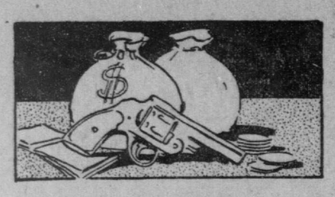

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By William Hamilton Osborne

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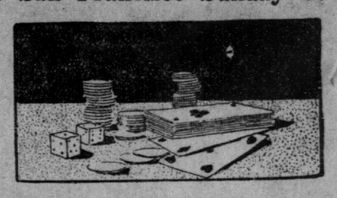

CHAPTER II (Continued)

CHALLONER CAUGHT

Stevens, the butler, outside, rapped sharply on the door and thrust in his head.

"Mr. Murgatroyd," said he, in a confidential tone.

"Mr. Murgatroyd," exclaimed Eloise, "what Murgatroyd? Not William Murgatroyd? What's he doing here? What does he want, Stevens?"

"Sh-h-h," warned Stevens, gently, "he can hear me. He's the prosecutor of the pleas."

"Oh, yes," said Eloise, "then it is Mr. William Murgatroyd. But what does he want?"

Stevens shook his head, stepped aside suddenly, the door opened to its full width, and a man entered. The newcomer looked about the room, stared at Eloise for an instant and started back.

"Eloise," he exclaimed, "you here?"

Eloise held out her hand. "And you," she exclaimed, "what are you doing here? I didn't know you were a friend of the family."

She stopped and turned to see that the burning paper had been totally consumed, and then turned back to him.

"Isn't this terrible?" she said.

"Terrible," assented Murgatroyd, in even tones.

He was a tall, well built chap, with a smooth shaven face, a square chin, and a nose that stood well out into the air. He had held office now for six months, elected on a reform ticket. He was making some kind of a stand against the regular organization, embarrassed on the one hand by the plaudits of the cranks, and retarded on the other by the apathy of the average citizen. For the rest, Murgatroyd was a man who appeared to be without enthusiasm, who followed his nose on the theory that it would take him to the right place, after all. He was pleasant, but in conversation usually short, sharp and businesslike.

Turning to Eloise Bloodgood, he came to the point at once.

"I wanted to see Mrs. Challoner," he announced. "I'm glad you're here. I don't know her very well, and—"

Eloise shook her head. "You can't see her just now. She's terribly unstrung. She's ill. You know, it's two weeks since James Challoner first went away."

"I know," answered Murgatroyd, just a bit impatiently.

Suddenly Eloise gasped. "You—you don't mean to say," she faltered, "that you're here in—in your official capacity?"

Murgatroyd smiled grimly. "It is the only capacity in which I'm likely to be here, Eloise," he answered.

"But," she protested, "I thought they left these things to the police."

Again he smiled, the more grimly, too.

"They do," he answered, "but the police renigged. There are reasons, don't you see? In the first place, since I was appointed prosecutor of the pleas, I've turned up a thing or two in the police department. That made 'em sore. And—well, I and the police department are out of tune. These grand jury cases they put up to me and my men."

"You don't mean to say," protested the girl, "you have to do this kind of thing yourself?"

Murgatroyd raised his eyebrows. "That's the only way I can see that it's done," he answered. "Besides," he went on, "this tragedy involves Cradlebaugh's, and Cradlebaugh has got Mulholland of the regular organization, and the police department, too, by the throat. Cradlebaugh's is a gold mine. Cradlebaugh pays thousands in money and thousands in votes, too." Murgatroyd smiled sadly. "Cradlebaugh is going to 'get his' one of these days, I am afraid," he went on. "But," he explained, "you see how it is. Mulholland of the organization puts his finger on the police department, and the department lays down. Oh, yes, it's up to me."

Eloise uneasily shifted her position. She didn't like Murgatroyd in this new capacity. And yet there was something in the grim determination of the man that pleased her.

"But," she exclaimed, "James Challoner has been arrested in Chicago."

"That," answered Murgatroyd, "is what the papers say. I know better."

"What," she exclaimed, "isn't it true?"

Murgatroyd shook his head. "I talked to Chicago over the wire tonight and I talked to the man they've got. He isn't Challoner."

"Not Challoner?" echoed Eloise. "Then he isn't caught. Then why are you here?"

"To see Mrs. Challoner. To find out where he is. To persuade her to persuade him to come back." Murgatroyd chopped out the sentences as if he were a machine.

Eloise touched him on the arm. "Billy," she said, "do you really think he murdered Richard Rafferty?"

Murgatroyd laughed a short laugh. "If I didn't know you, Eloise, I should imagine you were sparring for time. If I didn't know you I wouldn't answer any questions. As it is, I must answer yours in the same way I would do anything you ask of me, short of crime."

"If you put it that way," returned Eloise, drawing away from him, her tone growing cold, "you needn't answer me at all."

Murgatroyd did not heed her. "I don't know," he went on, "whether Challoner murdered Rafferty or not."

"You don't know?"

"No," returned the prosecutor, "I don't know. No man can know, so far. The evidence is purely circumstantial."

Eloise Bloodgood had been hanging on his words. Now she drew a long breath. Suddenly she brought her hands sharply together as if in applause.

"Circumstantial," she echoed; "then the newspapers were wrong when they said it was a certainty?"

Murgatroyd held up his hand. "What I tell you," he explained, "is confidential. You understand."

"Yes, yes," she said, impatiently, "but tell me about it. The real facts. That is, if you want to. If you can."

"There's no reason why I shouldn't, I suppose," said the prosecutor of the pleas. "The real facts, as we have them—as we have them, mind—are simple. Challoner quarreled with Rafferty—"

"What about?" asked Eloise impulsively."

Murgatroyd flushed. "That makes no difference," he answered; "they quarreled. It was a quarrel in which the passions of each man were roused to the uttermost. For the time being they parted. Three days afterward Rafferty came home with $10,000 odd in his pocket. He had picked a winner at Gravesend, that's all. When he got back they met, these two men, in Cradlebaugh's. They had a game. They had another quarrel, a second quarrel—"

"And then."

"Then," went on the prosecutor, "they parted. That was all. All save at 2 o'clock next morning Rafferty was found in Canal street with a bullet through his heart."

Eloise was quivering with suppressed excitement. "Who saw him shot?" she asked.

"No one."

"But then—" protested Eloise.

"But," returned Murgatroyd, "a man named Pemmican, of Cradlebaugh's, witnessed both quarrels and Challoner has run away. Put two and two together and they look like four."

"But," still persisted Eloise, "you don't mean to say that such evidence is conclusive."

"Let me finish," went on the prosecutor, calmly. "Rafferty's wallet was still upon him. But he was minus his $10,000 roll."

Eloise clapped her hands again. "That is conclusive," she commented; "conclusive the other way around. You don't think that James Lawrence Challoner would steal?"

Prosecutor Murgatroyd paused for an instant and placed finger tip against finger tip.

"Yes," he answered slowly, speaking as if with conviction, "I believe that Challoner, judging by the kind of man he is today, would do anything. I believe that he would steal. I do."

Eloise shook her head. "It's impossible," she answered. "Besides, the Challoners have any amount of money."

Murgatroyd shrugged his shoulders. "Challoner's wife has," he assented; "the town knows that."

"It's the same thing," protested Eloise, "and she adores him. You don't know how she adores him, Billy."

Again Murgatroyd shrugged his shoulders. "Does he adore her?" he queried.

The girl shook her head. "I know—I know," she answered, sadly, hopelessly. "He married her for her money. She's blind to everything, Miriam is. Isn't it terrible?"

Once more she placed her hand upon Murgatroyd's arm. She did it unconsciously, impersonally, but impulsively. "What an awful thing it is that he has ruined himself, isn't it?"

Unconsciously Murgatroyd changed his mood to meet hers. "It's a tragedy," he said, "to see a man like that go downhill. I wonder why he went. He used to be a decent chap, good—respectable."

"And his wife," responded Eloise the loyal. "No one could have a better wife than Miriam. You used to be a friend of his."

"Yes," assented Murgatroyd, "before he married. When he was poor and decent, like the rest of us. Yes, I was a friend of his."

Eloise Bloodgood drew her brows together. "And you, good friend that you were, left him; you let him take his downward course."

For an instant this imputation seemed to rest heavily upon Murgatroyd's broad shoulders. He cast it from him with a sigh.

"A man's best friends," he answered her, "are like a man's good wife. They do not desert him, whatever happens. He deserts them. And so it was with Challoner."

"And so at the last," said Eloise, "he has no friends."

"None," returned Murgatroyd, "save a flock of vampires who fed upon his purse, and who would keep on feeding so long as he has a purse." He pulled out his watch. "But," he protested, "I am wasting time."

"Thank you," exclaimed Eloise, with profound obeisance.

"Oh, thunder," returned Murgatroyd, flushing, "I didn't mean my time. I mean yours, in particular, and the county's time, in general. The county is a stern master. Look here, I've got to be frank. I've got to see Mrs. Challoner. I've simply got to, don't you see?"

Eloise shook her head. "Miriam Challoner is ill, too ill. She gave orders."

"She is not too ill," persisted Murgatroyd, "to walk from room to room. My men have seen her through the windows. Will you tell her that I've got to see her?"

Eloise started out, but returned. "I can't tell her," she wailed. "I'll ring for Stevens."

She rang and Stevens came.

"Stevens," she said, "will you tell Mrs. Challoner—" She stopped. "Oh, I can't, I can't—" she faltered.

Murgatroyd stepped into the breach. "I am the prosecutor of the pleas," he said to Stevens. "Will you tell Mrs. Challoner I must see her? I'm sorry, but I must."

Stevens gulped, nodded hastily, and left the room.

Eloise shivered. She sank into a chair and half covered her face with her hands.

"This is terrible," she kept repeating. "I can't get over it—that James Challoner threw himself away when he had everything to live decently for."

"Did he have everything to live decently for?" asked Murgatroyd. "Are you sure?"

"I don't believe he murdered," went on the girl. "I don't believe he robbed. That is not what I mean. But his life, his life. Oh, he was worth saving."

Murgatroyd nodded solemnly. "There is," he said, "but one way to reform a man like that; but one remedy. For Challoner there is only one way out."

"And what is that remedy?" queried Eloise eagerly.

She was interrupted. Miriam Challoner stood in the doorway, silent as a ghost, pale as a ghost. Eloise dashed toward her.

"Miriam," she cried, abjectly, "I didn't send for you. It was Mr. Murgatroyd."

Mrs. Challoner bowed and smiled faintly. "I have met Mr. Murgatroyd once or twice, I think," she said, with a grace that belonged only to herself.

Murgatroyd looked behind her, on into the hall, to see whether she was accompanied. Then he bowed in turn.

"Thank you, Mrs. Challoner," he said. "You know," he went on swiftly, "that I am the county prosecutor. You know that this, Mrs. Challoner, is a highly important matter. And when I tell you that it is up to me, I'm sure you will understand. Were I not bound hand and foot by a sense of duty, I should not be here."

Young Mrs. Challoner moistened her lips. It was plainly apparent that she held herself together with great effort.

"Please don't apologize," she said gently, "I understand. It may be better that you are some one whom I have met before; it may be easier for me."

"Harder for me," returned the prosecutor of the pleas.

Eloise, shuddering, started for the door, holding out her hand as she went. "I must be going, Miriam," she said.

The self-possession, the restraint fell from Mrs. Challoner in an instant. Uttering a half sob, one that was felt rather than heard, she clutched Eloise hysterically by the shoulder.

"No, no, Eloise," she wailed. "No, I can't bear it. You must stay here. If you don't, I don't know what will happen. I shall go mad, I think. Stay here all the time."

Eloise nodded. "I shall do whatever you want me to do, Miriam," she said.

Murgatroyd placed a chair for Mrs. Challoner and bade her be seated. Eloise sank into a chair at her side. Then Murgatroyd, too, seated himself, and gazed, inoffensively, but steadily, into the face of Mrs. Challoner.

"No, no, Eloise," she wailed, "no, I can't bear it. You must stay here."

"Mrs. Challoner," he said, still more gently than at any time before, "believe me that I have no desire to annoy you, no desire to trouble you. Believe me that I shall do nothing that is not necessary."

Mrs. Challoner held fast to Eloise, as if she pinned her faith to that young woman. "Please don't apologize," she said to Murgatroyd. "Please come to the point."

Murgatroyd rose and took from his breast pocket the latest extra.

"I shall begin at the beginning, Mrs. Challoner," he said, handing her the paper. "You may not have seen the Evening Mail."

Challoner's young wife rose to her feet in alarm. "Challoner Caught in Chicago!" she exclaimed. She stood unsteadily for an instant. Then an expression of gratitude filled her face. "Then Jimmy boy, is found," she went on, "Thank Heaven. I'm glad, so glad they have got him. Then he must come back home."

"I had supposed," said the prosecutor, in even, business like tones, "that the news of his arrest would be an unpleasant shock to you. I find that the unpleasant shock is yet to come."

Quick as a flash, Miriam Challoner read the truth in the prosecutors's face. "You don't mean—you can't mean—" she began.

He bowed. "I have already told Miss Bloodgood that the report is a mistake. Your husband was not arrested in Chicago."

For the first time, Mrs. Challoner really broke down. She sobbed silently on the shoulder of the girl beside her.

"Then he won't come home," she wailed. "Jim—Jimmy boy. Why not? Two weeks, Eloise. Two long weeks he's been away."

Murgatroyd waited patiently until she had recovered, never once forgetting that he was the servant of the county. His was a double duty. He must apprehend the guilty, and so do it as to save the county great expense. Murders had become expensive luxuries of late. But two short years before, as Murgatroyd recalled, it had cost $30,000 to track, around the world, Heimbolt, a highway robber, who by accident had murdered. And the county hadn't found him, either. Murgatroyd knew that in this case, hampered as he was, he must make good.

"Mrs. Challoner," he said at last, "I shall cut this as short as possible. I believe—we believe, down at the office, that Challoner has not left the east, that he did not go west, and we believe he may still be here in town."

He had reseated himself, but now, once more he rose.

"Mrs. Challoner," he said, "please look at me, just once. I want to have my men search these premises, while I am here; while you are here. This house—"

Eloise Bloodgood shook herself from the grasp of Miriam.

"This is an outrage, Mr. Murgatroyd," she said; "It is preposterous. Can't you take her word that her husband is not here?"

Murgatroyd glanced back at Mrs. Challoner. "Does she tell me that her husband is not here?"

Miriam smiled faintly, and returned Murgatroyd's glance with interest. "He is not here," she said. "I wish he were. I wish he were."

Eloise still held the floor. "You see, Mr. Prosecutor," she interposed, "she tells you."

Murgatroyd was unmoved. "It is necessary," he repeated, "for my men to search this house. You see?"

For Murgatroyd knew that there is something, after all, that brings men—good men, bad men, indifferent men—back to their homes. But Eloise was adamant.

"No," said Eloise.

Mrs. Challoner placed a restraining hand on Eloise. For Miriam Challoner once more held a strong grip upon herself.

"You may search this house from top to bottom, Mr. Murgatroyd," she assented, "and if you should find my husband, no one would be more pleased than I."

"I'll tell my men," said Murgatroyd. He left the room.

Miriam Challoner once more gave way. "Jim—Jimmy boy," she cried to Eloise. "Poor chap! only think of him, Eloise, days and nights, starting at every sound, terror showing on his poor white face."

Murgatroyd stepped into the room once more, leading his two men, Muller and McGrath. One of these men but a short while before had stolen in at the French window, and looked at unopened letters on the desk. He it was who left the window open.

"They're going to look here first," said Murgatroyd to the two women. "Will you go or stay?"

Eloise drew Miriam toward the door. "We shall go, of course."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Challoner. "We shall stay."

Muller and McGrath, plainclothes men, county detectives, little recked who went or who stayed.

"Excuse us, please," said Muller.

"We beg your pardon," said McGrath. They started in. There were places in that room unknown to Eloise; places that even Miriam had forgotten about—cubby holes, false closets. Muller and McGrath overlooked nothing. Silently, quietly, in their businesslike way, they turned everything topsy turvy and turned it back again, leaving things as they had found them.

"There's only one place left," said McGrath to Muller, with a grin, "look up the fireplace."

Muller, forgetting the fire, did so, and singed his hair. He rubbed it ruefully.

"Did you look up there good?" McGrath inquired; "because if he's up there, you know, the chief'll never forgive you."

"If he's up there the chief'll forgive him, all right," said Muller, still with the smart of the flames upon his face.

They turned to their chief. "It's all right, counselor," they said.

Murgatroyd nodded. "Will you cover the rest of the house?" he said.

They grinned sheepishly. "That's all done," they answered.

"Done?"

McGrath nodded. "Did it while you was chinning in here, chief," he said. "We showed our shields, and they let us through." He drew near and whispered. "We thought it best," he explained; "it kind o' took 'em by surprise. They hadn't no time to fix things, don't you see?"

"Nothing found?" asked Murgatroyd.

Simultaneously they shook their heads, "Nothing found," they echoed.

Murgatroyd waved his hand. "Wait for me at the door," he commanded, "I won't be half a minute."

He turned to Mrs. Challoner. "Your husband is not in this house, Mrs. Challoner," he said. "When Muller and McGrath start in they use a fine toothcomb. But there's just one other thing I want to say to you. If you know where your husband is—"

"She doesn't," sharply returned Eloise.

Murgatroyd ignored the interruption. "If you know where he is," he went on; "if you have any means of communicating with him—"

"She hasn't," once more interposed the girl.

"If you have," quietly continued the prosecutor of the pleas, "I want you to use your influence with him to come back. His flight amounts to a moral confession of crime. He has nothing to gain by staying away. He has much to lose. He has nothing to lose by coming back. He has much to gain. Listen to me. He will be caught. He can not escape."

"Yes," assented Mrs. Challoner, sorrowfully, "he must come back. I want him to come back. Yes, he must face it through; this charge. You—you don't think him guilty, Mr. Murgatroyd?"

Murgatroyd strode toward the door. "I don't know," he said, shortly, sharply, coldly. "Goodby."

He went.

"What do you think, counselor?" his men asked him, down at the door.

He shook his head. "They don't know anything about him," he returned. "We don't know, and they don't know where he is. It's a game of watch, watch, watch."

"Right you are, chief," they assented.

Back in the Challoner house Eloise Bloodgood tiptoed to the window and drew aside the curtain.

"There they go, Miriam, down the street. All three. Ugh! What a lot of brutes. And Billy Murgatroyd is the worst of the lot."

Miriam Challoner had been resting her head forlornly on her arm at the table. Now she looked up and smiled a wan smile.

"Murgatroyd!" she exclaimed in surprise. "I thought you liked him, Eloise?"

Eloise Bloodgood hunched her shoulders expressively. "You have things badly twisted, Miriam. He likes me," she answered. Suddenly she jumped to her feet and clapped her hands impulsively. "Oh, Miriam, I almost forgot. Good news! Good news!" she ran swiftly toward Mrs. Challoner, then swiftly back again to the window. "I wonder if they can see me or hear me," she exclaimed, shuddering. She glanced out of the window. "No, there they are, out of sight, almost."

"Good news?" echoed Miriam Challoner. "What good news?"

Eloise placed a hand upon her lips. "Prosecutor Murgatroyd told me confidentially—" she began.

And straight, square little Miriam Challoner shook her head. "Confidentially," she repeated, "then you'd better not—"

Eloise frowned belligerently. "Oh, no," she continued, "it's all right. Billy Murgatroyd likes to tell things to me. He told me once he believed that to be one of the controlling motives that led to matrimony—a man having somebody to tell things to."

Mrs. Challoner's woman curiosity—her eagerness, got the better of her. "And he told you?" she inquired.

Eloise nodded. "He told me the facts about the affair. He gave away his evidence—to me."

"But," again protested Miriam.

Once more Eloise silenced her. "No, I shall tell you," she persisted. "This may be a matter of life and death, and beside, you have suffered so. You are entitled to know the truth."

"Yes, yes," assented Miriam. "Tell me. I must know. Wait a minute."

She pushed a button and Stevens entered.

"Stevens," she asid, insistently, as if in another instant something within her brain might snap, for she was wearied and worn to the limit of endurance, "Stevens, now listen! Don't let anybody else in the house. Understand. I can not stand it. Don't let anybody in the house. If anybody comes get their business and shut the door upon them. And Miss Bloodgood will attend to it, won't you, Eloise?"

"Yes," answered Eloise.

She waited until Stevens had left the room. Then she went on.

"Murgatroyd told me the greatest cock and bull story about the murder. The papers have distorted, exaggerated everything. Listen, my dear, it's the flimsiest case."

Miriam Challoner took a deep breath. "How?" she asked. "Tell me."

Eloise tapped the table with her hand. "Nobody," she went on, "saw that man Rafferty killed. Nobody saw the shot fired. There's nothing in it. They've only got some disreputable gambler or bar tender who claims to have seen a quarrel. That's all. And the man that killed Rafferty robbed him of $10,000, too. Don't you see? James Lawrence Challoner wouldn't rob a man, let alone kill him."

"I don't know," answered Miriam, slowly, "whether he would or not."

"What?" gasped Eloise.

"Don't misunderstand me," pleaded Miriam. "There are two James Lawrence Challoners. One is the man I love; the man who—loves me."

Eloise averted her eyes. She could not help thinking how this woman before her had been deceived.

"The other," went on Miriam, "is the James Lawrence Challoner who does things. "I don't care now," she added fiercely, "whether he is a robber or a murderer, or what. I want him back." She sobbed for an instant. "Don't you see, Eloise, we had a quarrel. I treated him shamefully—shamefully. He hasn't come back since."

"You quarreled? You—Miriam," exclaimed Eloise, "and about what?"

"Money," admitted the conscience stricken woman. "He wanted me to give him some. A perfectly natural request, wasn't it? Men have got to have money. And I wouldn't give him any. It was brutal in me. I can never forgive myself."

Eloise gasped. "You wouldn't give him any money, and he didn't have any when he went away?"

Miriam wept. "No, poor boy," she answered. "Poor, poor chap. Think of him, starving, freezing, dying, maybe."

Eloise Bloodgood drew a long breath. "And Richard Rafferty was robbed," she thought to herself. But she didn't say it to Miriam.

"I don't think you understand," went on Miriam. "As for the murder and the robbery, of course, James didn't do those things. I don't believe that at all. But he must come back and stand trial and be acquitted. And I," she added proudly, "will be at his side through it all."

To Eloise the face of Miriam was the face of a martyr.

"On the evidence they have," Eloise returned slowly, "he'll be acquitted all right." And she added to herself: "Whether he happens to be guilty or innocent."

"What's that?" said Mrs. Challoner, starting up nervously in alarm.

"The bell again," whispered Eloise, shuddering as Miriam shuddered.

"That bell," repeated Mrs. Challoner, "that terrible bell. How cold it is again. I'm shivering all over. Do you hear voices below? Listen! I thought I heard voices."

Eloise stole to the door and listened "It's Stevens, turning them away," she answered. "It is nothing at all."

"I hope so," wailed Miriam. "I hope it's no one. I can't see any one. Why, why doesn't Jimmy boy come home."

Suddenly Eloise fell back from the door. It was being stealthily pushed open.

"Oh," she gasped. "It's Stevens. Nobody but Stevens. How you frightened me."

Stevens stood at attention at the door. He glanced straight before him at the fire, looking neither to the right nor to the left. He drew a long intake of breath. Then, for the first time, he spoke:

"Mr. Challoner," he announced.

He stepped aside suddenly, or was pushed aside. Behind him, tall and gaunt, had followed another man—a ghost. A man disheveled, exhausted, pale faced; a man, soiled, tottering. This man was James Lawrence Challoner, and he had come home.

Miriam did not comprehend at first.

"What did you say, Stevens," she had exclaimed, "Mr. Challoner? Who is Mr. Challoner?"

Then she had seen. For an instant she stood back, pale, frightened. Then she rushed forward.

"Jim," she cried in ecstasy, "Jimmy boy. You've come back." Hungrily she threw herself upon him; kissed him, not once, twice, thrice, but many times. "You've come home," she laughed. The youth, the freshness of joy, was in her voice.

But Challoner, still standing just within the entrance to the room, never heeded her. He cast her off with a desperate sweep of his arm.

"Never mind," he cried, "I'm tired—dog tired. I've got to sleep."

"You've come back to me," murmured Miriam.

Challoner turned upon her sullenly, desperately. "That isn't the point," he growled. "You don't understand. I'll make it plain. I've got to have sleep—sleep—sleep!"

Eloise waved her arm frantically. "Stevens," she cried, almost screamed, "pull that curtain down. I pulled it up after they went. Pull it down."

Challoner turned upon her next. "I don't care anything about the curtain, I tell you," he said. "I don't care anything about you, either of you. I don't know you. I must have sleep—sleep—sleep."

Eloise knew in her soul that these were things she must not hear.

"Miriam," she said, "I shall not stay. I must go. I must not see all this. You must let me go."

She wheeled suddenly upon Stevens. "Stevens," she exclaimed peremptorily, as if she and not Miriam were the mistress of the house, "leave the room."

Stevens withdrew posthaste.

For the first time Miriam left her husband and clung to Eloise.

"You shall not go, Eloise," she exclaimed. "You and Jim are the only two friends I have. You must stay here with Jim and me. You must—you must."

Eloise saw the agony in her face. "I shall stay, then, Miriam," she assented.

Miriam, once more assured, darted back to Challoner.

"Jimmy boy," she cried, kissing him and pushing the hair away from his forehead. "So tired—so tired."

For answer, Challoner, a wolf now and not a man, jerked himself from her.

"I came home, didn't I?" he responded. "Well, then, I must have sleep, sleep, sleep."

He stalked, tottering over to the dainty, silken covered lounge, and threw himself upon it, sighing deeply. One of his soiled shoes destroyed its daintiness forever. "Sleep," he kept saying, as if to himself, "I must have sleep."

Miriam watched him, spellbound for the instant. Then, once more she darted toward the lounge, and half threw herself upon him, clasping his head, his shoulders in her embrace.

"Oh, Jim, Jimmy boy," she exclaimed frantically, "Jimmy, my love! Everything's all right now, Eloise. He's come back. Listen, Jimmy boy. You'll forgive me for my quarrel, won't you? I was a brute. Yes I was, Jimmy," still kissing him upon the lips, the face, the forehead. "You've come back to me again, my love, my love, my Jimmy boy."

Her answer was a snore. Challoner lay supinely where he had thrown himself. He had not moved. He had gone to sleep forthwith, and he slept as does some beast who had crept back to his lair, after days of hunting by the manpack.

Eloise whispered, her nerves tingling "Miriam," she said, "this is important. You and I must think of things. It was lucky that Murgatroyd and his men went when they did. They must have left the house in one direction and Jim came in another. Lucky they searched the house, too, wasn't it?"

There was a flush upon the face of Miriam Challoner. She was kneeling at the side of that dainty lounge, with its far from dainty burden. Her arm was still about the neck of the man who slept upon it.

"I can hardly realize that Jimmy boy is back," she murmurmed, happily.

"Yes, yes," returned the practical Eloise, "but we must warn him. This is important. He may not be found. But, yes, they will find him some time I suppose.

Miriam Challoner laughed joyously and tried to straighten out her young husband's tangled hair.

"Yes, they will find him, I suppose," she answered, absently, "but I don't care. I can go and see him every day and he will be acquitted." She turned and kissed him once again. "My Jim," she murmured in his ear. Somehow she thought he heard, and was glad.

Eloise crossed to her, stooped down and caught her by the shoulder.

"Yes, but, Miriam," she expostulated "we must take no chances. We ought to waken him."

Miriam interposed her body between Eloise and Challoner.

"No," she exclaimed, "he must sleep. We must let him sleep."

Eloise glanced fearfully toward the doors and windows. She felt the significance of it all; she knew that what she said was of the utmost importance. She knew that James Lawrence Challoner was guilty, but they couldn't prove it, and he must be warned.

"We ought to tell him, Miriam," she persisted, speaking very distinctly "what kind of evidence there is against him. He ought to know that. If we didn't warn him in time, he'd never forgive us—he'd never forgive you. He's a man."

Mrs. Challoner nodded. "Yes, you're right, Eloise. You're always right, I think. Yes, he ought to know." Gently she shook him, then rocked him gently to and fro upon the lounge, as some fond mother might wake a drowsy growing boy on a lazy summer morn.

"Jim," she called softly in his ear "Jim, wake up, Jim. Wake up."

For an instant Challoner stirred "I've got to sleep—sleep," he returned in guttural tones. And he slept and kept on sleeping.

"We must wake him," insisted Eloise. Then she stopped short.

For as they stood there, clustered about the sleeping thing, something faint and far away, but clear, insistently clear, smote the ears of both. It was the bell, the front door bell. They clutched each other in abject fear.

"That bell again!" wailed Mrs. Challoner. "Who can it be?"

They stood frozen, silent, both watching the door. They heard Stevens toiling up the stairs without. They waited for him. They saw him enter and they shivered.

"Well?" asked Eloise of Stevens.

Stevens glared at them with frightened eyes. "It's the prosecutor's men ma'am. They come to—"

"Stevens," gasped Eloise, "you didn't tell them—"

"I didn't say a word," answered the butler. "They said they saw him."

Eloise groaned and pointed to the lounge. "Saw Mr. Challoner?" she faltered.

Stevens nodded. "They saw him come into the house. That's what they said."

"Impossible," returned Eloise, "I saw them go away."

Stevens sadly shook his head. "Mr. Murgatroyd is the slickest prosecutor we've ever had," he answered hopelessly. "They said they saw him come."

Mrs. Challoner stepped forward "You left them outside, Stevens?"

"One of them stayed outside. The other man put his foot in the door and came in. He did more. He telephoned to Murgatroyd. He tells me Murgatroyd was most particular to be here when they took him."

"In at the death," murmured Eloise; "it's like Murgatroyd. And one of these men, then," she asked of Stevens "is downstairs in the hall?"

There was a tap on the door, and Kitty, the maid, entered. She was in a quiver of fear, excitement and indignation.

To Be Continued Next Sunday

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