Both he and Caspar offered their resignations; but Mrs. Mills, faithful to her husband's dying wish, had refused to accept Craig's suggestion, and of course included Kuhn in this reply. He, however, had insisted, and left for another position procured for him by his uncle. He told Craig frankly that he valued his skin. His ill-luck had not ended there, however. Before he had been a week in his new job he had been set upon in the dark near his house, as he returned from dinner with the manager, by a dozen men. But this time Mr. Caspar Kuhn was armed; he put a bullet through the brain of one of his assailants. This affair was wrapped in absolute mystery; not a trace of motive could be discovered, and practically the whole camp produced alibis which were at least plausible. Kuhn, however, developed a severe attack of cold feet, and decided to take a holiday in Europe.

The annual report dated from the time of the first assault on Caspar Kuhn. It therefore made no mention of the amazing developments of the following month.

A perfectly unknown individual named Ransome had appeared with what purported to be a first mortgage on the property. He alleged fraud, duress, and various other illegalities against Mills. If his claim were well-founded, the mine was his.

Mrs. Mills had been advised by her trustee that the man was an ignorant crook, probably in the hands of some clever shyster. No court would consider the case for ten minutes. Grass had taken the title-deeds and other necessary papers from his safe deposit vault, intending to hand them to his attorney. That

night his house was burgled, and the papers, among other things, stolen.

When Ransome appeared in court, the company's attorney asked for an adjournment, hoping that time would permit him to recover the papers.

Ransome asked for an interim injunction to prevent the operation of the mine pending decision of the ownership. Having shown a prima facie case, this was granted. In fact, the company preferred not to oppose it, lest something should transpire which might disclose the serious nature of their loss. He might, for all they knew, coolly challenge their locus standi.

Three days later, Ransome's rooms, which were in an old-fashioned house in the Tenderloin, were entered, and his papers destroyed in the fire which he had left burning while he went out for dinner. Experts had however been able to recover a great deal from the burnt sheets, and Ransome's lawyers had prudently caused certified copies to be made.

Mrs. Mills had been very much distressed by the harsh attitude of Mr. Arnheim, who declared furiously that he had no time to be mixed up in so petty an affair, with its eternal conferences. He washed his hands of the matter, and proceeded to through his stock on the market. It had stood at 20 or thereabouts for a long while; it now fell to 3-1/4, with no buyers.

Mr. Kuhn had however acted with loyalty and magnanimity. He secretly purchased Arnheim's stock, and made it over to Mrs. Mills as a Christmas present. He had taken an entirely unexpected attitude with regard to Ransome, proclaiming that he would spend his last dollar to fight the case. It was not the value of his share in the mine, he declared wrathfully, but it was worth twenty millions to him to prevent any person of undesirable ancestry thinking that he could put one over on Theophilus Kuhn.

Arnheim was furious. He openly stated his belief that Kuhn had some 'inside dope' and had bought his stock for the rise. Kuhn calmly displayed the transfer to Mrs. Mills. Arnheim left Kuhn's office in a rage. The friendly collaboration of twenty years was broken.

Nor did he stop there. He withdrew from an important deal in which he had been associated with Kuhn, and created a temporary panic in that market. He was next heard of as engineering a colossal combine in copper, in the course of which he bought up a dozen mines in the immediate neighborhood of the Ruddigore. Kuhn remained perfectly impassive, hardly troubling himself to laugh at his former friend. The general opinion on the street was that Arnheim was more than a little crazy.

Meanwhile Ransome seemed to be in a fair way to prove his claim to the mine. Nothing could save Kuhn and Mrs. Mills but the recovery of the stolen papers. The company had been obliged to declare the loss, and Kuhn, his back to the wall, had offered a reward not much less than the full value.

Mrs. Mills was distressed beyond measure by all the commotion. She had always accepted the mine as a fact in nature, and supposed that the periodic receipt of a check for dividends was a phenomenon comparable to the recurrence of

Spring. It might be a little more or a little less, just as Spring might be genial or severe; but it was bound to come. She had practically no income except that from the mine, and she had saved no money. She began to feel anxious for the mine was closed up under the injunction, and her bank balance sank weekly. Arnheim offered to buy her interest at the 3-1/4 which Kuhn had paid for his. She was tempted.

Kuhn came to the rescue with a check for a year's income reckoned at 2 per cent. Hold on, said he; this luck can't last forever. The mine's good; once we're rid of Ransome, I'll put in more capital and new machinery, and we'll have her paying ten per cent before we're five years older. And he dictated a sarcastic telegram in reply to Arnheim's offer.

Another year had nearly elapsed. Despite Kuhn's generous kindness, she was horribly worried. There was a constant stream of legal papers, which she did not in the least comprehend, to be signed with formalities as to witnesses and notaries public which irritated her almost to madness. Her whole life was disturbed; she lost her sleep; at last she began to try to escape, and sounded Kuhn as to the possibility of selling her interest. Kuhn told her that the stock was waste paper, so far as the market was concerned; she had to hold on, whether she liked it or not.

Arnheim probably had news of her state of mind; he telegraphed a new offer. He would pay 5.

Mrs. Mills took the wire up to Kuhn's office. "Do let me accept," she said pitifully. "I'm so tired of all this. I could get a Government annuity, couldn't I?"

"If you give way," said Kuhn, "I'll never speak to you again. Think of Agnes! You would only get two thousand dollars a year at the most, and it would cease with your life. Agnes would have to marry a rich man instead of Craig. You hold on! I'll see you through! May I wire for you? Just take this telegram, Jenks. Arnheim, Astor House, Butte, Montana. I have just offered to take over Mrs. Mills' interest in the Ruddigore mine at par. Theophilus Kuhn. How's that, Mrs. Mills?"

"What does it mean exactly?"

"It means that I'm offering you four hundred thousand odd dollars instead of Arnheim's twenty thousand odd."

"You don't really mean that?"

"I never say anything unless I mean it. But don't you do it! That stock's worth more than par with M.E., me, Theophilus Kuhn, behind it."

The poor lady had departed in absolute distraction, and laid the matter before Agnes. To her amazement, the girl had flown into a rage, and delivered an oration, rivalling Mark Antony's, on her father's dying wishes. But the trustee, who was present, urged her to sell. "It's a marvellous offer," he cried, "Utterly Quixotic. Why, the mine may not belong to you at all!"

"And what I think," concluded Mrs. Mills, very impressively, in a stage whisper, having explained that the above interview represented the situation to date, "is that Mr. Kuhn wants Agnes!"

Simon Iff roused himself from his exhaustion-torpor.

"Very shrewd, very shrewd of you, my dear lady. I am sure that if Agnes inherits one tenth of your charm, every sensible man must want her. To what a very curious line of speculation this may lead! Love is a form of attraction, is it not, dear lady? And so is gravitation. Observe, the last incident in your story is the attraction of Theophilus to Agnes, just as the first incident in far-away Montana is the attraction of the Earth's mass to the roof of Gallery 13. To the philosophical mind this coincidence is infinitely significant! To you it does not seem so? Nor does it seem so to me. Our minds are therefore not philosophical, dear lady, and we may thank Fortune for that, philosophy being a very wearisome subject."

Mrs. Mills was completely bewildered by the characteristic imbecility of these remarks.

Iff joined his fingers, and gazed earnestly heavenwards. "I think that the most pragmatic school of philosophy is Scottish, is it not? Then in such practical matters we should enlist the services of Mr. Craig. I think you said he was a Scotsman."

"Of Scottish family, Mr. Iff, but born in Canada, as I understand."

"Good, born in Canada, he should be canny. Exactly the man for our purpose."

"I really don't understand all this. I'm afraid you are taking Agnes' part."

"I am taking nobody's part until I have found out what happened at the mine before the fall of rock in Gallery 13."

"But what has that got to do with it?"

"Well, you won't admit the fall itself as accounting for the love of the most excellent Theophilus. And as nothing has happened since the fall, something must have happened before. That something will probably explain everything."

"I don't understand at all. But I promised Agnes that I would abide by your decision."

"My decision is that you do nothing until I have seen Mr. Craig."

"He is at Glanders, of course."

"I am naturally of a curious disposition, and, having once heard of it, I could in no case rest until I had beheld with my own eyes the place so favoured in the matter of nomenclature."

"It is a perfectly horrid place."

"No place where you have been could be horrid. By the way, please let no one, not even Mr. Kuhn, know that you have seen me. That is highly important."

Mrs. Mills took her leave. "Get Agnes," said Simon as the door closed, "get her here just as quick as you can."

But even as he spoke the telephone bell rang. It was a voice unknown to the magician. It appeared that Mrs. A. had been telling Mrs. B. at Mrs. C's dinner party that Mrs. D. had heard from Mrs. E. that Mrs. F. had had a letter from Mrs. G. saying that Mrs. H. had met Mrs. I. at Mrs. J's, the subject of discussion being Mrs. K's divorce. Mrs. L. had then . . . it went on to the climax, where Mrs. Y. had advised Mrs. Z. to consult Mr. Iff; and might she call to see him?

Mr. Iff regretted that he was sailing, that afternoon, to take up his residence in a monastery on Mount Athos, and replaced the receiver.

"It won't do, Mollie, it won't do!" he lamented. "I have changed my mind. I am not going to Glanders. And I will write to Mrs. Mills while you get Agnes."

He wrote. "Dear Mrs. Mills, Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law. In the little matter which you honoured me by mentioning this afternoon, I have made up my mind. Mr. Kuhn's offer seems to me most liberal, and I should accept it without hisitation. Even should he lose his money, he can well afford if. And I recommend you to invest the proceeds of the sale of your share of the mine in sound Government securities.

"Love is the law, love under will.

Yours truly, Simon Iff."

"There!" he cried to Mollie, tossing the letter across, "I wash my hands of any matter in which women are concerned!"

She read it, surprised. "Then why do you want to see Aggie?"

"To advise her to marry Mr. Kuhn." He called the servant, and told him to take the letter. Then he proceeded to teach Mollie how to play piquet, and had just piqued and capotted her for the third time in ten minutes when Agnes Mills appeared.

"It is you, I gather," said Simon, sternly, after introduction, "that suggested my meddling in your love affairs!"

"I haven't the slightest idea what you mean!"

"My advise to you is to marry Mr. Kuhn."

"But . . ."

"But me no buts!"

"Mr. Kuhn has never hinted at such a thing."

"Observe the artfulness of modern wooing! Your mother . . . a shrewd mind . . . has told me the facts!"

"It's perfect nonsense. Anyhow, I'm going to marry Mr. Craig."

"That fickle Scot! Maiden! I despise myself that I should have to wound your noble heart, to bring the pearly dew to those gazelle-like eyes, but the stern truth must out. He loves you not!"

"I have told you he was a little funny in his talk. You mustn't mind him, dear!" put in Mollie.

"Be silent, wench!" thundered Iff.

But he had no need. Aggie was on her feet, aflame with indignation. "Mr. Iff! I don't know by what right you speak to me like this; but let me tell you that not one day has passed in these three years that I haven't had an eight-page letter from him!"

"That hard-headed Scotsman writes you a daily bucket of slush? Faugh!"

"How dare you say such things? He writes me nice sensible letters, telling me everything that happens at the mine."

"In that case, you can tell me exactly what was going on just before the fall of the roof in Gallery 13."

Mollie burst into a ripple of laughter, that swelled to full diapason as Aggie joined rather hysterically in.

"I told you what a funny man he is!"

But Agnes became very serious. She saw that Simon had had some reason for playing on her emotions, for keying her up to a high pitch before revealing his true purpose. She hesitated. Mollie understood the gesture. She went over to Simon, and patted him on the head. "He's the best and dearest and biggest baby in the world," she said, "and I'd trust him with my life."

"Is this a proposal?" cried the alarmed magician.

"I wouldn't dare till 1912; that's Leap Year."

"I'll be in Mount Athos before then. However, to business, Miss Mills! There's no time to lose. You haven't the letters here, of course? How's your memory?"

"I remember all that month as I do the multiplication table. I read and re-

read all the letters of that period, because I wanted to discover why anyone should want to shoot poor Bob."

"Of course. What an ass I am! It's entirely your fault, Mollie, for making me play piquet when I should have been thinking. Well, Miss Mills?"

"There was absolutely nothing but routine for months before the rockfall . . ."

"Until one day before?"

"Yes," said Agnes, surprised and encouraged. "How did you guess that?"

"I had a feeling that somebody or other had been reading Macbeth. 'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly.' Or, scorning the Thane's hesitation, turning the page to 'There is a tide in the affairs of men' . . . something of that sort, don't you know?"

Agnes wetted her lips thoughtfully with her tongue.

"I seem to sense something. I've puzzled over this for ages."

"Well, who was working in Gallery 13?"

Agnes crooked her head, and nodded.

"You're on the trail, and I can't see how, or why. Gallery 13 was the lowest level. It was a pure experiment; it didn't follow the geological indications. It was a pet idea of Mr. Craig's."

"Ah! I might have known that, too, but for Mollie."

"Johansen, a highly educated man, and a real friend of Bob's was in charge of the drill. He was assisted by a Russian Jew named Lipsky, a steady clever worker, but full of Socialistic ideas, and liable to fits of drinking. These were the only two men at work. It was a tiny gallery, you understand?"

"But sometimes inspected?"

"The engineer would go his rounds, of course."

"Mr. Kuhn?"

"Yes, I imagine so."

"Clever man, Mr. Kuhn?"

"Yes, splendid. He always got on first-rate with Bob. They used to study mineralogy and geology together nearly every night."

"But he was harsh with the men?"

"Never, till this incident of the pumps fouling."

"Go on about poor Johansen!"

Agnes started again at the adjective, and controlled herself.

"That afternoon Johansen was killed as he came out of the gallery."

"A commonplace accident, for a dollar!"

"Quite. He was near the junction of Gallery 12 and the main shaft when a trolley, running down the incline, knocked him down and killed him outright. The wheels crushed his head in."

"Lipsky saw this?"

"Yes, he shouted a warning, but too late."

"Thank you. I am interested in the Remorse of Mr. Lipsky. Was his temper upset at all?"

"Yes, he became virulent against mine-owners. He was one of the ringleaders in the attacks on Mr. Kuhn. Mr. Kuhn, senior, arrived from New York, and adopted a policy of all-round conciliation. He carpeted the ringleaders, one by one, and dealt with them in various ways. Lipsky was impertinent, and Mr. Kuhn gave him his ticket to Mexico and a hundred dollars; anything to get such a firebrand out of the country."

"And did he go?"

"He wanted to stay. But his friends meant to go back to work and have no more trouble; so they packed him off. In fact, they rode him out of town, as they say."

"Only one other question. Why do you object so strongly to your mother's selling out? The price is a splendid one. Don't trouble to tell me about your father's dying wishes! You're not that sort of girl."

"No, that's only what I tell mother. It's Bob. He implores me in every letter to get her to hold on, no matter at what cost."

"Why?"

"He won't say. He says I must trust him."

"Well, I've advised your mother to sell. She had promised to abide by my decision. So if you want to stop her, get busy."

Agnes blanched. Then she saw something in the mystic's eyes that gave her second counsel.

"I'll stop her."

"She has my note by now. I feel sure that she has telephoned to Mr. Kuhn; also that she has mentioned my name."

"You must tell me some more."

"If you developed a very bad cough, would your mother hurry you to Palm Beach?"

"She might if I made a point of it."

"These tablets will assist you in the production of a helpful cough. Depart in peace, and rely on me to put an entirely new face on things before Mrs. Mills gets ready to sign any more papers."

"Good-bye, and thank you. But I expect a whole lot . . . from what I've seen."

"Oh! I'm not to be bribed by flattery."

She went out exalted; and Simon Iff remarked that he must lose no time in settling this small matter.

"Mollie! mollior cunicule cinaede! we must have Paul Powys at our unostentatious board. Invoke him by the Qabalistic number which constraineth him; it is Fulton 11,000."

She got the number. "Ah, Mr. Iff, so glad you called me; I was thinking of you only this morning," said the magnate genially, not having thought of Simon for a month. "Dinner? My dear man, I only wish I could; but I'm tied up with Sharp and McGregor. A business dinner, or I'd ask you to come along . . . Yes, I want to see you too; but I'm absolutely tied up all day. Haven't a minute; had no lunch yet, confound it, and I'm hungry. Won't you ring me up again soon?"

Iff smiled quietly. "Will you answer me one question, only one very little one? Have you by any odd chance anything very big on just now? Something so big that it would break you if you lost out . . . say to a combination of . . ."

Powys broke in. "Absolutely nothing at all like that. Dear me, no! (What's that?) Oh, how fortunate! Does that invitation hold, Mr. Iff? My secretary tells me Mr. Sharp has just rung through to call off the dinner."

"Of course," said Iff. "Delighted! Shall we say half-past six?"

"Well, there's absolutely nothing doing to-day in the Bank; dull as ditch-water. If you're not busy, might I run up now and play that game of chess you promised?"

"Certainly. Come right round. I'll get the pieces out."

Twenty minutes later Paul Powys stepped from his limousine. He was a small

man, well-knit, well-groomed, with a neat white moustache and imperial. His hair was still plentiful, of pale ashen grey, and it was smoothed carefully upon his head. His eyes were set very deeply in his head, and were intensely vital. He reminded one a little of Henri de Rochefort, a miniature of that great Frenchman. The mouth was thin and very red, the nose unusually thin and long, with a decided angle, like Wellington's. His step was light, soft, and elastic, and he possessed the quality of personality in the highest degree, magnetizing the attention without doing anything whatever towards the attainment of that most desirable end.

He found Simon finishing the last sentence of a memorandum. Mollie was typing furiously; her hair, loose and tousled about her head, was like a comet of fiery serpents in the red glow of the afternoon sun as it streamed through the open casement, and cast her shadow upon the rich blue and amber of the Chinese carpet.

She pulled the paper from the machine. Simple Simon handed the sheets to his visitor. "Your move!"

He enjoyed one of the treats of his life. Paul Powys spread the sheets, and closed them again, like a lady flirting her fan. Then he folded them in three, and handed them to Simon. The whole action did not occupy thirty seconds. As he passed the paper to the magician, he said; "Of course, they have found gold. But that won't queer my deal, however much it may be."

"It isn't that at all," said Simon Iff. "They aren't thinking about that."

"You had better give me your theory - in detail, please."

Simon Iff knew that Powys could have quoted his memorandum textually from end to end, so he did not trouble to remind him of the facts.

"I saw two objectives in these operations from the first."

"Somebody was trying to prevent access to Gallery 13, and trying to buy the mine. That meant they had found gold there in some unheard-of richness."

"Quite. I think young Kuhn must have come on the men just as they struck it, and made up his mind in a few minutes what to do. Johansen was certain to tell Craig of the strike; he had to be killed right there. Lipsky was a good tool. But he drank; old Kuhn saw at once when he arrived that he must be got out of the country and pensioned off. Caspar and Lipsky proceed to wreck the gallery and then the mine. The strikes and assaults are all intended to prevent the mine from re-opening, and to divert any suspicion from Kuhn. Note that he is careful to be assaulted even in his new job; argument, the ill-feeling against him has nothing to do with what happened in the mine."

"This is very probable, and very interesting," interrupted Powys.

"But, you are about to say, how does it concern me?" Do you think I would waste a moment of your time?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Iff."

"I want to prove to you that the entire device, from the moment of Theophilus Kuhn's arrival at Glanders, was directed against you."

But Simon Iff had wasted several moments of Powys' time; he need not have said that at all, and he pulled himself up with a frown.

"They invent this Ransome idiocy not merely to keep the mine unworked until they can force Mrs. Mills into selling it; I agree with you that the mine is a trifle to such minds as yours and, indeed, Kuhn's; but to give a pretext for the pretended quarrel between Kuhn and Arnheim."

"I may tell you that their quarrel has cost them over fifty million, to my certain knowledge."

"I was sure Kuhn would do things well, on the grand scale. You have beaten him too often before."

"How are you sure of this?"

"Miss Madison here told me that Kuhn was called "Pussy" on Wall Street. I saw him taking endless trouble and risk and loss; he would only do that for some great object; what object so great as you,

"His preoccupation with trifles proved a giant aim to be concealed; his advertized quarrel with Arnheim proved a closer alliance."

"I agree with you. I thank you very much. I will attend to the matter."

"Just one word more, if I may. I came into this in the interest of Mrs. Mills."

"Don't worry. He won't show anxiety to close the deal. The transfer would hardly be ready in less than three days. And - in three days - where would Theophilus Kuhn find four hundred thousand dollars?"

Simple Simon was taken aback for once in his life. The question was as if he were asked where a man on the sea-shore would find a pebble.

He shook hands quietly with Powys at the door. "Mollie, put your things on. I am going to buy you a new hat. I have had one of the most delightful experiences of my life. So much for my good temper, which bestows hats on blessed damozels. My bad temper, which makes mean me pay for them, is due to remorse for my egregious blunders in this very simple affair."

She fixed her passionate blue eyes adoringly upon his face.

"No!" cried the mystic, in prophetic frenzy, "you only betray your ignorance and your stupidity. Sit down, and let me lecture you upon my own base folly!"

She curled her snaky body into a cunning crook of the sofa, and, with her head thrown back, began to puff a cigarette.

"I sit upon the stool of penitence," he continued, doing so, with the music stool, *faute de mieux*.

"You noticed, of course, that I changed what in moments of paranoiac megalomania I insult Nature by calling my mind. I did not allow to Mrs. Mills her full measure of imbecility. I did not fully realize that she would instantly do the wrong and dangerous thing. So I let her see what was actually in my mind, or, to be more accurate, I made it possible for Theophilus to divine what was in my mind from her words or her manner.

"That telephone call from that female glossorrhoeic reminded me that I was known all over New York, and that Theophilus probably knew already that Mrs. Mills had come to consult me. My more tragic error, indeed is a fatal under-estimation of the calibre and range of Theophilus. For, trying to correct my first mistake, I made a worse one. I tried to deceive him. I wrote a letter which I thought he might accept as indicative of my contempt for Mrs. Mills, and my lack of interest in her affairs. I gave him credit for less intelligence than a limpet's, a - a - a Simon Iff's!" Put yourself in his place! 'So Mrs. Simon Iff found nothing to interest him in that story? Really! Too bad!' He would then judge that I was lying to somebody. Who would that be? Who worth my while? Who but the quarry, himself? He would then - I mean, he will now - proceed to get after me. As he has the brains of the devil himself, and doesn't stick at murder - even his young hopeful Caspar shoots a man he never saw before merely to conceal his part in a game where no one had ever suspected him to be a player - the inference is that we are liable to be blown up by dynamite at any moment. My only hope is that he will think that letter of mine indicates permanent instead of temporary dementia."

Miss Mollie Madison absolutely declined to take alarm. She crossed her feet over the arm of the sofa, so that 'Cephas' might take note of the fact that she had the right divine to wear white boots - unpinched feet no larger than new-born kittens. And she lighted a third cigarette, not even deigning to reply.

"You are right. I will buy you six pairs of white kid boots."

"She passed a hand negligently through her hair.

"Of course," he added hastily, "as you imply, the tops must be of green morocco."

"Think, Cephas!"

From her eyes he understood that she did not wish him to make light of the expected duel.

"Our friend, as we should expect from a disciple of the Evangelist Luke, will be full of Human Sympathy; the Christian Touch will be his long suit; his Middle Name will be Eleemosynaria. Then he will know that I am on to his little game; and I will bet you an emerald necklace to match your perfectly intoxicat-

ing Poiret - where, oh where are the Prohibitionists? - that he knows that Powys has been here, and what I said to him. But he will not know what Powys said to me, because Powys has always been a bit above his class. But he will be devilish well scared; he will imagine Powys as laying a trap for him, perhaps the more so as he may think Powys ignorant or careless of his own knowledge of the situation. We must hope that he has committed himself too far in this deal to withdraw. In fact, we may say that it is certain that he has done so, for Powys spoke of his ruin with entire assurance. Powys never guesses, or expects, or hopes. Indicative and Imperative are the only moods in his Defective Verbs. Mr. Theophilus Kuhn will therefore know himself bankrupt; there will be nothing left for him but revenge. The question is: Will he try to kill Powys, or will he try to kill me? We are to remember the necessity of this man's mind; his nature compels him to perpetual concealment of his purposes. Will he then try to gain access to Powys on some such pretext of conference, or offer to compromise, or some such obvious blind? He would know that he would stand not a chance in a million. With me the case is different. He knows that I am vowed to the service of humanity, and that, were he three hundred and thirty three times the liar, thief, and murderer that he is, I would see him if he came to me on the pretext that he needed my advice or aid in any spiritual distress or aspiration. Most people interested in occult subjects being potential or actual murderers,^{RS} I therefore arrange for their reception in the following ingenious manner. Just look out of the window for a minute."

Mollie obeyed. He drew the curtains behind her, and switched on three electric lamps, which shed a soft and cheerful glow in the apartment. He then made certain re-arrangements in the room.

"Come and sit down by me, now, and we will play piquet until Mr. Kuhn favours us with a visit."

Mollie turned and came through the curtains. She walked, as she supposed, straight to him, and banged into a sheet of plate glass in a totally different part of the room.

"Theophilus will have to be a very bad shot in order to hit me," he laughed, came swiftly towards her, and led her gently to the sofa where he had been sitting. The bell rang.

"Ah! but here is our friend the enemy!"

The Japanese boy entered with a visiting card.

"Sir," it read, "I am in extreme spiritual affliction, and I implore you to receive me, and give me your counsel. T.K."

"Ask Mr. Kuhn to enter, and place a chair for him!" The boy obeyed. "See!" he whispered in the girl's small round ear, "so far we have read his mind aright."

Theophilus Kuhn came in, walking heavily. He was an extreme contrast to Powys. His large frame was clad in loose, untidy clothes, and supported an

enormous head, slightly asymmetric like Verlaine's with an immense domed forehead crowned with a thick mat of curly black hair. He was clean shaven; the mouth was large and prominent, the jaw aggressive, the nose fleshy, curved, and spatulate, the eyes glaucous and cold, with an indefinable expression of cunning and malice that inspired Miss Madison with horror and Simon Iff with sorrow. Even in the dim light, they showed a curious inequality which was somehow uncanny. His hands were large and strong, heavy with fat as the face itself. Simon Iff waited for him to speak. He fumbled long and clumsily with his black gloves before he got them off. Then he slowly drew a fountain pen and check-book from his pocket.

"I understand, Mr. Iff, that you are in need - temporary need, of course, purely temporary - of a little money. I am very happy to be able to accommodate you. I will make out the check for eight million dollars. I have had an excellent day on Wall Street. I have beaten Paul Powys. Yes, sir, we have had many battles, but he has come to his Waterloo. You can hardly imagine what this means to me. It gives me control of the whole wealth of this great country. I have America in my pocket. In five years Europe will be mine. Asia, Africa, the whole world shall bow before Theophilus Kuhn. Understand, Mr. Powys, you are in the presence of no ordinary man. I have wished many a time to kill you; now I let you go, because I have beaten you, beaten you to hell, you dog. I despise you for the toy you are! Aha! you thought to make yourself equal to me. And I let you think it - do you know why? I have waited for this day of your humiliation to tell you the great secret. You puppet! You Marionette! I made you. I am God! Now let me write you your check, Mr. Iff."

Mollie had crouched closer to Simple Simon in abject terror; she put her red mouth to his ear, and whispered.

"He's shamming mad. He thinks it will help him with the jury."

But the magician patted her softly on the head, and went quietly over to the table where Kuhn was laboriously writing out the check, with many a hesitation. He could not make the upstrokes properly.

"Thank you very much for the kindly thought, Mr. Kuhn. The money will indeed be my salvation."

As he spoke, he touched a tiny handbell, and the Japanese appeared. "Bring a doctor," said Simon softly, in the man's own language. "Mr. Kuhn has been suddenly taken ill."

Kuhn rose and handed the check to Iff with a flourish, and then began once more to babble of his fame and his success, his wealth, his empire, and his god-head. He went away with the doctor like a child; he had forgotten Iff's presence; the new face took his attention, and he began all over again to boast of his money, and to offer millions to the servant and to the physician.

The door closed behind him. Simon Iff went over to the girl and put his hand upon her shoulder.

"We will not play piquet to-day, child, and we will not buy ourselves hats and boots. We have need to humble ourselves."

He led her to a recess in the wall, where beneath a lamp of silver, with its red glass, and wick afloat in olive oil, stood the bronze figure of Thoth, the Egyptian God of Wisdom.

"I do not bend the knee in supplication to the Gods; but I bend the head in veneration of their infinite wisdom and of their awful justice. I have been proud of the powers of this poor mind, matching it against the greatest intelligences incarnate on this planet. And in this I did well. But this day have I erred thrice, and the third time is the greatest folly in all my life. For I knew not, nor understood, the infinite wisdom and the awful justice of the Gods. I did not comprehend that a mind so false, so cunning, and so malignant must be a mind insane.. Of course the shock of knowing that he was outwitted and irrevocably ruined would topple the unsound structure. I did not understand that. Therefore I feared, and hid myself with a coward's device; and all the virtue is departed from me."

He led her back into the room, and switched on the full light.

"Even in my confession pride thrust up its head," he said very wearily and sadly. "I had to explain to you just where I had gone wrong, and how clever I was to see it. And it's my pride that is urging me now to explain that to you; I wanted to prove how genuine my penitence really was. And now - when I am going to ask you not to come to see me for a week unless you really need me - it is still pride. I want to boast how great sin it is that demands so fierce a penance for its purgation. It's in the marrow of our bones!"

"However," he resumed in his grimly humorous tone, "I am going to do the of meditation, for all that, it's my Vow. And the subject of Vows is to prevent the devil getting at us by the road on Introspection."

"I need you always," answered Mollie, touching the vital spot that concerned her. "But I shall not come to see you. I have a slight touch of pride myself."

"Retro, Satanus!" cried the mystic cheerfully, "you are flattering me where a True Man feels it most. But, my sweet child, that is a lawful pride, and man would be indeed a worm without it. So, Satanissa, you miss the target."

"I think I ought to go down to Palm Beach, and tell the good news to Agnes. You had better come too; that pride of yours comes from sitting cooped up in the city, when you need fresh air and exercise. And those errors of judgement are plain indigestion. You can do your week of meditation down there."

"I will meditate upon the Sun and Moon, upon Fire, Earth, Air, and Water; and I will also write a short treatise upon how Eve got Adam to eat apples when he ought to have been naming pterodactyls. Oh woman, your fascination is in the Intuition which serves you so well instead of Knowledge. What a wonder of Nature to make such a compensation for you!"

"There you go again! Humanum est errare . . . then thank the Lord I err. Now tell the Mikado to serve dinner."

She ran off merrily.

"Don't mind me!" was her laugh, "I've always been 'loco', you know."

"Well," flashed back Simon, "dulce est desipere in loco," Latin not being her long suit, she did not answer, and he became serious once more.

"It's the Wonder of Wonders! Not a self-respecting convolution in her whole cerebral cortex, and here she is telling me, the high and mighty Simon Iff, all sorts of things I don't know. I shall have a busy week with that meditation; I think I had better make it a fortnight."

He did not even know that Miss Mollie Madison had made up her mind to make it a month.

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