

The Red Button

BY **Will Irwin**
AUTHOR OF
"THE CITY THAT WAS, ETC."

ILLUSTRATED BY
Harry R. Grissinger

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"They are a little cold on the surface, those Scotch love-songs," he said, "though warm beneath, like a volcano. Now ye who speak Spanish—we can throw our emotions to the surface."

"Don't you think," responded Betsy-Barbara, "that to conceal it—but to show it's there—is the more wonderful way after all?"

The blood of the MacGregors in Betsy-Barbara was calling her to the defense of her own.

"Do you happen to know any of our Spanish songs?" pursued Estrilla.

"Only Juanita, I think—and La Paloma."

Estrilla looked as though he might have laughed but for Spanish politeness.

"Those are Spanish for outside consumption, as when the English call your cheap-off-cloth is it not—'American cloth.' Let me sing to you—but a Spanish song does not go well with the piano."

"There's a guitar over in the alcove," announced Betsy-Barbara.

"Far-seeing maiden!" exclaimed Estrilla with such a delicious Spanish roll on the vowels that Betsy-Barbara laughed a little, and he, as though understanding, laid out with her.

So he tuned the guitar, Betsy-Barbara finding the key for him on the piano. And while he tweaked the strings, he made comment on them.

"This—you hear—is the angel-string. It is for celestial harmonies. One cannot go wrong on this string; but it is too fine and high to make all our music. This is the man-string. You can go very right or very wrong on this one." "These one," he pronounced it; and he drew out the vowels as though lingering on the thought. "This is the woman-string. Listen—how discordant now! I tune it to the man-string, or I am God of this little world—and you how beautiful!"

"You are talking poetry!" said Betsy-Barbara; and thought of the phrase in some what awkward.

"Ah, but I am inspired!" replied Estrilla.

"(He surely 'doesn't mean me,'" thought Betsy-Barbara, "that would be no delicious!" However, he was looking not at her but at the guitar.)

He strummed little shimmering chords as he spoke. He fell to silence, but still the languorous music quivered from the guitar. Betsy-Barbara turned about on the piano stool, her hands held lightly in her lap, her eyes cast low.

It was many years before Betsy-Barbara, looking back over everything, could analyze the feeling of that moment, could put it in its true relation to herself and her life. At the time, she knew only that she sat there, impulsive, embarrassed, but inert, that she felt shame yet also a furtive pleasure at the steady look of those caressing eyes. It lasted only a moment.

The outer door slammed violently. Betsy-Barbara started as though caught in something guilty. She hesitated a moment for fear of showing her feelings to Estrilla. Then she walked out into the hall. There was no one in sight. That seemed curious, since the hall stairs were not carpeted, and one could hear footsteps. It was as though some one had opened the front door and then quickly closed it again without entering. When she turned back, puzzled, she felt the necessity for explanation.

"I thought it might be Miss Harding," she said, falsely—"I wanted to see her."

He only smiled the same caressing smile. But the spell was cracked, and Betsy-Barbara herself completely broke. Half an hour later she winged a hint, which he caught mid-course, as he seemed to catch every delicate shaft of meaning. He rose and bade her a formal good night. "I hope I may sing with you again," he said at parting.

Betsy-Barbara went to her own room. She dived over her preparations for undressing, making a dozen starts and stops. She was not sleepy; a hundred currents of thought were crossing and recrossing in her mind. So at last she threw a kimono over her evening gown and sat down at the window, maiden-fashion, and thought.

To make no further mystery, the person who opened the front door and disturbed the tete-a-tete between Estrilla and Betsy-Barbara was only Tommy North. He had been searching strenuously for a job. No mystery about that, either. The reason was Betsy-Barbara. The night's quest had failed. The fluid mercury of his disposition had fallen almost to absolute zero. In this mood, he unlocked the front door. The parlor was open; he heard the soft thrum of a guitar. Hungry for companionship, he crossed the thick hall carpet to the parlor door. He looked in and beheld Betsy-Barbara sitting with flushed cheeks and folded hands. It was the attitude of a woman who yields. Beside her sat the Estrilla person, strumming gently on a guitar and looking a million lan-

guished. With a movement that was an explosion, Tommy rushed out, slamming the front door behind him.

His feet, rather than his will, carried him away. There was a saloon at the corner. As by instinct, Tommy rushed into it and ordered a glass of whisky—his first since the night of the Henska murder. In a period incredibly short, he fulfilled the tragic purpose for which he left the boarding house.

An hour and a half after, Tommy North, muttering over and over to himself, "New life in new climate—wonderful plan of genius—" was waiting toward the select boarding house of Madame Rosalie Le Grange. Laboriously he unlocked the door; painfully, and with occasional mutterings about a blasted life, he reached the first landing.



He Strummed the Shimmering Chords as He Spoke.

ing. And on that landing a door opened. Betsy-Barbara stood looking at him.

Yet curiously, as the gaslight caught her full, it was not upon Betsy-Barbara's shocked wide-open eyes that he fixed his gaze. He looked at her feet. Betsy-Barbara was wearing high-heeled velvet shoes with paste buckles. In the full light, they sparkled like real diamonds. Betsy-Barbara stepped back with woman's instinctive fear of a drunken man. So one of those slippers moved. Tommy, his eyes still toward the roomer, clutched at it. The motion almost tumbled him over—did make him reel against the door-post.

"Get it an' hold it," he said—"then discover murder."

"Mr. North—Mr. North!" exclaimed Betsy-Barbara and stood helpless, staring at this weird performance.

"Drunk!" he said. "Final disgrace—everything gone now!"

"Mr. North," said Betsy-Barbara, gathering her courage, "listen to me. If you wake people up tonight, they'll never forgive you. Now I'm going to lead you to your room."

He waved her away and started to make his own course up the stairs. Betsy-Barbara followed, her hands extended to give help in case of need. At his own landing, Betsy-Barbara ran ahead, opened his door, switched on the electric light. Then returning, she pushed him in with a final:

"Good night—and please try to be quiet."

Betsy-Barbara had endured a day filled with as many varied emotions as it is generally given woman to endure. She applied the best remedy that woman knows for surfeit of feeling. She took down her hair, undressed, and cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER VII.
Facing the Music.

Tommy woke next morning to the appropriate mental and physical tortures. When memory had finished with her rack, the future applied thumb-screws. If he went down to breakfast, he must meet—her. Remorse and jealousy struggled in him with a perverse pride. At any rate, he would not run away. No, he would face her. He would look into her eyes, which would be shocked and hurt. The last embers of a ruined existence would shine through his own. Then, after she had seen and realized, he would go away forever and send her just one letter—no, just one flower with his card—to let her know what he had felt and what he had cast aside.

Then—since the human spirit is never static—having touched the lowest depths, his thoughts began to rise toward hope. Just how had he behaved last night? What had she seen him do? From the haze of confused memories, a clear fact appeared in this place and that. He had been aware of her standing at the landing. How had she looked? Somehow, he could not remember her face. Why? Because he had been looking at her shoe buckles—at something which glittered—why?

The tragic night of the Henska murder flashed in upon him, and with it a fact which he had told neither

the police in the third degree process nor yet the coroner at the inquest, for the simple reason that he had forgotten it. Now, he remembered it clearly, perfectly. A freak of drunken consciousness had brought back something which he might never have remembered again.

"Gee whis!" he cried, leaping out of bed, headache and all. "She's looking for evidence—this will fix her!" A cold dip and a dash of bromide restored him wonderfully, for the tissues of Tommy North were resilient and young. As he entered the dining room for breakfast, only a slight pallor and a little languor indicated the crisis of the night before.

Betsy-Barbara and Constance were already seated. Betsy-Barbara looked him full in the eye.

"Good morning, Mr. North," she said evenly.

"Good morning," replied Tommy shortly; and he slid into his chair and attacked his grapefruit.

The breakfast went on. Betsy-Barbara talked freely; she appeared animated even. She included Mr. North in the conversation, throwing him a question now and then. He noticed, however, that these questions came only at regular intervals, as though she were remembering to be very careful. That might be a good sign or it might be a bad one, he could not decide which.

Betsy-Barbara and Constance had risen now. Tommy North, with an effort of the will, rose and followed.

"Miss Lane," he said in the hall; and then, since she did not seem to hear him, he spoke louder, "Miss Lane."

Betsy-Barbara turned. Alone with him now—since Constance had gone on—her eyes showed the emotions which she had suppressed in public.

"What is it?" she said icily.

"I wanted," said Tommy—"I wanted to tell you something."

"I think," responded Betsy-Barbara, "that you needn't make any more explanations—thank you!"

She was turning away when Tommy recovered himself.

"Oh, it isn't that," he said. "I can't explain that, of course. I'm not trying to explain that, Miss Lane. It's just something—something new in the line of evidence—about the Henska case—I think it may help."

Betsy-Barbara turned again—and this time quickly. Her look was startled—but—heaven be praised—friendly.

"Something new?" she said, breathlessly. "Oh, you angel fresh from heaven! Shall I send for Constance?"

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"It has to do, he said humbly, "with the way I was last night. You saw me—I shouldn't like to tell her."

"Let's take a walk," proposed Betsy-Barbara, with her wonderful practicality.

"If you wish," said Tommy North humbly, and yet thrilled with a sense of renewed companionship. Indeed, by the time they reached the street, he had recovered his spirits so much as to propose because the street was so noisy, that they take a cross-town car and walk up Fifth avenue. The car was crowded; they must stand; so they did not approach the subject of the moment until they were treading the street of the spenders.

"Well, what is it? I'm dying to know!" said Betsy-Barbara. The instant they reached the avenue.

"Did I do anything strange," inquired Tommy, "when I first saw you last night?"

"You nearly tumbled at my feet, for one thing," replied Betsy-Barbara.

"What—what were you wearing on your feet?"

Betsy-Barbara thought a second on this peculiar question.

"My velvet slippers with the rhinestone buckles," she said.

Tommy nodded solemnly.

"That was it—I was reaching for them last night—just as I was reaching for something the night I fell at Captain Henska's door. And it brought everything back."

"Oh, what do you mean?" begged Betsy-Barbara. "Go on! Please go on."

"I had got to the head of the stairs on the night of the murder," said Tommy. "The gas was lighted in the hall. I was pickled. You know how your

tumbled and hit—the stuff. The tumble and the sticky feeling put diamonds out of my mind. But I'm sure, just the same, that I saw a bunch of diamonds or something beside that door. You've asked me to tell you anything I might find about the Henska case. And I'm telling, that's all."

Betsy-Barbara considered.

"It may not mean anything," she said, "and it may mean a good deal." She considered again. "Even if the diamonds were there, maybe it had nothing to do with our case. If anybody had been robbed that night, if there had been any signs of a burglar, this evidence would be very important. But the police say that the house wasn't entered. Then again, what became of the diamonds? It seems no one else noticed them."

"Well," remarked Tommy North cynically, "there were a great many policemen in the house."

Betsy-Barbara walked on, still thinking. "Maybe, I'm afraid, though, that it might be only an aberration," she said finally.

"Perhaps," echoed Tommy North. And now, having finished his introductory speech he approached the subject nearest his heart.

"Of course, that's all," he said, "except that I owe you an apology—for my condition last night."

"It is to yourself," said Betsy-Barbara, "that you owe the apology. Mr. North, why did you do it—again?"

Now it was in Tommy North's impulses to tell exactly why he did it—to come out with the truth, accompanied by his opinion of philandering Spaniards. But that would have amounted to a declaration; and to declare his feelings for Betsy-Barbara was leagues beyond his present courage.

"Oh," he said, carelessly, desperately, "I got a jolt. That's all. And I took it out in booze."

"You told me she other night it was because you hadn't anything better to do. Mr. North," she added, suddenly lifting her blue eyes to his, "I'm going to ask a very personal question. I'm not asking it for curiosity. I've a reason, which I'll state later—have you saved any money?"

"Bare yourself for the shock," replied Tommy, "but I really have. I inherited three hundred dollars a while ago. And my mother made me promise every week: I have five hundred dollars in the bank."

Betsy-Barbara nodded her wise and golden head.

"That will do beautifully for a start," she said.

"A start at what?" inquired Tommy.

"At the Thomas W. North Advertising agency."

"At—"

"The Thomas W. North Advertising agency, its founded now, 19-15 a. m. October sixteenth, at the corner of Fifth avenue and Forty-sixth street, New York!"

"This is so sudden!" exclaimed Tommy. But his heart leaped and danced.

"Now, see, Mr. North," resumed Betsy-Barbara, "I've diagnosed your case. The trouble with you is that you've drifted. You need responsibility. When you're boss, you won't be loafing on the job. You'd discharge an employe who did that—and you can't discharge yourself. Some day you'll wish you had a business of your own. Then you'll look back and be sorry you didn't start it when you were young. You can get business, can't you?"

"I ought to," said Tommy.

"And you can—fix up—the business when you get it."

"I suppose I can. I never lost a place for incompetence."

"Then there's really nothing more to be said," responded Betsy-Barbara. "Just get an office, and hang out your shingle, and go to work. You may fail, of course. But you'll be doing it for yourself, and that, Thomas W. North, is what you need."

Tommy North had been looking at her as one who sees visions and hears voices. "Why, that's the way I used to think. That's the way I used to talk," he said. "I didn't realize until I heard it from you, how I'd got over it."

"The first thing to do when you're starting in business is to find an office," said Betsy-Barbara practically.

"There are lots of good cheap little places in lower Fifth avenue," said Tommy North.

"Let's look at them right now!" exclaimed Betsy-Barbara. And the newly-formed Thomas W. North Advertising agency wheeled and started southward.

That afternoon, Betsy-Barbara and Rosalie Le Grange were sewing together in the sun-parlor. As they pulled bastings, Betsy-Barbara slipped in a remark which she tried artfully to conceal in general chatter.

"Mr. North tells me," said Betsy-Barbara, "that he is going to start in business for himself."

"That so?" exclaimed Rosalie; "well he's a nice, smart young man and it will be the very best thing for him." She pulled bastings for ten seconds before she resumed:

"It will keep him straight. He won't have to be helped up to his room for some time, I hope."

Betsy-Barbara stared and flushed.

"Oh! Did you see it?"

"Now, my dear, I think it was brave and nice of you. It's what any girl should have done, and it's what most good girls wouldn't have the decency to do. No woman's a real lady when she's too much of a lady. Yes—I heard him stumble, and I come out and looked."

"To Be Continued"

"It was a Cluster of Diamonds," mind gets on one little thing when you're pickled."

"I don't," put in Betsy-Barbara, in spite of her interest in the story—but please go on."

"And I saw something bright in the hallway, close to Captain Henska's door. I braced against a post and looked at it. It was a cluster of diamonds—the more I think of it, the more it seems like that shoe buckle of yours. I reached out to get it. Then

needed when you took that walk this morning."

"Oh, that wasn't the reason!" cried Betsy-Barbara, driven back on her maiden defenses. "It wasn't that. I really didn't want to see him. But he had something new to tell me about—the case—or thought he had. Something he'd forgotten—something which came back to him last night when he was—well, you saw." And detail by detail she repeated Tommy North's story about the diamond cluster. Rosalie, as she listened with downcast look, used all her will to keep her head steady and her fingers busy.

"That's interesting," she remarked, in a matter-of-fact tone, when Betsy-Barbara had finished. "But I don't know it's important. They think they see funny things when they're drunk and they're ready to swear to 'em when they sober up. Intend to tell Mrs. Henska or the lawyers about it?"

"I thought I might—I'm doing every least thing to help."

"Well, the evidence of a drunk wouldn't go at all in a court of law," pursued Rosalie, her eyes still on her work. "Mr. North is pretty humiliated already, and he's a nice young man, and he'll probably cut out drink now he's in business for himself. Still, if you think it's your duty—"

"Oh, I hope you think it isn't," said Betsy-Barbara. "I don't want to put Mr. North in that position, again."

"Can't see where it's the least bit of use, an' I would only do Mr. North harm," replied Rosalie. "If you was me, would you french this seam? Yes, I guess it looks more fancy that way." Rosalie turned the conversation to a discussion of autumn fashions. She sewed and chatted for ten minutes. Then she looked ostentatiously at the clock.

"Gracious! A quarter to four an' I must be down-town quarrelin' with that laundry at a quarter past!"

She rose, gathered coat, hat and gloves, and hurried to the corner drug store, from which she made by telephone an immediate appointment with Inspector McGege. They met in Abingdon square, a rendezvous half-way between her house and headquarters. She proceeded to business at once.

"I've been just settin' on this Henska case, inspector," she said. "Knew if I waited long enough, something would hatch. It has, but I can't say yet whether it's a rooster or a duck. In the first place, when the grand jury goin' to get to the Wade indictment?"

"Pretty soon, I guess. I've been holding them off until I get more evidence."

"Well, keep holdin' 'em off."

"Honest, what have you got?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Here Rosalie broke out all her dimples, so that Inspector McGee smiled on her. "Call it a hunch from the spirits."

"You can't come that on me," said the inspector, half playfully. "I know your kind of spirits."

"Well, call it a woman's notion then, if you like that any better. The grand jury's the first thing. Next, that old house of Mrs. Moore's is still vacant, isn't it? I want to go through it with you from top to bottom—an' I've got to do it so I won't be seen."

"That's easy. We can enter the block from the other side and go in by the back door."

"All right, now's two o'clock tomorrow?"

"Fine."

"Now I'd better run along. I don't want to take any chances of being seen with you."

"Honest, what have you found?"

"Honest, I don't know myself!" said Rosalie Le Grange, dimpling over her shoulder as she walked away. McGee stood following her with his eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.
Coquetish McGee.

The Moore boarding house, scene of the Henska murder, remained closed, a plain-clothes man from the precinct detective force keeping it under watch and ward.

To this house came Captain McGee and Rosalie Le Grange. They approached with all the caution of forethought, entering the block through an office building on the next street, opening the area door with a pass-key, going into the house by the basement door at the rear.

"Ugh! I hate to touch it," said Rosalie, drawing her skirts away from the wreckage of the cellar. "I'm glad I wore my old clothes. Guess Mrs. Moore never kept this place any too well—an' with this dust an' your undirty cops, Martin McGee, it's just scandalous now. Well, come on!" And so she dragged her police escort through floor after floor, room after room—at first a superficial survey and then a minute search.

As they came to Captain Henska's room, Inspector McGee stopped and made oration.

"You can see," he said, "that it was an inside job. Beginning on the roof, there's no way to enter except by the hatch which goes down into the lumber room. On account of the fire regulations, the hatch couldn't be locked, but it was closed inside by a bolt. That hadn't been monkeyed with. In fact, the dirt around the edges showed that the hatch hadn't been opened for a long time."

"And the fire escape?" asked Rosalie, pursing her brows with concentration.

"The most common cause of insomnia is disorders of the stomach and constipation. Chamberlain's Tablets correct these disorders of the stomach and constipation. Chamberlain's Tablets correct these disorders and enable you to sleep. For sale by all dealers."

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"Mr. North tells me," said Betsy-Barbara, "that he is going to start in business for himself."

"That so?" exclaimed Rosalie; "well he's a nice, smart young man and it will be the very best thing for him." She pulled bastings for ten seconds before she resumed:

"It will keep him straight. He won't have to be helped up to his room for some time, I hope."

Betsy-Barbara stared and flushed.

"Oh! Did you see it?"

"Now, my dear, I think it was brave and nice of you. It's what any girl should have done, and it's what most good girls wouldn't have the decency to do. No woman's a real lady when she's too much of a lady. Yes—I heard him stumble, and I come out and looked."

"To Be Continued"

needed when you took that walk this morning."

"Oh, that wasn't the reason!" cried Betsy-Barbara, driven back on her maiden defenses. "It wasn't that. I really didn't want to see him. But he had something new to tell me about—the case—or thought he had. Something he'd forgotten—something which came back to him last night when he was—well, you saw." And detail by detail she repeated Tommy North's story about the diamond cluster. Rosalie, as she listened with downcast look, used all her will to keep her head steady and her fingers busy.

"That's interesting," she remarked, in a matter-of-fact tone, when Betsy-Barbara had finished. "But I don't know it's important. They think they see funny things when they're drunk and they're ready to swear to 'em when they sober up. Intend to tell Mrs. Henska or the lawyers about it?"

"I thought I might—I'm doing every least thing to help."

"Well, the evidence of a drunk wouldn't go at all in a court of law," pursued Rosalie, her eyes still on her work. "Mr. North is pretty humiliated already, and he's a nice young man, and he'll probably cut out drink now he's in business for himself. Still, if you think it's your duty—"

"Oh, I hope you think it isn't," said Betsy-Barbara. "I don't want to put Mr. North in that position, again."

"Can't see where it's the least bit of use, an' I would only do Mr. North harm," replied Rosalie. "If you was me, would you french this seam? Yes, I guess it looks more fancy that way." Rosalie turned the conversation to a discussion of autumn fashions. She sewed and chatted for ten minutes. Then she looked ostentatiously at the clock.

"Gracious! A quarter to four an' I must be down-town quarrelin' with that laundry at a quarter past!"

She rose, gathered coat, hat and gloves, and hurried to the corner drug store, from which she made by telephone an immediate appointment with Inspector McGege. They met in Abingdon square, a rendezvous half-way between her house and headquarters. She proceeded to business at once.

"I've been just settin' on this Henska case, inspector," she said. "Knew if I waited long enough, something would hatch. It has, but I can't say yet whether it's a rooster or a duck. In the first place, when the grand jury goin' to get to the Wade indictment?"

"Pretty soon, I guess. I've been holding them off until I get more evidence."

"Well, keep holdin' 'em off."

"Honest, what have you got?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Here Rosalie broke out all her dimples, so that Inspector McGee smiled on her. "Call it a hunch from the spirits."

"You can't come that on me," said the inspector, half playfully. "I know your kind of spirits."

"Well, call it a woman's notion then, if you like that any better. The grand jury's the first thing. Next, that old house of Mrs. Moore's is still vacant, isn't it? I want to go through it with you from top to bottom—an' I've got to do it so I won't be seen."

"That's easy. We can enter the block from the other side and go in by the back door."

"All right, now's two o'clock tomorrow?"

"Fine."

"Now I'd better run along. I don't want to take any chances of being seen with you."

"Honest, what have you found?"

"Honest, I don't know myself!" said Rosalie Le Grange, dimpling over her shoulder as she walked away. McGee stood following her with his eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.
Coquetish McGee.

The Moore boarding house, scene of the Henska murder, remained closed, a plain-clothes man from the precinct detective force keeping it under watch and ward.

To this house came Captain McGee and Rosalie Le Grange. They approached with all the caution of forethought, entering the block through an office building on the next street, opening the area door with a pass-key, going into the house by the basement door at the rear.

"Ugh! I hate to touch it," said Rosalie, drawing her skirts away from the wreckage of the cellar. "I'm glad I wore my old clothes. Guess Mrs. Moore never kept this place any too well—an' with this dust an' your undirty cops, Martin McGee, it's just scandalous now. Well, come on!" And so she dragged her police escort through floor after floor, room after room—at first a superficial survey and then a minute search.

As they came to Captain Henska's room, Inspector McGee stopped and made oration.

"You can see," he said, "that it was an inside job. Beginning on the roof, there's no way to enter except by the hatch which goes down into the lumber room. On account of the fire regulations, the hatch couldn't be locked, but it was closed inside by a bolt. That hadn't been monkeyed with. In fact, the dirt around the edges showed that the hatch hadn't been opened for a long time."

"And the fire escape?" asked Rosalie, pursing her brows with concentration.

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CHAPTER VIII.
Facing the Music.

Tommy woke next morning to the appropriate mental and physical tortures. When memory had finished with her rack, the future applied thumb-screws. If he went down to breakfast, he must meet—her. Remorse and jealousy struggled in him with a perverse pride. At any rate, he would not run away. No, he would face her. He would look into her eyes, which would be shocked and hurt. The last embers of a ruined existence would shine through his own. Then, after she had seen and realized, he would go away forever and send her just one letter—no, just one flower with his card—to let her know what he had felt and what he had cast aside.

Then—since the human spirit is never static—having touched the lowest depths, his thoughts began to rise toward hope. Just how had he behaved last night? What had she seen him do? From the haze of confused memories, a clear fact appeared in this place and that. He had been aware of her standing at the landing. How had she looked? Somehow, he could not remember her face. Why? Because he had been looking at her shoe buckles—at something which glittered—why?

The tragic night of the Henska murder flashed in upon him, and with it a fact which he had told neither

the police in the third degree process nor yet the coroner at the inquest, for the simple reason that he had forgotten it. Now, he remembered it clearly, perfectly. A freak of drunken consciousness had brought back something which he might never have remembered again.

"Gee whis!" he cried, leaping out of bed, headache and all. "She's looking for evidence—this will fix her!" A cold dip and a dash of bromide restored him wonderfully, for the tissues of Tommy North were resilient and young. As he entered the dining room for breakfast, only a slight pallor and a little languor indicated the crisis of the night before.

Betsy-Barbara and Constance were already seated. Betsy-Barbara looked him full in the eye.

"Good morning, Mr. North," she said evenly.

"Good morning," replied Tommy shortly; and he slid into his chair and attacked his grapefruit.

The breakfast went on. Betsy-Barbara talked freely; she appeared animated even. She included Mr. North in the conversation, throwing him a question now and then. He noticed, however, that these questions came only at regular intervals, as though she were remembering to be very careful. That might be a good sign or it might be a bad one, he could not decide which.

Betsy-Barbara and Constance had risen now. Tommy North, with an effort of the will, rose and followed.

"Miss Lane," he said in the hall; and then, since she did not seem to hear him, he spoke louder, "Miss Lane."

Betsy-Barbara turned. Alone with him now—since Constance had gone on—her eyes showed the emotions which she had suppressed in public.

"What is it?" she said icily.

"I wanted," said Tommy—"I wanted to tell you something."

"I think," responded Betsy-Barbara, "that you needn't make any more explanations—thank you!"

She was turning away when Tommy recovered himself.

"Oh, it isn't that," he said. "I can't explain that, of course. I'm not trying to explain that, Miss Lane. It's just something—something new in the line of evidence—about the Henska case—I think it may help."

Betsy-Barbara turned again—and this time quickly. Her look was startled—but—heaven be praised—friendly.

"Something new?" she said, breathlessly. "Oh, you angel fresh from heaven! Shall I send for Constance?"

"This was the point where Tommy North became a strategist.

"It has to do, he said humbly, "with the way I was last night. You saw me—I shouldn't like to tell her."

"Let's take a walk," proposed Betsy-Barbara, with her wonderful practicality.

"If you wish," said Tommy North humbly, and yet thrilled with a sense of renewed companionship. Indeed, by the time they reached the street, he had recovered his spirits so much as to propose because the street was so noisy, that they take a cross-town car and walk up Fifth avenue. The car was crowded; they must stand; so they did not approach the subject of the moment until they were treading the street of the spenders.

"Well, what is it? I'm dying to know!" said Betsy-Barbara. The instant they reached the avenue.

"Did I do anything strange," inquired Tommy, "when I first saw you last night?"

"You nearly tumbled at my feet, for one thing," replied Betsy-Barbara.

"What—what were you wearing on your feet?"

Betsy-Barbara thought a second on this peculiar question.

"My velvet slippers with the rhinestone buckles," she said.

Tommy nodded solemnly.

"That was it—I was reaching for them last night—just as I was reaching for something the night I fell at Captain Henska's door. And it brought everything back."

"Oh, what do you mean?" begged Betsy-Barbara. "Go on! Please go on."

"I had got to the head of the stairs on the night of the murder," said Tommy. "The gas was lighted in the hall. I was pickled. You know how your

tumbled and hit—the stuff. The tumble and the sticky feeling put diamonds out of my mind. But I'm sure, just the same, that I saw a bunch of diamonds or something beside that door. You've asked me to tell you anything I might find about the Henska case. And I'm telling, that's all."

Betsy-Barbara considered.

"It may not mean anything," she said, "and it may mean a good deal." She considered again. "Even if the diamonds were there, maybe it had nothing to do with our case. If anybody had been robbed that night, if there had been any signs of a burglar, this evidence would be very important. But the police say that the house wasn't entered. Then again, what became of the diamonds? It seems no one else noticed them."

"Well," remarked Tommy North cynically, "there were a great many policemen in the house."

Betsy-Barbara walked on, still thinking. "Maybe, I'm afraid, though, that it might be only an aberration," she said finally.

"Perhaps," echoed Tommy North. And now, having finished his introductory speech he approached the subject nearest his heart.

"Of course, that's all," he said, "except that I owe you an apology—for my condition last night."

"It is to yourself," said Betsy-Barbara, "that you owe the apology. Mr. North, why did you do it—again?"

Now it was in Tommy North's impulses to tell exactly why he did it—to come out with the truth, accompanied by his opinion of philandering Spaniards. But that would have amounted to a declaration; and to declare his feelings for Betsy-Barbara was leagues beyond his present courage.

"Oh," he said, carelessly, desperately, "I got a jolt. That's all. And I took it out in booze."