



"I Want Your Prisoner Signor Petrozini—You Will Release Him at Once!"



ELUSIVE LABEL

by JACQUES FUTRELLE
ILLUSTRATIONS by M.G. KETNER

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SYNOPSIS.

Count di Rosini, the Italian ambassador, is at dinner with diplomats when a messenger summons him to the embassy, where a beautiful young woman asks for a ticket to the embassy ball. The ticket is made out in the name of Miss Isabel Thorne, Chief Campbell of the secret service, and Mr. Grimm, his head detective, are warned that a plot is being hatched in Washington, and Grimm goes to the state ball for information. His attention is called to Miss Isabel Thorne, who with her companion, disappears. A shot is heard and Mr. Grimm, in the Mexican legation, is found wounded. Grimm is assured Miss Thorne did it; he visits her, and she tells him of the affair, and arrests Pietro Petrozini. Miss Thorne visits an old bomb-maker, and they discuss a wonderful experiment. Fifty thousand dollars is stolen from the office of Senator Rodriguez, the minister from Venezuela, and while detectives are investigating the robbery Miss Thorne appears as a guest of the legation. Grimm is assured that the money is recovered, but a new mystery occurs in the disappearance of the ambassador. The ambassador returns and again strangely disappears. Later he is rescued from an old house in the suburbs. It is discovered that Pietro Petrozini shot Senator Alvarez and that he is Prince d'Abuzzi.

CHAPTER XVII.—(Continued.)

"He was bribed," was the ready response. "Now, Warden," the masked intruder continued, "I would be much more pleasant all around and there would be less personal danger in it for both of us if you would release Signor Petrozini without question. I may add that no bribe was offered to you because your integrity was beyond question."

"Thank you," said the warden grimly, "and it shall remain so as long as I have this." He tapped on the desk with the revolver.

"Oh, that isn't loaded," said the masked man quietly.

One quick glance at the weapon showed the warden that the cartridges had been drawn. His teeth closed with a snap at the treachery of it, and with his left hand he pulled back one of the levers—that which should arouse the fallers, turnkeys and guards. Instead of the insistent clatter which he expected, there was silence.

"That wire has been cut," the stranger volunteered.

With clenched teeth the warden pulled the police alarm.

"And that wire was cut, too," the stranger explained.

The warden came to his feet with white face and nails biting into the palms of his hands. He still held the revolver as he advanced upon the masked man threateningly.

"Not too close, now," warned the intruder, with a sudden hardening of his voice. "Believe me, it would be best for you to release this man, because it must be done, pleasantly or otherwise. I have no desire to injure you, still less do I intend that you shall injure me; and it would be needless for either of us to make a personal matter of it. I want your prisoner, Signor Petrozini—you will release him at once! That's all!"

The warden paused, dazed, incredulous before the audacity of it, while he studied two calm eyes which peered at him through the slits of the mask.

"And if I don't release him?" he demanded at last, fiercely.

"Then I shall take him," was the reply. "It has been made impossible for you to give an alarm," the stranger went on. "The very men on whom you most depended have been bought, and even if they were within sound of your voice now they wouldn't respond. One of your assistants who has been here for years unloaded the revolver in the desk there, and less than an hour ago cut the prison alarm wire. I personally cut the police alarm outside the building. So you see!"

As yet there was no weapon in sight, save the unloaded revolver in

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Again there was silence for a little while. Slowly the prince's eyes were darkening, and a shadow flitted across Miss Thorne's face. The prince rose impatiently.

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"Twenty-five minutes," replied Mr. Grimm quietly.

"But here," exclaimed the prince explosively, "I have credentials which will insure my protection in spite of your laws."

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Again there was silence for a little while. Slowly the prince's eyes were darkening, and a shadow flitted across Miss Thorne's face. The prince rose impatiently.

"Well, what is the meaning of all this? Are you going to take me back to prison?"

"No," said Mr. Grimm. He glanced at his watch. "I will give each of you one-half hour to pack your belongings. We must catch a train at one o'clock."

"Leave the city?" gasped Miss Thorne.

"Impossible!" exclaimed the prince.

"One-half hour," said Mr. Grimm coldly.

"But—but it's out of the question," expostulated Miss Thorne.

"One-half hour," repeated Mr. Grimm. He didn't dare to meet those wonderful blue-gray eyes now. "A special car with private compartments will be attached to the regular train, and the only inconvenience to you will be the fact that the three of us will be compelled to sit up all night. Half a dozen other Secret Service men will be on the train with us."

And then the prince's entire manner underwent a change.

"Mr. Grimm," he said earnestly. "It is absolutely necessary that I remain in Washington for another week—remain here even if I am locked up again—lock me up again if you like. I can't sign compacts in prison."

"Twenty-five minutes," replied Mr. Grimm quietly.

"But here," exclaimed the prince explosively, "I have credentials which will insure my protection in spite of your laws."

"I know that," said Mr. Grimm placidly. "Credentials of that nature cannot be presented at midnight, and you will not be here to-morrow to present them. The fact that you have those credentials, your Highness, is one reason why you must leave Washington now, to-night."

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ready there. He rose courteously. At sight of him Miss Thorne's face went deathly white, and the escaped prisoner turned toward the door again.

"I would advise that you stay, your Highness," said Mr. Grimm coldly. Signor Petrozini paused, amazed. "You will merely subject yourself to the humiliation of arrest if you attempt to leave. The house is guarded by a dozen men."

"Your Highness?" Miss Thorne repeated blankly. "You are assuming a great deal, aren't you, Mr. Grimm?"

"I don't believe," and Mr. Grimm's listless eyes were fixed on those of the escaped prisoner, "I don't believe that Prince Benedetto d'Abuzzi will deny his identity?"

There was one of those long tense silences when eyes challenge eyes, when wit is pitted against wit, and mind is hauled around to a new, and sometimes unattractive, view of a situation. Miss Thorne stood silent with rigid features, colorless as marble; but slowly a smug settled about the lips of Signor Petrozini that was, and he sat down.

"You seem to know everything, Mr. Grimm," he taunted.

"I try to know everything, your Highness," was the reply. Mr. Grimm was still standing. "I know, for instance, that one week ago the plot which had your freedom for its purpose was born; I know the contents of every letter that passed between you and Miss Thorne here, notwithstanding the invisible ink; I know that four days ago several thousand dollars was smuggled in to you concealed in a basket of fruit; I know, with that money, you bribed your way out, while Miss Thorne or one of her agents bribed the guard in front; I know that the escape was planned for to-night, and that the man who was delegated to take charge of it is now locked in my office under guard. It may interest you to know that it was I who took his place and made the escape possible. I know that much!"

"You—you—!" the prince burst out suddenly. "You aided me to escape?"

Miss Thorne was starting, staring at them with her eyes widely distended, and her red lips slightly parted.

"Why did you assist him?" she demanded.

"Details are tiresome, Miss Thorne," replied Mr. Grimm with the utmost courtesy. "There is one other thing I know—that the Latin compact will not be signed in the United States."

The prince's eyes met Miss Thorne's inquiringly, and she shook her head. The sneer was still playing about his mouth.

"Anything else of special interest that you know?" he queried.

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For the Hostess

A Japanese Tea. Affairs Japanese are always effective and pleasing to one's guests. To make the rooms as really Japanese as possible much of the furniture should be removed, partitioning off spaces where necessary with Japanese paper screens. Use flowering shrubs, almond blossoms (artificial), chrysanthemums and butterflies suspended by invisible black threads. The hostess must bow very low three times, saying "Konichiwa" when the guests arrive and "Sayonara" when they leave. Tea should be served with no cream; use cups without handles. Sponge cakes may be served if rice ones are not obtainable, also preserved ginger. If something cold is wished have cherry ice. Those who assist should wear kimonos.

Have some young girls in Japanese costumes play "bag ball" (dama). Have a number of bright-colored bags filled with dried beans. Each girl tries to keep as many bags going as possible without dropping them. Another amusing game is played by means of a long silk scarf, in the center of which is a loose knot or loop, held midway between the two players who hold the scarf and the floor. On one side of the loop a player sits. On the other side is a small object, a flower, a bean bag, even a thimble. The player who sits by the loop tries to slip her hand through, grab the small article and take her hand back again before those holding the loop can draw it tight and make her hand prisoner.

Games for Outdoor Parties. All this summer outdoor affairs have been very popular and in consequence we have all been on the look-out for pastimes suitable for the lawn, the shore and the porch. One called "stagarino" is played by having two bases opposite each other, say at either end of the grounds; the players are on either side with "it" in the middle (the latter being chosen by drawing lots or the old-time method of "counting out"). The game is to run from one goal to the other without being caught. When once touched he or she joins in trying to catch the others.

"Fire buckets" is another jolly game, so called from the old way of passing buckets of water from hand to hand in the volunteer fire companies. The players are formed in two long lines opposite each other with captains at the head who have a basket or box filled with all sorts of hastily collected articles—handkerchiefs, balls, hats, hair ribbons, pocket knives, etc., which are to be passed on one at a time until the end of the line is reached, the last player, depositing the objects on the ground beside him, begins at once to pass them back. The line first accomplishing