

The Protector of Finance

Tales of Resilius Marvel, Guardian of Bank Treasures

By WELDON J. COBB

THE ORIENTALIST

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OUR auto had gone dead after striking a great loose paving block. The chauffeur was busy getting the machine into shape again. Resilius Marvel could brook necessary delay, but it was his characteristic never to sit placidly by with folded hands. He had estimated a stoppage of some continuance, had leaped from the vehicle, and asked for my company with a brief glance.

It was a quaint part of the great city, remembered by old settlers only. Once the narrow winding street, extending only two blocks, had been residential. Business had reached and swung over and fallen into the desuetude of rag warehouses and storage cellars. Some of the rickety old-fashioned structures had gone to decay and disuse. We strolled along the stone walk, cracked and irregular, while my friend descended on the glided past of those old tottering mansions.

It was sudden, startling, tragic—the cry, the call, the appeal that abruptly rang out upon that dull afternoon air. The near hum of business activity did not soften or dash it out. Marvel came to a sharp halt and I followed his example. Those keen eyes of his gave one comprehensive sweep of what lay opposite us. Mine followed the indication of his own, roved across the gray house fronts and rested on the third story, where every sash was boarded up or out of place.

"For the love of heaven—oh, some one come into the house!"

Those were the words, uttered in weird, thrilling accents. Time, place and the speaker, a fair young girl, harmonized with a suggestion of the intense and dramatic. She was framed vividly against the dark background of the vacant room, one hand supporting her against the rotting window frame. She wavered as though she would fall over the low reaching casement into the street. Her face was white as marble, her eyes stricken with some fearful emotion of horror or excitement. She saw us, and her cry was meant for us.

I noted Resilius Marvel incline that shrewd face of his as though striving to peer into a mystery, his keen professional instincts at once aroused. He was as a man before whom the end of a puzzle had been cast, with a challenge for expert elucidation. His features instantly assumed a certain grimness, as if he discerned menace in the situation, urgency, perchance peril.

"Come," he said simply, quickly, and started to cross the street, but a shriek, ringing, far-echoing, curdling half halted him. Together we noted a sharp turn to the episode, blotting out what had materialized so suddenly. From behind the wavering girlish form a pair of arms extended. They were sinuous, though stalwart, and full sleek vestments enclosed them. They encircled the shrieking girl and drew her back, one of them muffling her face in the folds of a fleecy, billowy scarf that, with the garb of the new actor in the momentary drama, gave an oriental tinge to the situation.

There was blankness then where there had been animation. Travesty, drama or tragedy, the curtain was down and the act ended. I wondered what Marvel would do next. His sure definite leap over the cobbles, his lightened eye. He reached the opposite pavement, made a rush, and as his powerful body came like a butting ram against the closed door guarding the old wreck of a rookery, it flew from its hinges like a barrier of straw.

The dull afternoon light of day penetrated a long passageway feebly, and beyond was gloom. There was a flash as we reached a shaking, uncertain stairway. My friend had brought out his portable electric tube. I followed it and himself, guided by the shifting focus point that showed splintered treads fast rotting away. We reached a landing. A frail door guarded the second flight. It was unlocked, however, and yielded to a touch. At the top of the stairway we came into a large room. It held the open window space at which the girl, now so mysteriously vanished, had appeared to our vision for the space of a few moments. As Marvel passed I saw him stoop. It was to pick up a crumpled piece of paper. Then, his eyes fixed on the floor, he traced a track in the accumulated dust of years, showing where trailing garments had made a broad plain mark.

There was an open door at the end of the long room. It led out upon a platform which spanned an alley. Leading from the platform was a rickety flight of narrow stairs. As we glanced over the railing we saw a female form just leaping from the lower step. As she turned to run down the alley towards the next street she turned slightly.

"The same girl," observed Marvel sententiously.

"Yes," I assented, noting that her hand was held closely across her chest and that she tottered as she ran, evidently on the verge of collapse from nervous excitement.

I saw Marvel make a movement to dash after her. Then he saw it was too late. At the mouth of the alley stood an automobile, evidently in wait-

ing for the girl. She fairly fell into its seat as she pulled herself up the step, the urgency with which the chauffeur acted telling that she had given him some speedy directions. The machine fitted out with view of a whisk, but not until my companion had applied a glass to his eye with the words:

"You are good at figures—remember 2134234." Then sententiously: "Our work is here, if it is really our work," and crossed the platform. A lowered door guarded the structure facing on the next street. It had an iron handle, and a mere pressure upon this sent the metal barrier on pulley chains to the ceiling. As we stepped across the grooved threshold of the door, through some delicate adjustment of weight, closed after us.

It was not given to exhibitions of surprise or unguarded utterances in the presence of the imperturbable Marvel. What we now faced, however, astounded me, and I noted plainly that he shared my emotions. It was like a step from squallor into splendor, from gaunt barrenness into the gleam of oriental grandeur. We had entered a large room heavily hung with tapestries, even to the ceiling, that must have cost a fortune. A heavy velvet carpet made our footsteps noiseless. In the center of the room was a raised dais. In front of this burned a varicolored lamp covered with the precious metals and rare and costly jewels. A globe giving out a soft girasole glow flooded the apartment with a mystic radiance, while the incense-laden air enhanced a certain dreamy effect that lulled the senses and suggested the rare inner temple of some shrine of the Indus.

The dais supported a throne, backed by a wondrous statue carved from ebony or Iguanavitae, representing a goddess perfect of frame and feature. All around the room were cushions fashioned of rose silk, and before each was a prayer rug.

"A translation to the antipodes," remarked Resilius Marvel, and for all the cautious subjugation of his tone, I traced the faint echo of a scoff. "Let us explore to a practical end. This layout had no legitimate promise in the heart of an American city. It is here with a purpose—we will find out what."

With the audacity of a man not unused to penetrating where he chose when in the line of duty, my friend led the way across the apartment and pushed aside the heavy drapery at its far end. An antecorridor continued the suite. It was as elaborately furnished as the main apartment we had just traversed. No denizen of the strange place had as yet come into evidence, but as we entered a third apartment we came upon a man hastily rearranging a disordered attire.

Judging from his flustered manner and the full sleeved silken robe he wore, he was the owner of the pair of arms that we had seen thrust back the girl from the window. Then, too, at his waist the man had stuffed into his belt the fluffy veil or scarf which he had used as a gag to silence that heart-stricken cry: "Oh, some one come into this house!"

The man was dark as the ebony statue in the first room we had entered. Instantly, as the shadow of Marvel fell across his range of vision, he was erect, his arms folded, his attitude brash and challenging. My friend had kept straight on as if to pass the draperies behind this arbitrary sentinel. Before the apparent entrance to another apartment the latter sprang, his arm outstretched.

"Banal—banal!" he croaked shrilly.

"I say, yes," observed Marvel contemptuously, and he placed his hand across the arm of the man and caught at the rich hanging. The entire drapery was suddenly wrenched out of his reach, the servant fell to hands and knees muttering some cabalistic jargon and then crept out of the way, and we saw—Nirvasa.

We did not know her then by that name; it came later; but I was awed and breathless, as like some splendid apparition, a being in the full bloom of lovely womanliness faced us. She stood near a gilt stand on which rested a crystal globe. She was peerless—in her dress purely oriental, a seeming Indian princess. Slightly dark, her face had an indescribable glow, rather that of the richest rose than delicate and clear. Her eyes were deep set, but sparkling, entralling, inviting.

She smiled upon us, divesting her welcome of every tinge of awkwardness, her attributes of any effort to impress and mystify. One flashing glance from those intelligent eyes seemed to envelope and consume us. And then, to my sublime astonishment she said, with stately self poise and without a shade of hesitation:

"Mr. Resilius Marvel, I am honored."

If she had not made the recognition, less speedily would my expert friend have pierced the travesty. If she knew him it was no necromantic power—she must be of the class who make it a study to know those whom they select as prey, those whom they fear as masters.

I had noticed that Marvel's comprehensive glance had swept the room keenly. His eyes were most attracted by a chart behind the gilt table. It was a complex chart with tracings of suns, moons, crescents and stars upon its surface, hieroglyphic characters and tables.

"A life chart," observed Marvel, fixing his glance now on the oracle of the place.

"A seance chamber of Mahamat," replied the lady promptly, but dimming any boastfulness by maintaining that even, complacent smile.

"Ah, yes," remarked Marvel—"clairvoyant."

"Mystic," corrected my lady.

"You are better informed than the police, then," retorted my friend incisively.

A pretty dismay wrinkled the forehead of the woman. She made an expressive movement with her hands to express helplessness. Then those liquid eyes took to their depths a pretty, pleading power.

"It is unfortunate that you accept so much on hearsay," she said softly.

"You are the final, I wish I had your good opinion. Will you let me try and gain it?—I will have no secrets from you. I am no impostor. I come from the Himalayas, the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter in vorticity. I profess to tell no fortunes, but some day, with time given, I may be able to show even Resilius Marvel that there is a coherency and potency to some of my claims."

My friend was silent. There was a slight curl of disbelief on his lip as the lady placed her dainty hand on the crystal globe.

"I have explored crystal reading," he said finally. "I was more fortunate than one of your clients—an old farmer who lost several thousands between here and his home."

Nirvasa shrugged her graceful shoulders and looked grieved and friendless. Then she swept aside the draperies behind her. We entered a large square room. Again—amazement.

old," purred the tones of Nirvasa. "I have the proofs. He is the gold maker. A wonderful power, but lacking still some ingredient to make his knowledge so complete that the touch of a wand would turn clay into bright, shining bullion. To leave his native mountains and breathe his tainted air would mean death. We dare not remove him for any length of time from the artificial air generated in those tanks. I will show you."

I watched with interest as the lady tapped on a hinged section of the glass globe, opened it and spoke to the oldest man in the world. He reached out and took up a crucible, placing something within it, and handed it to Nirvasa.

"It is coal," she said, and Marvel deigned to examine and agree. The man in the globe handed out next a tiny phial. "It is distilled vapor from his sole discovery, the gold root of Brahma-putra," she said further. "Pour it in. Come—see."

She moved the retort across a metal plate, turned on an acetylene jet, and surrounded it all with a metal drum. There was a hissing sound. She turned off the gas, with the aid of a pair of tongs immersed the crucible in a jar of water, and poured out upon a marble slab a jagged nugget.

"Accept as a souvenir, Mr. Marvel," she said in a low, winning tone. "You will find it of superlative quality."

"Doubtless," acceded my friend dryly. "I see your plan—the genuine articles in equipment to cater to your mystery-loving clients, and I suppose, a new religious fad to sustain all the accessories? I am not interested, as I did not come as a seeker after mystic revelations. I came by an unaccustomed way—the rear, and I am here to learn the occasion of an almost tragic outburst from the young lady who was removed so suddenly by your servant."

"Oh, yes," smiled Nirvasa, as tranquilly as if the simplest, most ordinary statement in the world had been made. "The young lady was

quieted and sent home. She is one of those impressionable beings who go easily into hysterics—you had an exhibition of it."

"And something more," replied Marvel sternly—"the number of the automobile that conveyed her away from here."

I saw Nirvasa wince. For a moment her audacity was daunted. But only for a moment.

"I do not know her name," she said, "but I can help you further, Mr. Marvel. She lives at the Glendale apartments."

"Thank you," said Resilius Marvel, if surprised not showing it, and my lady led us through an intricate variety of corridors and apartments until we reached the front of the building and turned us over to a tawny-skinned servant in costume. Still smiling, still radiantly beautiful, still unflinching, Nirvasa bowed—as from that remarkable haunt of mystery.

From the manner of the high priestess of what I considered to be a temple of chicanery, and the way in which Marvel treated the proposition, I was satisfied in my own mind that the woman Nirvasa was one of the many clairvoyants and mystics who made it a business to catch the unwary and credulous. We regained our machine without Marvel saying a word. He was silent and thoughtful until we reached the office of the United Bankers' Protective Association. He waved me to a seat, went to a bookcase, selected a scrapbook, opened it at a certain page, placed the volume before me and went to the telephone.

Within five minutes I had perused several old newspaper articles telling of Nirvasa. She was a shrewd adventuress, successful amid oriental occult surroundings. She had been mixed up in several cases where her clairvoyancy had gained the confidence of clients, and she had induced them to invest in worthless stocks and bonds owned by outside confederates. The Oldest Man in the World was really a patriarchal individual, and had once been one of the living curiosities of a big traveling circus outfit. Nirvasa was a grade above the average fortune teller. She really possessed a

fair clairvoyant power. At one city she had established a cult, had collected several thousands of dollars, and then with her combination had faded away.

Resilius Marvel came to me just as I had concluded my interesting reading. He held two pieces of paper in his hands. They were crumpled fragments straightened out, and I knew represented the little wad of paper I had seen him pick up at the window where we had seen the girl.

"Look that over," he said.

"A new zest of interest came 'nto the strange case. Torn crosswise, the two fragments comprised a check for \$20,000, signed 'Alpatsie Druse,' 'Garnet Druse.' It was drawn on our bank."

"Do you know them?" asked Marvel.

"I know the account well," I replied, "lost in surprise and agony; I know Alpatsie Druse by sight. This is—fairly remarkable."

"It gives us plain sailing for a bit," declared Marvel in his businesslike way. "I have been busy at the telephone. Nirvasa told the truth; the girl we saw, or at least one answering her description, lives at the Glendale apartments, and her name is Garnet Druse."

"That is the sister of Alpatsie Druse," I volunteered. "If you will give me ten minutes I may be able to dig up something at the bank."

"Go ahead," said Marvel simply.

I came back with some real information. The Druses, brother and sister, were children of the Hon. Amos Druse, now abroad. We had carried two family accounts. One was in the name of Alpatsie Druse, originally \$40,000, drawn down in solid amounts through sixty days, and a last check presented two days previous, thrown out—N. S. F."

"Not sufficient funds, eh?" translated Marvel. "And the other account?"

"Joint checks honored only on deposit of Amos Druse when bearing signature of both brother and sister."

"Good for the face of that check?"

"Yes, and four times over," I replied. "There is something queer about this affair," I submitted. "The paying teller says the withdrawal of such substantial amounts caused him to notice Alpatsie Druse. He knows him slightly in a social way. Says he has been hurried, excited, dopy by turns when he came to draw money of late."

"We will go to the Glendale apartments," announced my friend abruptly. "It was only through determined persistency that Marvel was able to get at last prevail upon Miss Garnet Druse, through her maid, to admit us. Everything bespoke refinement as we entered a room where she sat a frail delicate girl whose face and manner bespoke wistful gentleness that appealed to both of us. Her face was pale, her bosom heaving, her eyes expressed a hunted dread. She had not yet recovered from the great strain of the episode to which we had been a witness."

"Miss Druse," spoke my friend, "I am Resilius Marvel of the United Bankers' Protective Association. This gentleman," and he indicated myself, "is the private secretary of the bank upon which that check is drawn. Our mission is confidential and we ask an explanation that will be entirely helpful to you."

For a moment the fair young creature gazed at us as if her tongue was glued to the roof of her mouth and the life currents turned to ice. Then her head sank upon her arms outstretched on the table before her. She uttered two despairing, heart-rending words: "Save us!"

I noted the humane, sympathetic face of my friend soften. He made a quick motion to me which I understood and I passed into the next room, leaving the two alone. As I stood at the windows looking out into the street I could catch the echo of the tones of Marvel—low, persuasive, almost fatherly. Finally, broken, sobbing intonations mingled, the current of words became more steady. At the end of half an hour when my friend rejoined me, I knew that master mind of his had prevailed over the shrinking, fearsome mood of the beautiful girl, stricken with the weight of some dread secret, and had conquered the clouded situation. Now it was clear as crystal.

Alpatsie Druse, sanguine, lightly balanced, invested with liberal wealth for the first time in his life, had strayed to the seance chamber of the Nirvasa. Her fascination, it appeared, had less to do with his constant visits than her specious influence in making him believe that through a judicious investment he could assist The Oldest Man in the World to develop and mature his ability to manufacture gold from waste substances. Nirvasa had evidently secretly given him some subtle elixir under the guise of a rare Indian wine that had completed his subjugation. He had revelled in a fool's paradise. His sister had discovered in part his infatuation. She had followed him that day to the home of Nirvasa, to see him give the check to the woman upon which her name was forged. She had broken in upon them, seized the check, and the end of her wild flight we knew.

"Miss Druse will strive to find her brother through friends tonight and send us word tomorrow," explained Marvel. "She has begged me to allow her to make this effort, which she hopes will succeed, so that no scandal may result."

A hurry call reached me at the bank just after the directors' meeting; the next morning. It was from Resilius Marvel and requested my immediate presence. I was at his office in a few minutes. I noticed in his inner office the flutter of a white handkerchief. My

friend closed the door as I entered the room.

"It is Miss Druse," he said to me at once. "A new complication has arisen in the case. I hope and believe I have acted in time. I want you to go somewhere with me."

I knew where it was, after he had held a brief consultation with his visitor. It appeared that Miss Druse had come to his office less than half an hour previous in a great state of excitement and alarm. She had been unable to find her brother, and a thought had come to her mind that had driven her to come downtown early in the morning to visit the safety deposit vault where the plate, jewelry and family papers of the estate were kept. Only she and her brother held keys to the section where these valuables were. She had made an appalling discovery. Family diamonds contained in a chamois bag to the value of over \$100,000, most of them formerly the property of her dead mother, were missing. Foiled in securing capital for his mad scheme of wealth, Alpatsie Druse had secured the jewels. They were doubtless by this time in the possession of the conspirators.

"I have had two men acting on orders at the seance studio since last evening," reported Marvel as we spun along toward our destination. "There is my man now," he added, as reaching the front of the building we had so strangely visited the day previous a grim, severe-faced individual came to the side of the machine.

"We have detained the lady," reported this ally of Resilius Marvel. "At midnight we saw the crowd had taken alarm and were bent on flight. You left open orders, and I acted as my best judgment."

"Very good."

"No sign of the young man you described. We were careless about the general crowd, but only one or two of them made off."

"Take me to the lady," directed Marvel.

We found Nirvasa pacing to and fro in a room off from the apartment where we had first seen Djalmia. She feigned coolness and her wanton smile gleamed as we entered the apartment. Very briefly, very sternly, Marvel demanded a knowledge of the whereabouts of Alpatsie Druse.

"I do not know," she averred. "Her dealings have been with Djalmia exclusively."

"Some valuable diamonds are missing," proceeded Marvel. "They must be restored—must; do you understand? As to your deposit in a local bank, an embargo has been placed upon that until you have accounts for the \$40,000 of which you have divested in your latest dupe."

"You seem to know a good deal, said the woman, with her serpentine smile.

"I know enough to detain you a leisure for a long time," stated Marvel with sternness. "Come, I wish to see this Djalmia Khl."

"It is useless."

"And why?"

"He is dead. In arranging to remove him one of the men tipped a piece of furniture against the glass globe. The supply of gas was cut off. He died within the hour."

We stepped into the next room. Nirvasa had spoken the truth. The great glass case lay in brittle ruins on the floor of the room. Two of the servants were lifting the poor remains of The Oldest Man in the World into a long cedar box.

"I have only one request to make Mr. Marvel," spoke the woman gravely. "And what is that?" demanded Marvel.

"You jeer at my calling and its accessories, but at least this old man was genuine and consistent. I am Hindu enough to respect a sacred pledge whatever charge you may bring against me. I will stand the penalty. As to the victim of an unfortunate accident, poor Djalmia, I ask you to let his remains be shipped to a relative of his who is a member of a Hindic colony in the east. They will send his body back to his native land, a family responsibility they treasure and revere."

"Perhaps," said Marvel, steadily looking into the woman's eyes—"after an inquest."

Nirvasa started as if a scorpion had stung her. Dismay, disappointment, defeat were evinced in her features. She bit her lip and trembled with suppressed rage.

"Stand aside," ordered Marvel to the two servants. He pushed them away and I saw him grope within the cedar chest and his hands move all about the wasted body of Djalmia Khl.

"I thought so," he observed quietly, drawing from under the black, silken funeral robe of The Oldest Man in The World a little chamois bag.

"When I have verified these jewels," he said to Nirvasa, "and the \$40,000 and Alpatsie Druse have materialized you and your mountebank accomplices are free to seek new fields of business activity, and we are quits."

We traced Alpatsie Druse to a neat city, where the seance woman had sent him to get rid of him while she and her fellow birds of ill omen made a swift flight. She bought her freedom by returning the money she had duped out of the sorrow youth, who fully understood his just peril when the efforts of the subtle poison Nirvasa had given him departed and his dulled brain was cleared.

The remarkable man, the indomitable Resilius Marvel, placed his customary record of the case of The Oldest Man in The World among the secret archives of the United Bankers Protective Association, accepted the heartfelt gratitude of Garnet Druse as the one fair element in the gruesome case, and passed on to new endeavor in his expert professional line of duty.

"Impossible!" uttered John Raymond and his visitor bowed her face in her hands and sobbed bitterly.

He sat watching the convulsing figure, the fair golden hair, the cheap but immaculately neat and modest attire. His was a hard, heartless business. And he had made his nature hard, but not heartless. The pitiful pleader had impressed him. For the moment he lost his stern, rigid bearing. A wave of genuine sympathy swept his iron nature. He sighed.

Quickly that human signal of emotion went to the mark. The girl looked up. She caught the trace of pity in that immovable face before the mask was on again.

"Oh, sir!" she pleaded, "reconsider. Put yourself in my place. If you have no faith in poor Jim, try and trust me. I know him, sir. He has been bad and wicked."

"Young lady," spoke Detective Raymond, rising in his feet, "for your sake, yes."

"You'll give him a chance?"

"His last one, yes."

She had sunk to her knees before him. She had clasped his hand and was covering it with kisses.

Within the month Detective Raymond went before the state jordan board. Two days later Jim Waldron, alias "The Ferret," was released on commutation of a ten years' sentence. Still later the detective noted a modest line in a daily print among the marriage licenses—"James Waldron and Winnie Morse."

The detective could find no one willing to go hostage for Jim, so he had him paroled to himself. He felt it his duty to look up Jim within a month. His heart warmed as he found the happy pair living in two pretty rooms, neat, though humble.

The contented wife told him how Jim had "found a job." It was poor pay, but a beginning, and oh, they were so happy!

Then, somewhat later, the detective met Jim coming home from work. There was no mistaking the man's spirit in the ex-burglar. His eye was clear, his heart erect.

"How is it, Jim?" Raymond inquired.

"Grand, sir. Just to work, just to keep straight for her sake—bless her!"

"Good for you, Jim. Keep it up," nodded the detective with apparent indifference, but joy was in his soul.

For over a year Detective Raymond did not hear of his protégé. An important government case sent him to Alaska. He returned to his city post on the eve of a great burglary. A jewelry establishment had been looted. An expert had done the job, but his identity was not even guessed—except by John Raymond.

"It looks like Jim Waldron's old-time work," he decided and proceeded to look up the ex-convict. At his old home he learned that the Waldrons had left there four months previous.

The detective started in to find the missing couple. It was one evening at dusk that he located them in a shabby tenement house. His inquiry divulged the fact that Jim took a week before had gone to another city, hopeful of finding work where he was not known.

"And the poor lady, sir," said the detective's informant, "only yesterday she lost the little child, only ten days old. She has shut herself in her room and just mourns and mourns. See her—there she is now."

The detective, drawing back in the shadow, was shocked as a figure wearing a shawl about her came weakly down the stairs. It was Winnie Waldron, but woefully white and thin, despair in her wan face.

He was about to speak to her, when her shawl moved aside. Under it she concealed a bundle, boxlike and wrapped in a pillow case.

"I've hit it!" muttered Raymond. "The swag, I'll bet! and she's taking it to Jim."

Square after square he guardedly followed the lone figure. He gasped as she reached the edge of the city. It was to enter the gateway of a cemetery.

THE PADDED BRICK

By GEORGE ELMER COBB.

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