THE BLUE BUCKLE

A BAFFLING MYSTERY AND BREATHLESS TALE OF ADVENTURE

By WILLIAM HAMILTON OSBORNE

Author of "The Red Mouse," "The Running Fight," "Catspaw," Etc.

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SYNOPSIS.

On board a transatlantic liner, returning from Europe, Craig Rutherford falls in love with a woman, a Mrs. Talcott. She seems to be troubled by something, but refuses his help, and spends most of the time with her invalid husband. Also on board is J. Baron Helderman, an unscrupulous financier, who makes a business proposition to Rutherford, and in a conversation says that he suspects the Talcotts of something. He directs attention to a blue buckle worn by Mrs. Talcott. Later Helderman bribes the wireless operator to let him take a message.

CHAPTER IV—(Continued.)

Instantly she pressed both hands tightly over it, and shrank away from him.

"No, no! I can trust no one—not even you!" she cried.

Her words and gesture, though of refusal, set Craig's heart to pounding in his breast. "Not even you!" It seemed to be a sort of acknowledgment that she was willing to trust him above all others. Perhaps she realized the confession underlying her words, for she loosened the buckle by a final tug, and turned aside. Craig knew that she was hiding it in the sacred security of her breast.

Just as she faced him again the ship's lights glowed above their heads. The girl glanced timidly up at him, and found him regarding her with a steady eye. The blood rushed into her cheeks until they lost the pale drawn look of fright, and glowed, whether from confusion or guilt, Craig could not discover. She seemed to realize his right to the explanation he had not as yet asked in words.

"I thought that we had evaded them. It was such a surprise and shock to find that any one knew about it—and was trying to get it," she began, hesitatingly and ill at ease.

"You mean—?" prompted Craig.

"Why—the blue buckle, of course. I know it looks odd, of course, but I don't see why any one else should want it, unless they know what it means."

"What does it mean?" asked Craig deliberately. He must sacrifice politeness to get to the bottom of this systery, if possible; for it came to him suddenly that Helderman had led the subject up abruptly to this same blue buckle.

The look which the young woman flashed back at him was a mute plea for indulgence, a charming apology for being not wholly frank with him.

"I'm not quite sure. That is, I—well, I don't exactly know," she evaded.

A half-smile crept around Craig's lips, as he continued to look in her eyes.

"Oh, I know it seems silly!" she exclaimed. "I really don't know what it means; but I know that I mustn't lose it—that something dreadful would happen! That is the reason why I've kept it always in my sight."

She turned, as if impatient of this silent cross-examination. The chill of her sudden reserve startled Rutherford's finer sensibilities into life. He dreaded losing a fraction of the little progress he had made toward the real self of this alluring woman. Might she not, indeed, be telling him the simple truth? The idea came to Rutherford that her elderly husband, that man of such distinguished bearing and classically handsome face, was using her very innocence and fascination to serve some underhanded purpose of his own. She was being made a catspaw, was being hurled into unseen dangers—the recent attack of that stocky man showed it—while the real criminal played invalid, and shielded himself behind a woman's skirts! The violent blood rushed into Craig's face, as this disturbing thought came home to him. Impetuously he leaned forward and with an action so swift that she could not avoid it, he took one of her hands in both his own and again gazed straight into her eyes.

"Mrs. Talcott," he said, in a voice vibrant with suppressed emotion, "a moment ago you said you could trust no one—not even me! You are wrong. You can trust me. I may seem presumptuous in prying thus into your affairs, but it is only because I want to help you. You may be in danger—you seem alone. Will you not trust me—and let me help you—in any and every event?"

She gently released her hand, and met his impassioned look with a clear gaze that seemed to read his very soul. He never faltered, although he felt that she was appraising him for all time to come. Then a smile, so wonderfully blended of the glint of laughter and the shine of tears that the man could scarcely preserve his calm "attention" gaze, shone up at him.

"Mr. Rutherford, I thank you," she said with simple sincerity. "Perhaps there will be no danger—let us hope there will be none—but if there is, or any other occasion arises—I shall remember!"

It was a confused but effective little speech—yet Craig, man-like, was disappointed, and showed it. She was seized with a kindly impulse to explain.

"You see, no one must know—"

"But I—"

"No, not even you—at least, not now. I must try to carry it through alone."

Before he could speak again, she turned and hurried away.

CHAPTER V.

A SUMMONS FROM THE ROYAL SUITE.

Craig Rutherford felt as if some one had struck him a well-directed blow, driving a terrible and insistent question into his brain. "I must try to carry it through alone!" What else did she mean—what else could she mean, except the smuggling?

The glamour of that beautiful, confiding smile was still upon him, fighting back the meaning conveyed by her last words. Rutherford tried to bring himself to her possible point of view. He tried to make himself understand that a girl, otherwise good and honorable, might regard smuggling valuables into a country as a legitimate sort of business. He forced himself to believe that a girl like this might have been reared with the notion that smuggling was a perfectly respectable way of earning a living—quite as respectable, in fact, as running a millinery establishment. She might even look upon it as requiring high mental development. He knew that there were many people who regarded petty smuggling as a pastime—as something which lent zest to the voyage over. Indeed, some of the very passengers—curse them!—who were now ready to point the finger of scorn at the Talcotts were probably quaking in their boots at the thought of the customs officers! But, try as he might, he could not square his own old-fashioned notions with regard to such things any more than he could make this girl a party to them. And yet—and yet, what did she mean?

Another vexing question thrust itself into prominence beside the first. What had that commonplace blue buckle to do with it? How could it possibly aid in the secreting of jewels? And yet that man—could it have been one of the secret-service men?—that fellow who had frightened her was trying to seize the buckle! "I must try to carry it through alone," she had said. It—what was it?

Rutherford tramped grimly along the passage. The blue buckle was a blind. The girl was the unsuspecting tool of an adept villain who posed as her husband. He recalled with what courteous coldness Mr. Talcott had repulsed every effort on the part of the passengers to make the acquaintance of his fair companion. What he had thought was the grumpy jealousy of an elderly husband, whose young wife attracted too much attention, now appeared to be the clever ruse of a crook to protect himself from scrutiny and possible detection. Rutherford would have found a certain satisfaction in the thought that this man was either obnoxious to, or inconsiderate of the girl who bore his name—but he was denied even this slender consolation. Whatever Mr. Talcott might be to others, he was the perfection of kindness and affection to the young creature who hung about him and tended the sick man with manifest love. And so, all Rutherford's reasoning got him nowhere.

During the succeeding days, as the steamer neared her port, the young man grew more and more restless. He sought other opportunities to speak to Mrs. Talcott alone, but found none. Meanwhile, the story of the smugglers poisoned the minds of nearly every one else. Rumors flitted about among the passengers. Those who had formed pleasant acquaintances during the voyage suddenly found chill and suspicion spoiling them. The entire first cabin became a place of ferment and discontent. The few bearded men dodged about as inconspicuously as possible, or appeared unwarrantably brazen in their efforts to seem above suspicion. The situation was not without its humor, but for once Rutherford was blind to the funny side of things. He could do nothing but worry over the twdin—or rather the one—who seemed unconscious of, or indifferent to, all this covert suspicion. And, try as he might, he found no chance to get within speaking distance of Mrs. Talcott unwatched by the invalid or the secret-service men.

Rutherford's discomfort and uneasiness were not lessened when, on his return to his stateroom, one morning, he found many trifling evidences that his things had been disturbed.

He hurried into the smoking room and found other men fuming and fussing over similar surreptitious searches in their quarters. This was strange. Certainly all the passengers could not be under suspicion, and if they were he knew of no legal right for such overhauling. It looked as if the net were gradually being hauled in around the Talcotts, and this general search were merely a pretense. But the whole performance struck him as at variance with Government procedure and more like the work of private detectives.

Nevertheless, it was decidedly annoying, and Rutherford listened in silent sympathy while the men poured out their vials of wrath upon the whole situation. Presently a voice at his side claimed his attention.

"Mr. Helderman would be glad to have you join him in his room, sir."

Craig started up, glad of any distraction. The financier's valet was standing respectfully waiting for a reply.

"Very well. Tell him I shall be there in 15 minutes—if that's agreeable."

The man bowed and withdrew. Craig did not know just why he had not followed the man at once. Perhaps he did not want to seem to be dancing attendance upon the occupant of the royal suite. Perhaps he wanted breathing space to think things over, before trusting himself with the lynx-eyed German. At any rate he started to his own room first.

As he walked noiselessly ahead over the rubber carpet he saw two men standing between his own door and that of Mrs. Talcott. They were so absorbed in their investigations that they did not notice his approach.

"The door's always locked!" one complained.

"She keeps the key," the other asserted.

The two men hurried off in opposite directions the moment they glimpsed Rutherford, but a flash of understanding came to him as he saw the square, stocky back of one of them. He was the secret service man and likewise the man who had tried to take the blue buckle away from Mrs. Talcott.

This put another and very disturbing idea into Rutherford's head. Certainly the man could have no possible use for the buckle; was that, then, what he had really been after—or had the girl used the buckle as a blind? Had the man really wanted the diamond necklace, concealed upon her person.

The more Rutherford puzzled over the situation, the more at sea he was. Customs officers didn't usually proceed that way; and he was ready to stake his soul upon his faith in the girl. He went into his room, scowling and shaking his head, and busied himself trying to discover whether or not his unwelcome visitors had been his way again.

Presently he heard the door just across the corridor open softly, almost stealthily. His own door stood open by a tiny crack and cautiously he stepped to it and peered through. He saw a slender figure in a gray cloak, her back turned to him, as she tried evidently, to turn the kay in the lock. The key stuck, and in turning it she dropped it to the floor. It struck the metal trim with a sharp clang. She did not stoop to pick it up; on the contrary, with a swift and, he thought, frightened glance along the corridor in both directions, she hurried off.

This was very strange conduct to the silent onlooker—then a swift second thought seemed to enlighten him. The girl had been in her room all the time the two spies were trying the door. She had been too frightened to call for aid, especially with the lively memory of the attack upon her in the corridor; and now at the first opportunity she was hurrying to her husband for protection. Rutherford silently cursed the man who, though ill, could subject his young wife to such indignities.

Eager to aid the girl, he rushed out into the hall, picked up the key she had dropped and started after her. At the turn he saw her figure a little way ahead.

"Mrs. Talcott!" he called.

But she either did not hear or would not heed. He chose to believe the first and quickened his pace into a run.

"Mrs. Talcott, one moment—"

The girl, however, did not pause, although she could not have helped hearing him. She seemed to be actually running away from him.

His pride made him pause; then the thought of her peril and loneliness urged him to forget himself in her. Obviously she was frightened. It was enough to scare any woman to have her door tampered with. In her haste she was confusing him with one of the fellows who had been annoying her.

He sped forward again, but she had gained a good start and a corner suddenly shut her from view. When he reached the turn she was nowhere to be seen.

He stopped and stared along the passage. The unrevealing doors of the rooms on either side faced each other and him as blankly as if they had no secrets in the world, and had never heard of a slender woman in a gray cloak and blue veil who had lately rushed by them, or entered one.

Rutherford was baffled, and his wits did not tend to clear as he suddenly realized that Mr. Talcot's room was not at hand at all, but aft. Where, then, could the young woman have been going? Into what room did she disappear? The Talcotts had no acquaintances on board that one knew about.

Rutherford thrust the key savagely into his pocket and turned the other way. After all, what concern was it of his where the girl was going? Why should he care? But his self-revealing heart told him that, willy-nilly, he did care. He promised himself that, sooner or later, she must come out on deck, and then he would obtain permission to speak to her alone—to tell her what he knew and perhaps clear up some of the things that were vexing him.

As he strode along he suddenly remembered that he had an appointment with Helderman. Half-reluctantly he turned in the direction of the royal suite, in no mood for the financier's witticisms or gibes. Just as he reached the private corridor leading to the suite, he found himself attacked by a human catapult. A man fled by him with such haste that he was dashed back against the wall. The door from which the man had emerged slammed, cutting in two the volley of German oaths which had attended the ejection.

Craig pulled himself together, fairly sizzling with indignation, and laid hold of the man who had bumped into him so unceremoniously. It was the stock student, the secret-service man. The man recognized him no less quickly, and with one of his quick dodges was off again down the passage. Rutherford's anger of a moment before was as nothing to the rage that now possessed him. With a quick leap he seized the thick shoulder and swung the man around.

"Not so fast, my fine fellow!" exclaimed Craig. "You might at least stop long enough to apologize. Besides, I have been looking for you for some time."

The man shifted uneasily, but was silent.

"Talk, you sneak!" said Craig, shaking him. "Government officer or not I don't believe you have any license to search rooms or attack young women in the halls!" And Craig punctuated his remarks by a shaking such as a terrier would give a rat.

Curiously enough, the man made no attempt to fight; but at the words "Government officer" he glanced furtively at his assailant.

"Let up!" he growled.

"Not till you tell me what I want to know. What do you mean by sneaking into my room, trying to get into Mrs. Talcott's, and nosing around in Helderman's? He served you just about right. And if I had caught you down my way you'd have come out just about the way he sent you!"

The fellow flashed another quick glance at Rutherford.

"You rich guys think you ought to be left alone," he muttered, "but we've got to stick to our job. 'Taint no use huntin' for diamonds in the steerage, so I just took a look in the royal suite."

In spite of himself Rutherford chuckled at the idea of Helderman—the blatant, self-appreciative Helderman, who believed that his money could do anything—being subjected to surveillance like the others.

"It seems like a mighty bad way to go about it," observed Craig, momentarily relaxing his grasp. "I suppose you want to prove us all. Do you suspect any one in particular?"

His concern for Mrs. Talcott had taken the place of his anger. The detectives were searching every one, and the fact that they had tried to enter her room might not mean anything in particular.

"Don't I, though!" the man exclaimed with a wink; then profiting by the other's absorption, he turned quickly and made off down the hall.

The young man made no attempt to follow him. He was again busy with his own thoughts. What did the man mean by his wink? Did he actually suspect Helderman of smuggling? The idea had a certain fascination for him. Or did the wink mean that the man had fixed his suspicions where the passengers had placed theirs? Surely the espionage in the library, the attack in the corridor, the attempt at the door opposite his own, could have but one meaning.

A thought more disquieting than all the uncomfortable ones which had thus far assailed him now presented itself and would not down. Helderman was interested in Mrs. Talcott. He had made no secret of it. If he were seeking to get her into his power what a rare opportunity circumstances were offering the wily financier. He had been watching the net closing in about the girl. Perhaps he had summoned the secret service man to his rooms in order to bribe him to let the girl go free, and in this way obtain a hold upon her gratitude. It was altogether likely that he had offered the man a bribe. Craig recalled the ease with which he had tempted the wireless operator.

The stormy electment might just as well mean that the man had refused to serve two masters and paid the price for his fidelity by getting kicked out. That, too, would explain the German oaths. This was a much more reasonable theory than that of intrusion. Indeed, intrusion in the royal suite, where several servants were constantly in attendance, would have been next to impossible. The secret service man must have been asked to the royal apartment.

At this point Craig's imagination ran wild. He saw the astute financier allowing the elderly husband to become embroiled with the Government. He pictured him, with his remarkable mental resources and his smooth ways, slowly making himself indispensable to the young woman. He would relieve her of every anxiety. He would even assist her husband, while with his brilliant intellect and knowledge of the world he slowly weakened her faith in him. She would be made carefully to see her husband's duplicity and Helderman's unbounded generosity, until, until——

Full of the madness his own imagination had conjured up Craig turned sharply back toward the royal suite. He must face this man. He must know what lay back of Helderman's interest in the woman he himself loved with a self-sacrificial passion. He had dedicated the best of his manhood to her service without hope of reward. He suspected that Helderman's interest would not be so unselfish.

He reached the private hall again. The door stood slightly open, giving a glimpse of the reception room, luxuriously furnished. A long mirror was set in the panelling directly opposite the door. Rutherford saw reflected therein the entire room.

Helderman, straight, cold, an expression of contempt on his face, was in the centre. He stood looking down upon a woman whose arms were clasped about his neck, whose attitude expressed love and entreaty.

The woman wore a gray coat and a blue veil. Hers was the same slender form that had flitted ahead of Craig from the door of the stateroom opposite his own.

CHAPTER VI

THE HOUSE IN TENTH STREET

Home again! The great ship had passed Sandy Hook and the outer and the inner bay. Up the Hudson River she had slowly nosed her way, convoyed by tugs, and dodged by ferries and smaller craft, until the welcoming flag of the docking pier had signaled the journey done. Then came the long, tedious wait while the vessel was warped carefully into her slip—minutes which seemed hours to those whose friends awaited them at the landing. At last, however, came the welcome clang of the lower gangway, and the passengers began to stream impatiently down.

Rutherford was detained but a moment by the customs officers. They seemed to take him pretty much at his word, and he hurried beyond the retaining ropes with a determined set of his eyes ahead.

He had scarcely closed his eyes, all the night before, with the memory of that last tableau in the royal stateroom ever rising in front of him. He felt that he could never trust womankind again, and that he never wanted to set eyes again upon any of his shipboard acquaintances. The very name of the ship was anathema to him.

He had trusted—he had even loved, in spite of his trust—and he had been thoroughly disillusioned. The sight of the familiar bustling streets of New York made him feel lonely indeed. He must get to work and forget all this, like an evil dream. He remembered, with a breath of relief, that he had a controlling interest in a downtown bank. He would go to work there, if it were in the humblest place.

(CONTINUED TOMORROW)

'JIM' CAME AND SAW—AND IS DISAPPOINTED

Boy Stowaway From Jamaica Finds United States No "Fairyland."

During most of the 16 years of his life, "Jimmy" Williams has been playing beneath the tropical suns on the sands of his native land, the Island of Jamaica. Between dips in the deep blue waters of the ocean, he dreamed wonderful dreams of the "fairyland" called the United States.

Clad in nondescript garments, "Jim" hugged a sizzling radiator in Captain Tollefsen's quarters this morning. His rolling eyes were filled with tears. All his hopes have been shattered. His wonderful dreams have all been dispelled. In their place reigns dense gloom. The big fly in Jim's ointment is the weather.

"Ah'ee nevah knew suh, that thar war such cold places in the wurld befo'," he said. The snow on the ground flabbergasted him. Inspector Busha, of the immigration service, explained to him that it fell from the skies. But Jim was skeptical and he naively asked Busha if he was a sailor.

When "Jim" stowed away he wore less than Eve did in the Garden of Eden. In the hold of the steamer he made himself a nest of straw beneath bunches of bananas. A few crusts of bread and some of the fruit was all he had to eat during the five days required to make the run to this port from Jamaica.

He was discovered when the longshoremen removed the bananas. "He was too dark for September Morn," said the man who discovered him, "so I called him December Morn. The sun rises later then."

A hurry solicitation among the crew for clothes for Jim soon gave him enough covering to bring him out of the hold. When he reached Captain Tollefsen's quarters he wore an old battered derby hat, a pair of trousers that were too loose under the armpits and a pair of shoes that had lost their mates months ago. Into either one of them he could have put both feet. Strings from the banana stalks were used for laces. The peg tops of the trousers obviated the necessity for socks. An old, oil-soaked sweater that has not always been as big as it looked on "Jim" came next. The coat that topped off all was almost beyond description. It reached to his knees, was rolled up at the sleeves and could have been doubled over his chest and buttoned in back. It had as many colors as the famous coat that Joseph wore. In this uniform "Jimmy" Williams is going back home, never more to roam.

"JIMMY" WILLIAMS

In shackles after he arrived from Jamaica as a stowaway on the steamer Sosua.

THE TEMPTING OF TAVERNAKE

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

BOOK II.

CHAPTER V—(Continued)

"She was singing at a miserable east-end music-hall so that her father might find some sort of employment," Tavernake said. "The people only forbore to hiss her father's turn for her sake. She goes about the country with him. Heaven knows what they earn, but it must be little enough! Beatrice is shabby and thin and pale. She is devoting the best years of her life to what she imagines to be her duty."

"And how does this affect me?" Elizabeth asked, coldly.

"Only in this way," Tavernake answered. "You asked me how it was that I could find you as beautiful as ever and adore you no longer. The reason is because I know you to be wretchedly selfish. I believed in you before. Everything that you did seemed right. That was because I was a fool, because you had filled my brain with impossible fancies, because I saw you and everything that you did through a distorted mirror."

"Have you come here to be rude?" she asked him.

"Not in the least," he replied. "I came here to see whether I was cured."

She began to laugh, very softly at first, but soon she threw herself back among the cushions and laid her hand caressingly upon his shoulder.

"Oh, you are just the same!" she cried. "Just the same dear, truthful bundle of honesty and awkwardness and ignorance. So you are going to be victim of Beatrice's bow and spear, after all."

I have asked your sister to marry me," Tavernack admitted. "She will not."

"She was very wise," Elizabeth declared, wiping the tears from her eyes. "As an experience you are delightful. As a husband you would be terribly impossible. Are you going to stay and take me out to dinner this evening? I'm sure you have a dress suit now."

Tavernake shook his head.

"I am sorry," he said. "I have already an engagement."

She looked at him curiously. Was it really true that he had become indifferent? She was not used to men who escaped.

"Tell me," she added, abruptly, "why did you come? I don't understand. You are here, and you pass your time being rude to me. I ask you to take me to dinner and you refuse. Do you know that scarcely a man in London would not have jumped at such a chance?"

"Very likely," Tavernake answered. "I have no experience in such matters. I only know that I am going to do something else."

"Something you want to do very much?" she whispered.

"I am going down to a little music-hall in Whitechapel," Tavernake said, "and I am going to meet your sister and I am going to put her in a cab and take her to have some supper, and I am going to worry her until she promises to be my wife."

"You are certainly a devoted admirer of the family," she laughed. "Perhaps you were in love with her all the time."

"Perhaps I was," he admitted.

She shook her head.

"I don't believe it," she said. "I think you were quite fond of me once. You have such absurdly old-fasioned ideas or I think that you would be fond of me now."

Tavernake rose to his feet.

"I am going," he declared. "This will be goodby. Tomorrow I am going to British Columbia."

The laughter faded for a moment from his face. She was suddenly serious.

"Don't go," she begged. "Listen. I know I am not good like Beatrice, but I do like you—I always did. I suppose it is that wonderful truthfulness of yours. You are a different type from the men one meets. I am rather a reckless person. It is such a comfort sometimes to meet any one like you. You seem such an anchorage. Stay and talk to me for a little time. Take me out tonight. You asked me to go with you once, you know, and I would not. Tonight it is I who ask you."

"This is goodby!" he said, firmly. "I suppose, after all, you were not unkind to me in those days, but you taught me a very bitter lesson. I came to you today in fear and trembling. I was afraid, perhaps, that the worst was not over, that there was more yet to come. Now I know that I am free."

She stamped her foot.

"You shall not go away like that," she declared.

He smiled.

"Do you think I do not understand?" he continued. "It is only because I am able to go, because the touch of your fingers, that look in your eyes, do not drive me half mad now, that you want me to stay. You would like to try your powers once more. I think not. I am satisfied that I am cured indeed, but perhaps it is safer to risk nothing."

She pointed to the door.

"Very well, then," she ordered, "you can go."

He bowed, and already his fingers were on the handle. Suddenly she called to him.

"Leonard! Leonard!"

He turned round. She was coming toward him with her arms outstretched, her eyes wereafull of tears, there were sobs in her voice.

"I am so lonely," she begged. "I have thought of you so much. Don't go away unkindly. Stay with me for this evening, at any rate. You can see Beatrice at any time. It is I who need you most now."

He looked around at the splendid apartment; he looked at the woman whose fingers, glittering with jewels, rested upon his shoulders. Then he thought of Beatrice in her shabby black gown and wan little face, and very gently he removed her hands.

"No," he said, "I do not think that you need me any more than I need you. This is a caprice of yours. You know it and I know it. It's worth while to play with one another?"

Her hands fell to her sides. She turned half away, but she said nothing. Tavernake, with a sudden impulse which had in it nothing of passion—very little, indeed, of affection—lifted her fingers to his lips and passed out of the room. He descended the stairs, filled with a wonderful sense of elation, a buoyancy of spirit which he could not understand. As he walked blithely to his hotel, however, he began to realize how much he had dreaded this interview. He was a free man, after all.

For over an hour Tavernake endured the smells and the bad atmosphere of that miserable little music-hall, watching eagerly each time the numbers were changed. Then at last, toward the end of the program, the manager appeared in front.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he announced, "I regret very much to inform you that owing to the indisposition of the young lady, Miss Beatrice Franklin and her father are unable to appear tonight. I have pleasure in announcing an extra turn, namely the Sisters De Vere in their wonderful burlesque act."

There was a murmur of disapprobation mingled with some cheering. Tavernake left his place and walked around to the back of the hall. Presently the manager came out to him.

"I am sorry to trouble you, sir," Tavernake said, "b... I heard your announcement just now from the front. Can you give me the address of Professor Franklin? I am a friend, and I should like to go and see them."

The manager pointed to the stage-doorkeeper.

"This man will give it to you," he announced, shortly. "It's quite close. I shall look in myself after the show to know how the young lady is."

Tavernake procured the address and set out in the taxicab which he had kept waiting. The driver listened to the direction doubtfully.

"It's a poor sort of neighborhood, sir," he remarked.

"We've got to go there," Tavernake told him.

They reached it in a few minutes, a miserable street indeed. Tavernake knocked at the door of the house to which he was directed, with sinking heart. A man, collarless and half dressed, in carpet slippers, opened the door after a few moments' waiting.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, gruffly.

"Is Professor Franklin here?" Tavernake inquired.

The man seemed as though he were about to slam the door, but thought better of it.

"If you're a friend of the professor's, as he calls himself," he said, "and you've any money to shell out, why, you're welcome, but if you're only asking out of curiosity, let me tell you that he used to lodge here but he's gone, and if I'd had my way he'd have gone a week ago, him and his daughter, too."

"I don't understand," Tavernake protested. "I thought the young lady was ill."

"She may be ill or she may not," the man replied, sulkily. "All I know is that they couldn't pay their rent, couldn't pay their food bill, couldn't pay for the drinks the old man was always sending out for. So tonight I spoke up and they've gone."

"At least you know where to!" Tavernake exclaimed.

"I ain't no sort of an idea," the man declared. "Take my word for it straight, guvnor, I know no more about where they went to than the man in the moon, except that I'm well shut of them, and there's a matter of eighteen and sixpense, if you care to pay it."

"I'll give you a sovereign," Tavernake promised, "if you will tell me where they are now."

"What's the good of making silly conditions like that!" the man grumbled. "If I knew where they were, I'd earn the quid soon enough, but I don't, and that's the long and the short of it! And if you ain't going to pay the eighteen and six, well, I've answered all the questions I feel inclined to."

"I'll make it two pounds," Tavernake promised. "I'm going to sail for America tomorrow morning early, and I must see them first."

The man leaned forward.

"Look here," he said, "if I knew where they was, a quid would be quite good enough for me, but I don't, and that's straight. If you want to look for them, I should try one of the dess houses. As likely there as anywhere."

He slammed the door and Tavernake turned away. A sudden despair had seized him. He looked up and down the street, he looked away beyond and thought of the miles and miles of streets, the myriads of chimneys, the huge branches of the great city stretching far and wide. At 8 o'clock the next morning, he must leave for Southampton. Was it too late, after all, that he had discovered the truth?

(CONTINUED TOMORROW.)

No sickening suds-smell,
No temper-trying steam
through the house;
because no hot fire is needed
when washing
with

FELS-NAPTHA

soap;
however big the wash,
however soiled the clothes,
they come out sweetly clean.

Not rough—not crude.
Fels-Soap Powder.
Refined, sweet, and does the work.

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