THE RED MOUSE

BY WILLIAM HAMILTON OSBORNE

CHAPTER I

...OR years—the best years of her life, for that matter, as she often reflected in lonely moments—Miriam Challoner had been trying to prove to her own satisfaction that her husband was no worse than the majority of young men married to rich women, but she could never find the arguments whereby she might arrive at the desired conclusion. It is not to be wondered at, then, that eventually there came a day when the information was brought to her that even in the gay and ultrafashionable world in which they moved people spoke of him as "that mad Challoner," and were saying that he was going a pace that was rapidly carrying him far beyond the horizon of anything like respectability—going to the dogs, in truth, as fast as her money could take him there.

Now Miriam Challoner was not one of those women who deceive themselves, if not their friends, when they say that if ever they hear of their husbands doing such-and-such-a-thing they know perfectly well what they will do. It is true that, like them, she did nothing; nevertheless, she could not be persuaded to discuss with any one the humiliating position in which her husband had placed her.

In a way, this attitude of hers was unfortunate, for it was more or less responsible for the note of melancholy cadence which crept into her mind. And so it was that before very long she was dimly conscious of an emotion quite unlike anything that she had hitherto experienced; all the bitterness in her heart had given way to sickening sensation that she, as well as he, had been tried in the matrimonial furnace and found wanting. Somehow, she had fallen grievously in her own estimation.

And society's estimation? Illusions in that direction were hardly possible; there, too, doubtless she would incur the loss of a certain amount of consideration. And even the nonpossession of a highly imaginative temperament did not prevent her from dandying the expressive shrugs, and "Oh, of course his wife is to blame," which, for the sake of an inference that is obvious, would be voiced by more than one impeccable dame of her acquaintance — as often as not superbly gullible souls, whose eloquence increases in direct proportion to the world's lack of belief in the fidelity of their liege lords.

Nor were comments of that kind the worst that she might expect. For, as a penalty for belonging to a set which, to a greater degree, perhaps, than any other, recognizes the possibility of an up-to-date couple having a mutually implied understanding that neither shall object to the discreet—and more or less temporary—faithlessness of the other—she knew that it would be well nigh miraculous if some kindly disposed persons did not go still further for an explanation of his conduct, and point to her and her husband as a conspicuous example of such a precious pair. But though her whole being rebelled at the mere thought that there could be people who would regard her in such a light, she could not bring herself to take decisive action of any kind. There was nothing that could be said, she told herself, nothing that could be done—since a most conscientious and pitiless self-analysis had failed to reveal any wifely shortcomings—except to have faith that there were some of her sex—not many, it is true, but still a few friends—who would continue to believe her incapable of doing any of the things that so many others did, for whom there was far less excuse than there would be for her.

But whatever were the opinions of the women, there was no disposition on the part of the men to hold her in any way responsible for his behavior. Far from it. And in a favorite corner of an exclusive club, when the names of fair ladies—mostly of the stage—were bandied about as figuring in young Challoner's escapades, old cronies of his father, between sips of their Scotch and sodas, were wont to boil over with contemptuous indignation and explosively give thanks to the gods for willing that their lovable, old-time friend should not live to see the confirmation of his fears. And how well they recalled those fears.

For notwithstanding his very moderate circumstances, the elder Challoner had been that rarest of mortals—a man blissfully contented with his lot in life, and, one who seldom missed an opportunity to deplore the insatiable craze of the rich for more riches, forever protesting that blatant commercialism, haste and artificiality were the gods of the present day; and no picture in their gallery of lasting impressions stood out more vividly than the one in which, surrounded by a group of young fellows, who had "got him going," as they phrased it, he was declaiming against—what was merely his pet hobby in another form—the egregious folly of poor young men seeking riches through marriage.

"• • • and I, young gentlemen," he would conclude with great earnestness, "will always maintain that such a union will make a man lose all incentive to work out what the good Lord put in him."

Little wonder, then, that on the announcement that a marriage had been "arranged" between Challoner's son and a daughter of a man whose name the world over was significant of fiscal potency, the day bid fair to be a memorable one at the club, his contemporaries preparing to make merry at the old fellow's expense.

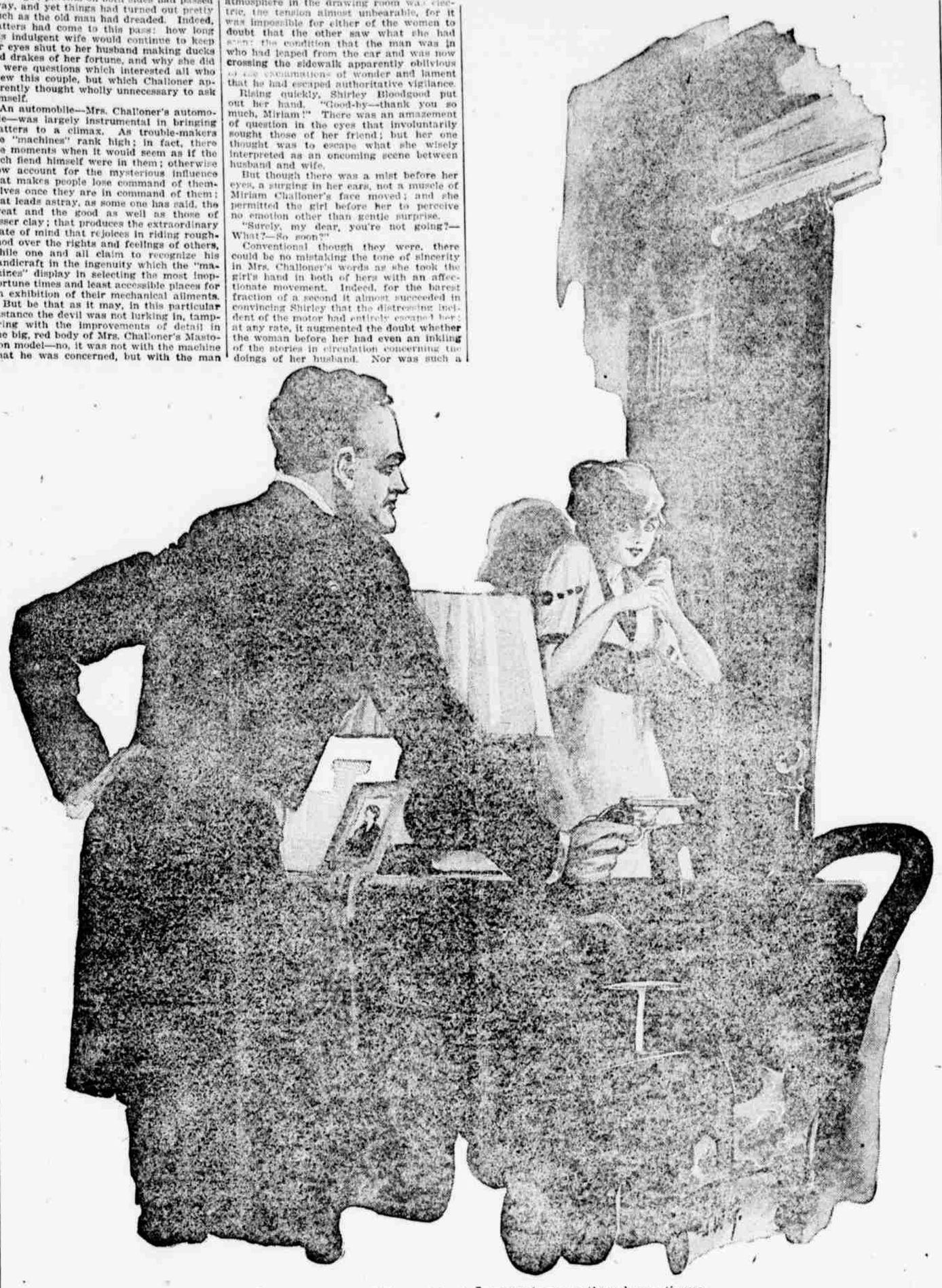
But, in a sense, his "showing up" there had been a disappointment; one look at the face, which showed symptoms of distress and a desire to be reassured, was sufficient to cause the banter to die in their hearts before it had reached their lips.

It soon came out that there had been a scene between father and son. These two, for many years, had been the only members of the family; and probably better than any one in the world the father had known the son's weaknesses; hypersensitive to new influences, vanity and inability to say no; and he had pointed out to him the many disadvantages—dangers to one of his temperament—which he could see in such an alliance. To the father's thinking, the boy would have no home—only establishments, yachts, racing stables and motorcars, and he had contended that there were far more desirable things in life than the possession of these—from which it can easily be surmised that J. Lawrence Challoner, Sr., was a man little in sympathy with the ideas of modern fashionable society.

Now to appreciate the mental anguish of another organism—even if that organism is one's own parent—is never an easy matter; and, of all men, the modern lover is apt to be the last to succumb to an argument that predicts a blighted future because of an intention to marry an heiress. And so it was only natural that Lawrence should have regarded his father as an old fogy, have resented his warnings and have replied that he was competent to look after his own affairs and that, anyhow, the consent of the girl's parents had been obtained and no interference was possible. And with that the father's manner had completely changed; he had wished the boy the best of luck; sent him away happy. Obviously, all this was years ago; parents on both sides had passed away, and yet things had turned out pretty much as the old man had dreaded. Indeed, matters had come to this pass: how long this indulgent wife would continue to keep her eyes shut to her husband making ducks and drakes of her fortune, and why she did it, were questions which interested all who knew this couple, but which Challoner apparently thought wholly unnecessary to ask himself.

An automobile—Mrs. Challoner's automobile—was largely instrumental in bringing matters to a climax. As trouble-makers the "machines" rank high; in fact, there are moments when it would seem as if the arch fiend himself were in them; otherwise how account for the mysterious influence that makes people lose command of themselves once they are in command of them; that leads astray, as some one has said, the great and the good as well as those of lesser clay; that produces the extraordinary state of mind that rejoices in riding roughshod over the rights and feelings of others, while one and all claim to recognize his handicraft in the ingenuity which the "machines" display in selecting the most inopportune times and least accessible places for an exhibition of their mechanical ailments.

But be that as it may, in this particular instance the devil was not lurking in, tampering with the improvements of detail in the big, red body of Mrs. Challoner's Mastodon model—no, it was not with the machine that he was concerned, but with the man



"Now, let him come!" he exclaimed, watching her as a tiger does a tigress.

himself, befuddling whatever brains he had left; and the devil it was and no other that incited Challoner to leave a certain establishment—about which we shall have something to say later on—take the wheel from the chauffeur and embark on a sensational, bacchic career up the Avenue at an hour when the view of that fashionable thoroughfare through the silken, shimmery curtains falling over a window in a corner house facing the Park was too alluring not to be irresistible.

And so it came about that the comments on the passing throng made by two women, indulging in afternoon tea in Mrs. Challoner's white and gold drawing room, were interrupted in a manner that was as unexpected as it was embarrassing.

"Look Miriam!" Shirley Bloodgood was saying to her hostess, apropos of a woman passing by whom they both knew, "did you ever see anything more atrocious than that gown?"

The other smiled her appreciation, and again the voluble Miss Bloodgood went on:

"And do look at the Heath girls in those huge hats; what frights!"

But whatever were her thoughts on the subject Miriam Challoner did not [illegible] for precisely at that moment her attention was attracted by something strangely familiar in an unusually insolent and insistent honking of a motor horn, which was causing a wave of apprehension to sweep down the long line of vehicles. And a moment later they saw that chauffeurs were rudely interrupting the purring of automobiles lazing over their allotted miles; that drivers were swerving their horses into closer relations with the curb; that hardly had these attained a position of comparative safety than there flashed by them and fetched up in front of Mrs. Challoner's house a big machine, which a distinguished, though dissipated-looking man, had been recklessly forcing with utter disregard of the right of way, a performance which called forth a volley of expletives not only from cabbies, executing perilously close shaves, but likewise from angry pedestrians who had halted on hearing the groan with which the machinery protested his sudden braking.

For a moment that seemed minutes the atmosphere in the drawing room was electric, the tension almost unbearable, for it was impossible for either of the women to doubt that the other saw what she had seen: the condition that the man was in who had leaped from the car and was now crossing the sidewalk apparently oblivious of the exclamations of wonder and lament that he had escaped authoritative vigilance.

Rising quickly, Shirley Bloodgood put out her hand. "Good-by—thank you so much, Miriam!" There was an amazement of question in the eyes that involuntarily sought those of her friend; but her one thought was to escape what she wisely interpreted as an oncoming scene between husband and wife.

But though there was a mist before her eyes, a surging in her ears, not a muscle of Miriam Challoner's face moved; and she permitted the girl before her to perceive no emotion other than gentle surprise.

"Surely, my dear, you're not going?—What?—So soon?"

Conventional though they were, there could be no mistaking the tone of sincerity in Mrs. Challoner's words as she took the girl's hand in both of hers with an affectionate movement. Indeed, for the barest fraction of a second it almost succeeded in convincing Shirley that the distressing incident of the motor had entirely escaped her; at any rate, it augmented the doubt whether the woman before her had even an inkling of the stories in circulation concerning the doings of her husband. Nor was such a conclusion at all illogical. Shirley Bloodgood could recall not a word that Miriam Challoner had ever uttered during all the years of her married life, nor a look that could be construed as implying a knowledge of his dissipations; on the contrary, there had been times when the girl had been so exasperated over the wife's outspoken admiration for qualities in the man which Shirley knew that he did not possess, that she had been sorely tempted to enlighten her friend as to his escapades. But gratifying as was the thought of the wife's possible ignorance, it by no means lessened the necessity of a hasty departure on Shirley's part; and somewhat confusedly but affectionately she kissed her hostess good-by.

"Oh, my dear Miriam, but I must—your tea is perfectly delicious though. If only I had time——" Shirley stopped abruptly; her endeavor to conceal her anxiety to be gone was making her uncertain of her words.

"One's tea, like one's friends, my dear, should be of the best." Miriam returned with a sweet smile. And apparently thinking of nothing but her somewhat insipid little compliment, she laughed pleasantly, passed her arm lovingly round the girl's waist, and accompanied her to the door of the drawing room.

Miriam's smile and manner touched Shirley deeply. The inclination to offer words of comfort was strong in this tall, rangy girl, whose every movement was as graceful as it was impulsive. How sweet, how easy it would be, she thought, if Miriam would only give a hint that they would be welcome. But, like many another woman, Miriam Challoner had schooled herself to face the world with a smile; had learned that to lay bare one's heart, even to one's friends, is to court surprise, perhaps ridicule; and that to dissimulate though it kills is to play well one's part; and she gave no sign.

On reaching the hall below, Shirley was able to see through the open door Challoner ascending swiftly but uncertainly the gray, stone steps. With a quick movement she drew to one side while he sullenly pushed by his wife's young butler, Stevens, and began to stumble up the soft-carpeted, wide stairway; then, unnoticed and with a sigh of relief, she fled out into the street.

Left rather abruptly alone, Mrs. Challoner went back into the drawing room, and, resting her arms on the mantel, bowed her head upon them and gave way to the misery of her reflections. It was not the first time, to be sure, that Lawrence had returned in this condition, but heretofore he had been gracious enough to have had it occur at night; and she had cherished the belief that she was his only witness. Now, there was an element connected with his home-coming that was still harder to bear; the sympathy which pleased for recognition on the face of her friend, and which told more plainly than words that she had seen all, understood all. Presently, lifting her head, she crossed the room and seated herself; then raising her hands she let them drop despairingly along the arms of the chair while the unbidden tears overflowed. In this position she remained until the sound of footsteps warned her of her husband's approach; then a moment of struggle for self-control; a brushing away of tears, and finally, rising, she left her seat for one behind the tea table. And it was in this unquestioned point of vantage, apparently cool and collected, in the act of pouring herself out a cup of tea, that Challoner's gaze first rested upon his wife as, lurching in his walk but his eyes holding a purpose, he came into her presence.

"Well, Miriam, here I am——I've come home, you see!" he blurted out in a don't-care-what-happens sort of manner, and without waiting for an answer slumped into a chair and added sneeringly: "You're not overdemonstrative, my dear!"

Mrs. Challoner winced. During the long days and nights of suspense and wonder as to his whereabouts, she had solaced herself with inventing plausible excuses for his absence; how useless they were, his looks, manner and more than anything else the intonation of his voice now showed; she dared not trust herself to speak lest she should give way to foolish invective.

Challoner came to the point at once.

"Miriam, I must have some money!" It was not a request; it was a command.

Up to this time the young wife had not lifted her eyes from the teacup in her hand. She was a woman with brown eyes and very attractive brown hair, but upon the face that still should have held the freshness of youth deep lines were beginning to appear. Pretty she was, in a way, though she had never been beautiful; and yet there was something that spelled beauty in the brown eyes which she now fixed upon him.

"For three days you have been away—where have you been?" The necessity for saying something alone was responsible for the question. Many days afterward, in reviewing the painful scene, she was positive that she had not inquired nor had he volunteered the information.

"I don't know," he answered dully, half-truthfully. "All I know is that I landed at Cradlebaugh's." And after a moment, noting the look of mystification on her face, he snapped out, "Cradlebaugh's gambling rooms—gambling rooms, there—now you know."

With the last words he rose excitedly, stalked over to a table and smote it with his clenched hand.

"I tell you I must have some money!" Miriam Challoner would not have been human if again bitter words had not risen to her lips. But one quick glance at the puffy face, the red-rimmed eyes, was sufficient to warn her of the danger of exciting his anger while in his present condition; and instead she merely inclined her head—an action which instantly caused hope to surge into the eyes of Challoner.

"I want—I must have a thousand dollars." Here again, the attitude was not that of a supplicant; in the demand was more of the highwayman than of the beggar.

Mrs. Challoner's dark eyes met those of the man, held them steady; then she said firmly, decisively:

"Lawrence, much as it hurts me to refuse you, I feel that I must. It is for your own good." The soft gown that clung to her figure seemed to take more rigid lines as she drew herself up and went on with: "I can give you nothing more—this sort of thing has gone quite far enough."

For an instant Challoner was stunned. His wife had never looked at him like that; there was something in the catch of her breath, too, as she ended, that meant denial, he was certain. But he took courage and renewed his attack; and meeting with no success, he turned to imploring, begging for the money. Did she not know that he would not ask her if he did not have to have it? Women never could understand why men had to have money—she didn't understand. If she would only let him have the money he would pledge himself to mend his ways, anything—but he must have the money. When men had to have money they had to have it—that was all there was to it. And then a violent, irresistible impulse to be perfectly truthful, to lay bare his mind before her, took hold of him; and that mind was so warped, his need so desperate, that he came perilously near to blurting out the real reason why he needed the money. For an instant he actually thought that his wife would see, understand, appreciate the reason as some of his male friends doubtless would.

"I'll tell how it is, Miriam——" he had begun, and then suddenly stopped.

What was he about to do! Was there not something queer, something not exactly right, in his telling Miriam about the other woman? After all, that was the one thing in his life that he had never told her. She was welcome to the rest, but that—she mustn't know that; and he ended by pleading—

"Surely, Miriam, you're not going to refuse me—come——"

"I am sorry, Lawrence, but I must." There was a sob in the refusal as she turned away.

And still, like a spoiled child, the husband would not abandon his plea. Besides, he had detected the sob. Once more his attitude underwent a change; he moved toward her, holding out his arms as though to gather her into them. It was a charm that always worked with Miriam; it would now, he told himself.

But Challoner was doomed to disappointment. It was the last touch needed to complete her humiliation, and, waving him back she cried:

"Laurie, Laurie, anything but that!" There was a flood of tears behind her look of pain.

"But I must—Cradlebaugh——" He came to a helpless pause.

Mrs. Challoner slowly repeated the name.

"Cradlebaugh! I wish you had never seen that man—that class of men! Your money—my money, very likely—has been going to them! Well, if you want money you will have to——" The tension snapped and she drew her hand across her eyes, then broke down completely.

"A sign of weakening," Challoner said to himself and promptly started toward her.

"No, no—go!" she cried, drawing her hands up to her face as if to shut out the sight of him from her gaze.

A moment later Challoner was seated in the motorcar. As the chauffeur threw in the clutch some instinct told Challoner to look back. He had a fleeting impression that he had seen a woman's face in the doorway. "Surely that's Miriam," he thought, and lifted his hat; but when he looked again there was no one there. Yet if his senses had been perfectly normal he would have known it was her face that he had seen. But the fates had no intention of letting him know that with his departure his wife's resolution had gone, and that she had come to the door to beseech him to come back; for even then they were cunningly spinning the web which was to encompass him about.

CHAPTER II

CRADLEBAUGH'S—Cradlebaugh's house of a thousand chances—rearing its four stories of brown stone, spreading itself out liberally on the north side of one of the side streets which is fast being given over to fashionable clubs and restaurants, is a thoroughly up-to-date establishment. Here the jeunesse dore of the city are made welcome—once the critical eye of the sentinel behind the triple steel doors at the top of the brown stone steps has recognized in them the essential qualifications. In appointments the house is luxurious and gorgeous, and is so closely shuttered that not a ray of light from outside is permitted to penetrate it. Cradlebaugh's day and night, night and day, is lit within by the glow of artificial lights; the sunlight has no chance in Cradlebaugh's. In additions to the main hall of play, there are accommodation for parties wishing to indulge in quiet games among themselves. Meals are served at all hours—supper being the specialty of the house—and notwithstanding that no charge whatever is made for them, the cuisine and service are beyond reproach. It can truly be said of Cradlebaugh's that it has all the cheerfulness of the hearth, the quiet of the sanctuary, mingled with the glare of irresistible recklessness.

It was to this establishment then that Challoner directed a cabby to take him after hours of unsuccessful attempts to borrow money from his friends—unsuccessful because they had come to know his irresponsibility and to realize that his obligations were not the obligations of his wife. The consequence was that man after man invented an excuse or refused him emphatically. And finally in desperation he had offered to sell the Mastodon. But the dealers knew who owned the car—one of the handsomest cars in town—and on Challoner disgustedly ordering his chauffeur home, a dealer more daring than the others had said to him with aggressive familiarity:

"Get your wife's bill of sale, Challoner; we'll buy it then, all right."

A spark of anger immediately lit up Challoner's eyes, resentment was deep down in his inmost soul; but his brain had been absinthiated for days, his sensibilities blunted and indignities fell from him like the proverbial water from a duck's back. Nor was it solely with his mentalities that the dissipations of the last five years had played havoc. His face, his body were unnaturally thin, and his glance had become fixed and strained. Nevertheless, overindulgence had not grossened him, he was still good-looking, and there was an air about him that few men had. In all his recklessness, whenever he wanted money he had not forgotten that fact. It had always counted with Miriam—until now. It counted still with Miss Letty Love of the Frivolity!

There had been moments, it is true, when rushing madly about town for funds that he had felt it would surely have been better for him if he had never gone to Cradlebaugh's; but then like a flash would come the thought that if he had not gone to Cradlebaugh's he would never have known Letty Love! And by no means had he arrived at the state where he could have wished that • • •

With the thought of Letty Love there came another indissolubly connected with it: Was Colonel Hargraves slowly undermining, ousting him out of her affections? Not without reason he argued that Colonel Hargraves had plenty of money, and the man with money was going to win out in the graces of the Frivolity actress! Challoner could see it, could feel it, and now in this crisis he could not raise a paltry thousand or two • • •

Suddenly a voice from overhead broke in upon his thoughts with:

"Front entrance, sir?"

Challoner started. The query was pertinent, frequently important, sometimes vital. But in all the times that Challoner had driven to Cradlebaugh's, never until now had this question been put to him.

The entrance on the street above, he was quite well aware, was for those whose livelihood supplied sufficient reason for preferring the more secret way, while the man-about-town—such as he flattered himself that he still was—the credential-bearing stranger, even those whose reputation might suffer, found that the arrangement of the main entrance furnished them with ample protection. Nevertheless, far from feezing him, Challoner felt that in some subtle way the question fitted in with his scheme of things. For a shadowy purpose was slowly forming in his mind—a purpose that required thought. His answer was of paramount importance, he must make no mistake • • • "The rear—no," he quickly corrected, "the front entrance."

Before the main street door the driver pulled up his horse and Challoner hurriedly walked—as one whose nose was straight and who followed his nose—into the whited sepulcher caddie Cradlebaugh's.

No one greeted Challoner as he passed into the main hall; it happened there was no one present at the table that he knew. In the old days it had been the custom of Cradlebaugh, the human spider, frankly to exhibit himself in the middle of his net, his grim smile and dry hand extended to each guest who came or went. But of late years—since he had shuffled off this mortal coil—there had been no one to make these obsequious greetings; for, though Cradlebaugh's still was Cradlebaugh's, its ownership remained a mystery. And whether it was a syndicate, an association, a reincarnated spirit, or a man, no one could tell. Of one thing, however, its patrons were certain: there was but one Cradlebaugh's!

For fully half an hour Challoner stood at the buffet, every now and then unsteadily tilting the decanter. And while this course of refreshment may have dulled his wits, it certainly strengthened his courage, for presently he said to himself:

"I'll try him, yes, why not?"

And a moment later, still optimistic, he called a servant and asked:

"Where is Pemmican?"

"Faro, sir."

Challoner ascended swiftly to the second floor, and paused at one room whose door was open.

"How long?" he inquired, thrusting in his head, by way of greeting to the group at the table.

Four of the men there did not glance up from their cards; hollow-eyed, cigars between their teeth, they were alive only to the hundredth chance that still eluded them. The fifth man, a railroad president, coatless, alone nodded to Challoner, and said sententiously:

"Forty hours—for me."

Half way down the corridor Challoner met Pemmican, head card dealer of Cradlebaugh's, a man with a pasty face, a low brow and shifty eyes—a man who knew his business. This Pemmican seemed the all-and-all of Cradlebaugh's, apparently general factotum; but though he simulated the appearance of an owner, in reality he was a servile servant stamped with a dread of the pseudo Cradlebaugh, of the man higher up. Nevertheless, whoever controlled the destinies of this gambling house had chosen him wisely.

Challoner came at once to the point.

"Pemmican, I want some money—about ——" and broke off abruptly, for the other was eyeing him coldly.

Instinctively Pemmican of the low brow knew that the game was up with Challoner; moreover, he saw that, although the man seemed sober, in reality he was very drunk. He walked away quickly, dismissing him with:

"I'm sorry, sir, but it's against the rules. I can't——"

"What rot!" interrupted Challoner.

But by this time Pemmican had reached the end of the hall, leaving the other to gather what he could of his mumbled excuses.

In anything but an amiable mood, Challoner resumed his position at the buffet. Suddenly he was conscious of a light touch on the arm. Turning slowly, he found himself face to face again with Pemmican.

"Why don't you try Colonel Hargraves?" whispered the latter.

"What?" came from the clogged brain of Challoner.

"Try Hargraves," the other went on. "He's been down to Gravesend for two days, and he's back——"

Pemmican's meaning was lost on Challoner, for he merely exclaimed:

"Well?"

Before answering, Pemmican of the low brow shrugged his shoulders and spread out his palms, then he said pointedly:

"Only that he pulled out ten thousand on Flora McQueen—that's all!"

"What?" Challoner began to understand.

Pemmican nodded.

"Sure thing—ten thousand dollars!"

Slowly and deliberately Challoner refilled his glass to the brim. For a moment there was silence, then Pemmican repeated tantalizingly:

"Ten thousand dollars—not a cent less!"

Challoner thought for a moment.

"How did you come out?" he asked, much to the other's surprise.

Pemmican shook his head.

"I lost a cool thousand because I did not back the mare. I played on Tigerskin. I've got to get that thousand back, somehow."

Challoner emptied his glass.

"Was Colonel Hargraves down there alone?" His voice was thick, hoarse.

"Where?" returned Pemmican, as if he had misunderstood.

"At Gravesend?"

Pemmican looked long and quizzically into Challoner's eyes.

"He was • • • not," was his simple but significant answer, and moved away.

But Challoner followed him up, and seizing his arm, said somewhat gruffly:

"Look here, Pemmican, if Hargraves comes in—I want to see him—tell him to wait for me."

For the first time Pemmican's eyes lost their curious tiredness, an enigmatical smile played about the corners of his mouth.

"Yes," he said simply, and nodding, went his way.

Left alone, Challoner found himself a prey to all the black fiends of rage, jealousy and desire for revenge. For a time everything was blotted out from his vision except the face of Letty Love and the face of Colonel Hargraves. "This small world," he muttered to himself, "is much too small for me and Colonel Hargraves!" With that there loomed up out of the mists of his mind the brilliantly lighted and ornate entrance of a certain apartment house a short distance away; and a few minutes later, obedient to his subconscious will, his feet carried him down the stairs to a door, evidently leading to the outside. A few words of explanation from Challoner to the man on duty there were necessary before he would proceed to undo the complicated system of bolts; and then he passed out and was under the starry skies. Challoner was not the first man of social prominence in the community that could directly trace the beginning of his life as an outcast to passing through that door!

CHAPTER III

HIRAM EDGAR LOVE—so read a faded yellow card on the door panel of Suite 10 in the "Drelincourt," an apartment hotel in a section of the city which has ever been popular with a class that has been well termed the "fringe of society." The name was not printed, not engraved, but written in ancient India ink in copper-plate perfection by the careful, cleanly, genteel Englishman that Hiram Edgar Love had been—Hiram Edgar Love, that long since had been laid to rest in a quiet Surrey churchyard leagues distant, though his name still did yeoman service, for it spelt respectability; it covered a multitude of peccadilloes; his soul went marching on! For was it not the shade of Hiram Edgar Love that had rented the Love suite in the "Drelincourt," his shade that paid the rent, his pipe and his slippers that lay near the fireplace for the world to see?—Hiram Edgar Love the myth, the constantly expected but never-coming master of the house!

Before the entrance of this suite Challoner came to a halt.

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CONTINUED IN MONDAY'S Evening Ledger