ing a pauper for a few hours on the 23d of next September."

"That is your plan, then?"

"Of course. First, I shall substantiate all that this will sets forth. When I am assured that there can be no possibility of mistake in the extent of this fortune and my undisputed claim, I'll take steps to get rid of my grandfather's million in short order." Brewster's voice rang true now. The zest of life was coming back.

Mr. Grant leaned forward slowly and his intent, penetrating gaze served as a check to the young fellow's enthusiasm.

"I admire and approve the sagacity which urges you to exchange a paltry million for a fortune, but it seems to me that you are forgetting the conditions," he said, slowly. "Has it occurred to you that it will be no easy task to spend $1,000,000 without in some way violating the restrictions in your uncle's will, thereby losing both fortunes?"

V.

THE MESSAGE FROM JONES.

A new point of view gradually came to Brewster. All his life had been spent in wondering how to get enough money to pay his bills, and it had not occurred to him that it might be as difficult to spend as to acquire wealth. The thought staggered him for a moment. Then he cried triumphantly, "I can decline to accept grandfather's million."

"You cannot decline to accept what is already yours. I understand that the money has been paid to you by Mr. Buskirk. You have $1,000,000, Mr. Brewster, and it cannot be denied."

"You are right," agreed Montgomery, dejectedly. "Really, Mr. Grant, this proposition is too much for me. If you aren't required to give an immediate answer, I want to think it over. It sounds like a dream."

"It is no dream, Mr. Brewster," smiled the lawyer. "You are face to face with an amazing reality. Come in to-morrow morning and see me again. Think it over, study it out. Remember the conditions of the will and the conditions that confront you. In the meantime, I shall write to Mr. Jones, the executor, and learn from him just what he expects you to do in order to carry out his own conception of the terms of your uncle's will."

"Don't write, Mr. Grant; telegraph. And ask him to wire his reply. A year is not very long in an affair of this kind." A moment later he added, "Damn these family feuds! Why couldn't Uncle James have relented a bit? He brings endless trouble on my innocent head, just because of a row before I was born."

"He was a strange man. As a rule, one does not carry grudges quite so far. But that is neither here nor there. His will is law in this case."

"Suppose I succeed in spending all but $1000 before the 23d of next September! I'd lose the seven millions and be the next thing to a pauper. That wouldn't be quite like getting my money's worth."

"It is a problem, my boy. Think it over very seriously before you come to a decision, one way or the other. In the meantime, we can establish beyond a doubt the accuracy of this inventory."

"By all means, go ahead, and please urge Mr. Jones not to be too hard on me. I believe I'll risk it if the restrictions are not too severe. But if Jones has puritanical instincts, I might as well give up hope and be satisfied with what I have."

"Mr. Jones is very far from what you'd call puritanical, but he is intensely practical and clear-headed. He will undoubtedly require you to keep an expense account and to show some sort of receipt for every dollar you disburse."

"Good Lord! Itemize?"

"In a general way, I presume."

"I'll have to employ an army of spendthrifts to devise ways and means for profligacy."

"You forget the item which restrains you from taking anybody into your confidence concerning this matter. Think it over. It may not be so difficult after a night's sleep."

"If it isn't too difficult to get the night's sleep."

All the rest of the day Brewster wandered about as one in a dream. He was preoccupied and puzzled, and more than one of his old associates, receiving a distant nod in passing, resentfully concluded that his wealth was beginning to change him. His brain was so full of statistics, figures and computations that it whirled dizzily, and once he narrowly escaped being run down by a cable car. He dined alone at a small French restaurant in one of the side streets. The waiter marveled at the amount of black coffee the young man consumed and looked hurt when he did not touch the quail and lettuce.

That night the little table in his room at Mrs. Gray's was littered with scraps of pad paper, each covered with an incomprehensible maze of figures. After dinner he had gone to his own rooms, forgetting that he lived on Fifth avenue. Until long after midnight he smoked and calculated and dreamed. For the first time the immensity of that million thrust itself upon him. If on that very day, October the first, he were to begin the task of spending it, he would have but 357 days in which to accomplish the end. Taking the round sum of $1,000,000 as a basis, it was an easy matter to calculate his average daily disbursement. The situation did not look so utterly impossible until he held up the little sheet of paper and ruefully contemplated the result of that simple problem in mathematics.

It meant an average daily expenditure of $2801.12 for nearly a year, and even then there would be 16 cents left over, for, in proving the result of his rough sum in division, he could account for but $999,999.84. Then it occurred to him that his money would be drawing interest at the bank.

"But for each day's $2801.12, I am getting seven times as much," he soliloquized, as he finally got into bed. "That means $19,607.84 a day, a clear profit of $16,806.72. That's pretty good—yes, too good. I wonder if the bank couldn't oblige me by not charging interest."

The figures kept adding and subtracting themselves as he dozed off, and once during the night he dreamed that Swearengen Jones had sentenced him to eat a million dollars' worth of game and salad at the French restaurant. He awoke with the consciousness that he had cried aloud, "I can do it, but a year is not very long in an affair of this kind."

It was 9 o'clock when Prewster finally rose, and after his tub he felt ready to cope with any problem, even a substantial breakfast. A message had come to him from Mr. Grant of Grant & Ripley, announcing the receipt of important dispatches from Montana, and asking him to luncheon at 1. He had time to spare, and as Margaret and Mrs. Gray had gone out, he telephoned Ellis to take his horse to the entrance to the park at once. The crisp autumn air was perfect for his ride, and Brewster found a number of smart people already riding and driving in the park. His horse was keen for a canter and he had reached the obelisk before he drew rein. As he was about to cross the carriage road he was nearly run down by Miss Drew in her new French automobile.

"I beg your pardon," she cried. "You're the third person I've run into, so you see I'm not discriminating against you."

"I should be flattered even to be run down by you."

"Very well, then, look out." And she started the machine as if to charge him. She stopped in time, and said with a laugh, "Your gallantry deserves a reward. Wouldn't you rather send your horse home and come for a ride with me?"

"My man is waiting at Fifty-ninth street. If you'll come that far, I'll go with pleasure."

Monty had merely a society acquaintance with Miss Drew. He had met her at dinners and dances, as he had a host of other girls, but she had impressed him more than the others. Something indescribable took place every time their eyes met. Monty had often wondered just what that something meant, but he had always realized that it had in it nothing of platonic affection.

"If I didn't have to meet her eyes," he had said to himself, "I could go on discussing even politics with her, but the moment she looks at me I know she can see what I'm thinking about." From the first they considered themselves very good friends and after their third meeting it seemed perfectly natural that they should call one another by their first names. Monty knew he was treading on dangerous ground. It never occurred to him to wonder what Barbara might think of him. He took it as a matter of course that she must feel more than friendly toward him. As they rode through the maze of carriages, they bowed frequently to friends as they passed. They were conscious that some of the women, noticeably old Miss Dexter, actually turned around and gazed at them.

"Aren't you afraid people will talk about us?" asked Monty with a laugh.

"Talk about our riding together in the park? It's just as safe here as it would be in Fifth avenue. Besides, who cares? I fancy we can stand it."

"You're a thoroughbred, Barbara. I simply didn't want you talked about. When I go too far, say the word and drop me."

"I have a luncheon at two, but until then we have our ride."

Monty gasped and looked at his watch. "Five minutes to one," he cried. The matter of his engagement with the attorney had quite escaped him. In the exhilaration of Miss Drew's companionship he had forgotten even Uncle James' millions.

"I've got a date at one that means life and death to me. Would you mind taking me down to the nearest Elevated—or—here, let me run it."

Almost before Barbara was aware of what was happening they had changed places and the machine, under Monty's guidance, was tearing over the ground.

"Of all the casual people," said the girl, by no means unequal to the excitement, "I believe you're kidnaping me."

But when she saw the grim look on Monty's face and one policeman after another warned him she became seriously alarmed. "Monty Brewster, this pace is positively dangerous."

"Perhaps it is," he responded, "but if they haven't sense enough to keep out of the way, they shouldn't kick if they get run over."

"I don't mean the people or the automobiles or traps or trees or monuments, Monty; I mean you and me. I know we'll either be killed or arrested."

"This isn't anything to the guit I'll be going if everything turns out as I expect. Don't be worried, Babs. Besides it's one now. Lord, I didn't dream it was so late."

"Is your appointment so important?" she asked, hanging on.

"Well, I should say it is, and—look out—you blooming idiot! Do you want to get killed?" The last remark was hurled back at an indignant pedestrian who had escaped destruction by the merest chance.

"Here we are," he said, as they drew up beside the entrance to the Elevated. "Thanks awfully—you're a corker—sorry to leave you this way. I'll tell you all about it later. You're a dear to help me keep my appointment."

"Seems to me you helped yourself," she cried after him as he darted up the steps. "Come up for tea some day and tell me who the lady is."

After he had gone Miss Drew turned to her chauffeur who was in the tonneau. Then she laughed unrestrainedly, and the faintest shadow of a grin stole over the man's face.

"Beg pardon, Miss," he said, "but I'd back Mr. Brewster against Fournier any day."

Only half an hour late, Brewster entered the office of Messrs. Grant and Ripley, flushed, eager, and unconscious of the big splotch of mud that decorated his cheek.

"Awfully sorry to have kept you waiting," he apologized.

"Sherlock Holmes would say that you had been driving, Mr. Brewster," said Mr. Ripley, shaking the young man's hand.

"He would miss it, Mr. Ripley. I've been flying. What have you heard from Montana?" He could no longer check the impatient question, which came out so suddenly that the attorneys laughed irresistibly, Brewster joining them an instant later. They laid before him a half dozen telegrams, responses from bankers, lawyers and mine operators in Montana. These messages established beyond doubt the extent of James T. Sedgwick's wealth; it was reported to be even greater than shown by the actual figures.

"And what does Mr. Jones say?" demanded Montgomery.

"His reply resembles a press dispatch. He has tried to make himself thoroughly clear, and if there is anything left unsaid it is past our comprehension. I am sorry to inform you, though, that he has paid the telegraph charges," said Mr. Grant, smiling broadly.

"Is he rational about it?" asked Montgomery, nervously.

Mr. Grant gave his partner a quick, significant glance and then drew from his desk the voluminous telegram from Swearengen Jones. It was as follows:

October 2.

GRANT & RIPLEY,
Yucatan Building, New York:

I am to be sole referee in this matter. You are retained as my agents, heir to report to me through the week. One desire of uncle was to forestall grandfather's bequest. I shall respect that desire. Enforce terms rigidly. He was my best friend and trusted me with disposition of all this money. Shall attend to it sacredly. Heir must get rid of money left to him in given time. Out of respect to memory of uncle he must take no one into his confidence. Don't want world to think S. was damned fool. He wasn't. Here are rules I want him to work under: 1. No reckless gambling. 2. No idiotic Board of Trade speculation. 3. No endowments to institutions of any character, because their memory would be an invisible asset. 4. No indiscriminate giving away of funds. By that I don't mean him to be stingy. I hate a stingy man and so did J. T. S. 5. No more than ordinary dissipation. I hate a saint. So did J. T. S. And both of us sowed an oat or two. 6. No excessive donations to charity. If he gives as other millionaires do I'll let it go at that. Don't believe charity should be spoiled by indulgence. It is not easy to spend a million, and I won't be unreasonable with him. Let him spend it freely, but not foolishly, and get his money's worth out of it. If he does that I'll consider him a good business man. I regard it foolish to tip waiter more than dollar and car porter does not deserve over five. He does not earn more than one. If heir wants to try for this big stake he'd better begin quick, because he might slip up if he waits until day of judgment. It's less than year off. Luck to him. Will write you more fully. S. JONES.

"Write more fully!" echoed Montgomery. "What can there be left to write about?"

"He is explicit," said the attorney, "but it is best to know all the conditions before you decide. Have you made up your mind?"

Brewster sat silent for a long time, staring hard at the floor. A great struggle was going on in his mind.

"It's a gamble, and a big one," he said at last, squaring his shoulders, "but I'll take it. I don't want to appear disloyal to my grandfather, but I think that even he would advise me to accept. Yes, you may write Mr. Jones that I accept the chance."

The attorney complimented him on his nerve and wished him success. Brewster turned with a smile.

"I'll begin by asking what you think a reasonable fee for an attorney in a case of this kind. I hope you will act for me."

"You don't want to spend it all in a lump, do you?" asked Mr. Grant, smiling. "We can hardly act as counsel for both you and Mr. Jones."

"But I must have a lawyer, and the will limits the number of my confidants. What am I to do?"

"We will consult Mr. Jones in regard to the question. It is not regular, you see, but I apprehend no legal difficulties. We cannot accept fees from both sides, however," said Mr. Grant.

"But I want attorneys who are willing to help me. It won't be a help if you decline to accept my money."

"We'll resort to arbitration," laughed Ripley.

Before night Montgomery Brewster began a career that would have startled the world had the facts been known. With true loyalty to the "Little Sons of the Rich," he asked his friends to dinner and opened their eyes.

"Champagne!" cried Harrison, as they were seated at table. "I can't remember the last time I had champagne."

"Naturally," laughed "Subway" Smith. "You couldn't remember anything after that."

As the dinner progressed Brewster explained that he intended to double his fortune within a year. "I'm going to have some fun, too," he said, "and you boys are to help me."

"Nopper" Harrison was employed as "superintendent of affairs," Elon Gardner as financial secretary, Joe Bragdon as private secretary, "Subway" Smith as counsel and there were places in view for the other members.

"I want the smartest apartment you can find, Nopper," he commanded. "Don't stop at expense. Have Pettingill redecorate it from top to bottom. Get the best servants you can find. I'm going to live, Nopper, and hang the consequences."

VI.

MONTY CRISTO.

A fortnight later Montgomery Brewster had a new home. In strict obedience to his chief's command, "Nopper" Harrison had leased until the September following one of the most expensive apartments to be found in New York City. The rental was $23,000, and the shrewd financial representative had saved $1000 for his employer by paying the sum in advance. But when he reported this bit of economy to Mr. Brewster he was surprised that it brought forth a frown. "I never saw a man who had less sense about money," muttered "Nopper" to himself. "Why, he spends it like a Chicago millionaire trying to get into New York society. If it were not for the rest of us he'd be a pauper in six months."

Paul Pettingill, to his own intense surprise and, it must be said, consternation, was engaged to redecorate certain rooms according to a plan suggested by the tenant. The rising young artist, in a great flurry of excitement, agreed to do the work for $500, and then blushed like a schoolgirl when he was informed by the practical Brewster that the paints and material for one room alone would cost twice as much.

"Petty, you have no more idea of business than a goat," criticized Montgomery, and Paul lowered his head in humble confession. "That man who calcimines your studio could figure on a piece of work with more intelligence than you reveal. I'll pay $2500. It's only a fair price, and I can't afford anything cheap in this place."

"At this rate you won't be able to afford anything," said Pettingill to himself.

And so it was that Pettingill and a corps of decorators soon turned the rooms into a confusion of scaffoldings and paint buckets, out of which in the end emerged something very distinguished. No one had ever thought Pettingill deficient in ideas, and this was his opportunity. The only drawback was the time limit which Brewster so remorselessly fixed. Without that he felt that he could have done something splendid in the way of decorating panels—something that would make even the glory of Puvis de Chavannes turn pallid. With it he was obliged to curb his turbulent ideas, and he decided that a rich simplicity was the proper note. The result was gorgeous, but not too gorgeous—it had depth and distinction.

Elated and eager, he assisted Brewster in selecting furniture and hangings for each room, but he did not know that his employer was making conditional purchases of everything. Mr. Brewster had agreements with all the dealers to the effect that they were to buy everything back at a fair price, if he desired to give up the establishment within a year. He adhered to this rule in all cases that called for the purchase outright of substantial necessities. The bump of calculativeness in Monty Brewster's head was growing to abnoral proportions.

In retaining his rooms at Mrs. Gray's he gave the flimsy but pathetic excuse that he wanted a place in which he might find occasional seasons of peace and quiet. When Mrs. Gray protested against this useless bit of extravagance his grief was so obviously genuine that her heart was touched and there was a deep, fervent joy in her soul. She loved this fair-faced boy, and tears of happiness came to her eyes when she was given this new proof of his loyalty and devotion. His rooms were kept for him just as if he had expected to occupy them every day and every night, notwithstanding the luxurious apartments he was to maintain elsewhere. The Oliver Optic books still lay in the attic, all tattered and torn, but to Margaret the embodiment of prospective riches, promises of sweet hours to come. She knew Monty well enough to feel that he would not forget the dark little attic of old for all the splendors that might come with the new dispensation.

There was no little surprise when he sent out invitations for a large dinner. His grandfather had been dead less than a month, and society was somewhat scandalized by the plain symptoms of disrespect he was showing. No one had expected him to observe a prolonged season of mourning, but that he should disregard the formalities completely was rather shocking. Some of the older people, who had not long to live and who had heirs-apparent, openly denounced his heartlessness. It was not very gratifying to think of what might be in store for them if all memories were as short as Brewster's. Old Mrs. Ketchell changed her will, and two nephews were cut off entirely; a very modest and impecunious grandson of Joseph Garrity also was to sustain a severe change in fortune in the near future, if the cards spoke correctly. Judge Van Woort, who was not expected to live through the night, got better immediately after hearing some one in the sick room whisper that Montgomery Brewster was to give a big dinner. Naturally, the heirs-to-be condemned young Brewster in no uncertain terms.

Nevertheless, the dinner to be given by the grandson of old Edwin Peter Brewster was the talk of the town, and not one of the sixty invited guests could have been persuaded to miss it. Reports as to its magnificence were abroad long before the night set for the dinner. One of them had it that it was to cost $3000 a plate. From that figure the legendary price receded to a mark as low as $500. Montgomery would have been only too glad to pay $3000 or more, but some mysterious force conveyed to his mind a perfect portrait of Swearengen Jones in the act of putting down a large black mark against him, and he forbore.

"I wish I knew whether I had to abide by the New York or the Montana standard of extravagance," Brewster said to himself. "I wonder if he ever sees the New York papers."

Late each night the last of the grand old Brewster family went to his bedroom, where, after dismissing his man, he settled down at his desk, with a pencil and a pad of paper. Lighting the candles, which were more easily managed he found, than lamps, and much more costly, he thoughtfully and religiously calculated his expenses for the day. "Nopper" Harrison and Elon Gardner had the receipts for all moneys spent, and Joe Bragdon was keeping an official report, but the "chief," as they called him, could not go to sleep until he was satisfied in his own mind that he was keeping up the average. For the first two weeks it had been easy—in fact, he seemed to have quite a comfortable lead in the race. He had spent almost $100,000 in the fortnight, but he realized that the greater part of it had gone into the yearly and not the daily expense account. He kept a "profit and loss" entry in his little private ledger, but it was not like any other account of the kind in the world. What the ordinary merchant would have charged to "loss" he jotted down on the "profit" side and he was continually looking for opoprtunities to swell the total.

Rawles, who had been his grandfather's butler since the day after he landed in New York, came over to the grandson's establishment, greatly to the wrath and confusion of the latter's Aunt Emmeline. The chef came from Paris and his name was Detuit. Ellis, the footman, also found a much better berth with Monty than he had had in the house on the avenue. Aunt Emmeline never forgave her nephew for these base and disturbing acts of treachery, as she called them.

One of Monty's most extraordinary financial feats grew out of the purchase of a $14,000 automobile. He blandly admitted to "Nopper" Harrison and the two secretaries that he intended to use it to practice with only, and that as soon as he learned how to run an "auto" as it should be run he expected to buy a good, sensible, durable machine for $7000.

His staff officers frequently put their heads together to devise ways and means of curbing Monty's reckless extravagance. They were worried.

"He's like a sailor in port," protested Harrison. "Money is no object if he wants a thing, and—damn it—he seems to want everything he sees."

"It won't last long," Gardner said, reassuringly. "Like his namesake, Monte Cristo, the world is his just now and he wants to enjoy it."

"He wants to get rid of it, it seems to me."

Whenever they reproached Brewster about the matter he disarmed them by saying, "Now that I've got money I mean to give my friends a good time. Just what you'd do if you were in my place. What's the money for, anyway?"

"But this $3000-a-plate dinner——"

"I'm going to give a dozen of them, and even then I can't pay my just debts. For years I've been entertained at people's houses and have been taken cruising on their yachts. They have always been bully to me and what have I ever done for them? Nothing. Now that I can afford it, I am going to return some of those favors and square myself. Doesn't it sound reasonable?"

And so preparations for Monty's dinner went on. In addition to what he called his "efficient corps of gentlemanly aids" he had secured the services of Mrs. Dan DeMille as "social mentor and utility chaperon." Mrs. DeMille was known in the papers as the leader of the fast younger married set. She was one of the cleverest and best looking young women in town and her husband was of those who did not have to be "invited too." Mr. DeMille lived at the club and visited his home. Some one said that he was so slow and his wife so fast that when she invited him to dinner he was usually two or three days late. Altogether Mrs. DeMille was a decided acquisition to Brewster's campaign committee. It required just her touch to make his parties fun instead of funny.

It was on October 18 that the dinner was given. With the skill of a general Mrs. Dan had seated the guests in such a way that from the beginning things went off with zest. Colonel Drew took in Mrs. Valentine and his content was assured; Mr. Van Winkle and the beautiful Miss Valentine were side by side and no one could say he looked unhappy; Mr. Cromwell went in with Mrs. Savage; and the same delicate tact—in some cases it was almost indelicate—was displayed in the disposition of other guests.

Somehow they had come with the expectation of being bored. Curiosity prompted them to accept, but it did not prevent the subsequent inevitable lassitude. Socially Monty Brewster had yet to make himself felt. He and his dinners were something to talk about, but they were accepted hesitatingly, haltingly. People wondered how he had secured the co-operation of Mrs. Dan, but then Mrs. Dan always did go in for a new toy. To her was inevitably attributed whatever success the dinner achieved. And it was no small measure. Yet there was nothing startling about the affair. Monty had decided to begin conservatively. He did the conventional thing, but he did it well. He added a touch or two of luxury, the faintest aroma of splendor. Pettingill had designed the curiously wayward table, with its comfortable atmosphere of companionship, and arranged its decoration of great lavender orchids and lacy butterfly festoons of white ones touched with yellow. He had wanted to use dahlias in their many rich shades from pale yellow to orange and deep red, but Monty held out for orchids. It was the artist, too, who had found in a rare and happy moment the massive gold candelabra—ancient things of a more luxurious age—and their opalescent shades. Against his advice the service, too, was of gold—"rank vulgarity," he called it, with its rich meaningless ornamentation. But here Monty was obdurate. He insisted that he liked the color and that porcelain had no character. Mrs. Dan only prevented a quarrel by suggesting that several courses be served upon Sevres.

Pettingill's scheme for lighting the room was particularly happy. For the benefit of his walls and the four lovely Monets which Monty had purchased at his instigation, he had designed a ceiling screen of heavy rich glass in tones of white that grew into yellow and dull green. It served to conceal the lights in the daytime, and at night the glare of electricity was immensely softened and made harmonious by passing through it. It gave a note of quiet to the picture, which caused even these men and women, who had been here and there and seen many things, to draw in their breath sharply. Altogether, the effect manifestly made an impression.

Such an environment had its influence upon the company. It went far toward making the dinner a success. From far in the distance came the softened strains of Hungarian music, and never had the little band played the "Valse Amoureuse" and the "Valse Bleue" with the spirit it put into them that night. Yet the soft clamor in the dining-room insistently ignored the emotion of the music. Monty, bored as he was between the two most important dowagers at the feast, wondered dimly what invisible part it played in making things go. He had a vagrant fancy that without it there would have been no zest for talk, no noisy competition to overcome, no hurdles to leap. As it was, the talk certainly went well, and Mrs. Dan inspected the result of her work from time to time with smiling satisfaction. From across the table she heard Colonel Drew's voice—"Brewster evidently objects to a long siege. He is planning to carry us by assault."

Mrs. Dan turned to "Subway" Smith, who was at her right—the latest addition to her menagerie. "What is this friend of yours?" she asked. "I have never seen such complex simplicity. This new plaything has no real charm for him. He is breaking it to find out what it is made of. And something will happen when he discovers the sawdust."

"Oh, don't worry about him," said "Subway," easily; "Monty's at least a good sportsman. He won't complain, whatever happens. He'll accept the reckoning and pay the piper."

It was only toward the end of the evening that Monty found his reward in a moment with Barbara Drew. He stood before her, squaring his shoulders belligerently to keep away intruders, and she smiled up at him in that bewildering fashion of hers. But it was only for an instant, and then came a terrifying din from the dining-room, followed by the clamor of crashing glass. The guests tried for a moment to be courteously oblivious, but the noise was so startling that such politeness became farcical. The host, with a little laugh, went down the hall. It was the beautiful screen near the ceiling that had fallen. A thousand pieces of shattered glass covered the place. The table was a sickening heap of crushed orchids and sputtering candles. Frightened servants rushed into the room from one side just as Brewster entered from the other. Stupefaction halted them. After the first pulseless moment of horror, exclamations of dismay went up on all sides. For Monty Brewster the first sensation of regret was followed by a diabolical sense of joy.

"Thank the Lord!" he said softly in the hush.

The look of surprise he encountered in the faces of his guests brought him up with a jerk.

"That it didn't happen while we were dining," he added with serene thankfulness. And his nonchalance scored for him in the idle game he was playing.

VII

Mr. Brewster's butler was surprised and annoyed. For the first time in his official career he had unbent so far as to manifest a personal interest in the welfare of his master. He was on the verge of assuming a responsibility which makes any servant intolerable. But after his interview he resolved that he would never again overstep his position. He made sure that it should be the last offense. The day following the dinner Rawles appeared before young Mr. Brewster and indicated by his manner that the call was an important one. Brewster was seated at his writing-table, deep in thought. The exclamation that followed Rawles' cough of announcement was so sharp and so unmistakably fierce that all other evidence paled into insignificance. The butler's interruption came at a moment when Monty's mental arithmetic was pulling itself out of a very bad rut, and the cough drove it back into chaos.

"What is it?" he demanded irritably. Rawles had upset his calculations to the extent of seven or eight hundred dollars.

"I came to report h'an h'unfortunate condition h'among the servants, sir," said Rawles, stiffening as his responsibility became more and more weighty. He had relaxed temporarily upon entering the room.

"What's the trouble?"

"The trouble's h'ended, sir."

"Then why bother me about it?"

"I thought it would be well for you to know, sir. The servants was going to ask for 'igher wiges to-day, sir."

"You say they were going to ask? Aren't they?" And Monty's eyes lighted up at the thought of new possibilities.

"I convinced them, sir, as how they were getting good pay as it is, sir, and that they ought to be satisfied. They'd be a long time finding a better place and as good wiges. They 'aven't been with you a week, and here they are strikin' for more pay. Really, sir, these American servants——"

"Rawles, that'll do!" exploded Monty. The butler's chin went up and his cheeks grew redder than ever.

"I beg pardon, sir," he gasped, with a respectful but injured air.

"Rawles, you will kindly not interfere in such matters again. It is not only the privilege, but the duty of every American to strike for higher pay whenever he feels like it, and I want it distinctly understood that I am heartily in favor of their attitude. You will kindly go back and tell them that after a reasonable length of service their wiges—I mean wages—shall be increased. And don't meddle again, Rawles."

Late that afternoon Brewster dropped in at Mrs. DeMille's to talk over plans for the next dinner. He realized that in no other way could he squander his money with a better chance of getting its worth than by throwing himself bodily into society. It went easily, and there could be only one asset arising from it in the end—his own sense of disgust.

"So glad to see you, Monty," greeted Mrs. Dan, glowingly, coming in with a rush. "Come upstairs and I'll give you some tea and a cigarette. I'm not at home to anybody."

"That's very good of you, Mrs. Dan," said he, as they mounted the stairs. "I don't know what I'd do without your help." He was thinking how pretty she was.

"You'd be richer, at any rate," turning to smile upon him from the upper landing. "I was in tears half the night, Monty, over that glass screen," she said, after finding a comfortable place among the cushions of a divan. Brewster dropped into a roomy, lazy chair in front of her and handed her a cigarette, as he responded carelessly:

"It amounted to nothing. Of course, it was very annoying that it should happen while the guests were still there." Then he added, gravely, "In strict confidence, I had planned to have it fall just as we were pushing back our chairs, but the confounded thing disappointed me. That's the trouble with these automatic climaxes; they usually hang fire. It was to have been a sort of Fall of Babylon effect, you know."

"Splendid! But like Babylon, it fell at the wrong time."

For a lively quarter of an hour they discussed people about town, liberally approving the slandered and denouncing the slanderers. A still busier quarter of an hour ensued when together they made up the list of dinner guests. He moved a little writing-table up to the divan, and she looked on eagerly while he wrote down the names she suggested after many puckerings of her fair, aristocratic brow, and then drew lines through them when she changed her mind. Mrs. Dan DeMille handled her people without gloves in making up Monty's lists. The dinners were not hers, and she could afford to do as she pleased with his; he was broad and tall and she was not slow to see that he was indifferent. He did not care who the guests were, or how they came; he merely wished to make sure of their presence. His only blunder was the rather diffident recommendation that Barbara Drew be asked again. If he observed that Mrs. Dan's head sank a little closer to the paper, he attached no importance to the movement; he could not see that her eyes grew narrow, and he paid no attention to the little catch in her breath.

"Wouldn't that be a little—just a little pronounced?" she asked, lightly enough.

"You mean—that people might talk?"

"She might feel conspicuously present."

"Do you think so? We are such good friends, you know."

"Of course, if you'd like to have her," slowly and doubtfully, "why, put her name down. But you evidently haven't seen that." Mrs. Dan pointed to a copy of the Trumpet which lay on the table.

When he had handed her the paper she said, "'The Censor' is growing facetious at your expense."

"I am getting on in society with a vengeance if that ass starts in to write about me. Listen to this," she had pointed out to him the obnoxious paragraph, "'If Brewster Drew a diamond flush, do you suppose he'd catch the queen? And if he caught her, how long do you think she'd remain Drew? Or, if she Drew Brewster, would she be willing to learn such a game as Monte?'"

The next morning a writer who signed himself "The Censor" got a thrashing and one Montgomery Brewster had his name in the papers, surrounded by fulsome words of praise.

VIII.

One morning not long after the incidents just related Brewster lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, deep in thought. There was a worried pucker on his forehead, half hidden by the rumpled hair, and his eyes were wide and sleepless. He had dined at the Drews' the evening before and had had an awakening. As he thought of the matter he could recall no special occurrence that he could really use as evidence. Colonel and Mrs. Drew had been as kind as ever and Barbara could not have been more charming. But something had gone wrong and he had endured a wretched evening.

"That little English Johnnie was to blame," he argued. "Of course, Barbara had a right to put any one she liked next to her, but why she should have chosen that silly ass is more than I know. By Jove, if I had been on the other side I'll warrant his grace would have been lost in the dust."

His brain was whirling and for the first time he was beginning to feel the unpleasant pangs of jealousy. The Duke of Beauchamp he especially disliked, although the poor man had hardly spoken during the dinner. But Monty could not be reconciled. He knew, of course, that Barbara had suitors by the dozen, but it had never occurred to him that they were even seriously considered. Notwithstanding the fact that his encounter with "The Censor" had brought her into undesirable notice, she forgave him everything after a moment's consideration. The first few wrenches of resentment were overbalanced by her American appreciation of chivalry, however inspired. "The Censor" had gone for years unpunished, his coarse wit being aimed at every one who had come into social prominence. So pungent and vindictive was his pen that other men feared him, and there were many who lived in glass houses in terror of a fusillade. Brewster's prompt and sufficient action had checked the pernicious attacks and he became a hero among men and women. After that night there was no point to "The Censor's" pen. Monty's first qualms of apprehension were swept away when Colonel Drew himself hailed him the morning after the encounter and in no unmeasured terms congratulated him upon his achievement, assuring him that Barbara and Mrs. Drew approved, although they might lecture him as a matter of form.

But on this morning as he lay in his bed Monty was thinking deeply and painfully. He was confronted by a most embarrassing condition and he was discussing it soberly with himself. "I've never told her," he said to himself, "but if she doesn't know my feeling she is not as clever as I think. Besides, I haven't time to make love to her now. If it were any other girl I suppose I'd have to, but Babs, why, she must understand. And yet—damn that Duke!"

In order to woo her properly he would be compelled to neglect financial duties that needed every particle of brain energy at his command. He found himself opposed at the outset by a startling embarrassment, made absolutely clear by the computations of the night before. The last four days of indifference to finance on one side and pampering the heart on the other had proved very costly. To use his own expression, he had been "set back" almost eight thousand dollars. An average like that would be ruinous.

"Why, think of it," he continued. "For each day sacrificed to Barbara I must do something like $2500. A long campaign would put me irretrievably in the hole; I'd get so far behind that a holocaust couldn't put me even. She can't expect that of me, yet girls are such idiots about devotion, and, of course, she doesn't know what a heavy task I'm facing. And there are the others—what will they do while I am out of the running? I cannot go to her and say, 'Please may I have a year's vacation? I'll come back next September.' On the other hand, I shall surely neglect my business if she expects me to compete. What pleasure shall I get out of the seven millions if I lose her? I can't afford to take chances. That Duke won't have seven millions next September, it's true, but he'll have a prodigious argument against me, about the twenty-first or second."

Then a brilliant thought occurred to him which caused him to ring for a messenger boy with such a show of impatience that Rawles stood aghast. The telegram which Monty wrote was as follows

Swearengen Jones, Butte, Montana—May I marry and turn all property over to wife, providing she will have me?
MONTGOMERY BREWSTER.

Continued Next Week.