

CHAPTER XXII.

The House Divided.

Alone in that strange place of silence and shadows—that den of the devil's livery, crimson and black—chained to the invalid chair wherein, day in, day out, for years on end, he had suffered the Promethean torments of the life that would not die out of his wretched, wrecked carcass, though without ceasing sharp-beaked envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitable-ness pecked insatiably at his vitals: Seneca Trine sat waiting, with the impassivity of a seven figure waiting on the immediate hour of ultimate avengement for the wrong that had made him what he was.

"Another hour! . . . In sixty minutes more they will be here, Judith and Marrophet and Rose—poor fool!—and him! . . . In sixty minutes more they will put him down before me, bound and helpless, if not dead!"

A slight pause prefaced words that were a whimpered prayer: "God send that he be not dead! Have I lingered

Upon this one he loosed the lightnings of his wrath without ruth. Rose suffered him in silence. His most galling recrimination educed no retort from this one.

In a lull in Trine's tirade, Judith chose to interject: "Don't be so hard on the silly fool; she's not responsible; she's sick with love for that good-looking simpleton!"

"And you!" Rose turned on her passionately—"what about you? If I love Alan Law, at least I love him openly. I am not ashamed to own it—and I don't pursue him, as you do, pretending I mean to sacrifice him to a wicked family feud, and then spare him every time I meet him, to lead him to believe I haven't the heart to injure him—as you do, hoping so to work upon his sympathies and earn a kindly word and a pat on the head from his hand!"

Fiercely she leveled a denunciatory arm at her sister. "There!" she cried to her father—"if you need to know—there stands the daughter who has betrayed your faith—as I have not, who have never even pretended to approve your villainy!"

"I think," Trine announced in a voice of ice—"I have learned now what I needed to know."

His fingers sought the row of buttons; and when a servant responded, he inquired:

"Mr. Marrophet has returned?"

"He is in the waiting room, sir."

"Conduct Miss Judith to him and tell him I hold him personally responsible for her safe-keeping. He will understand."

And for a long time thereafter the father, alone with the daughter who had been estranged from him since birth by every instinct of her nature, essayed in vain to break down her mutinous silence.

At last Trine summoned two of his creatures and had her led weeping from the rooms to be held prisoner in her bedchamber on the topmost floor of the house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A Sporting Offer.

Some two hours later, that same evening, Mr. Alan Law, very much alive and, in spite of a complete new outfit of ready-made clothing, looking much more like himself than he had in a fortnight, issued forth from the Grand Central station, hailed a taxicab, and had himself conveyed to the Hotel Monolith.

But if he looked his proper self once more, it was his true name that was demonstrated that his wish was otherwise; for after learning from the room-clerk of the Monolith that a suite was being held in the name of Arthur Lawrence, that was the name Mr. Law inscribed on the register.

On the other hand, it was his true name that he gave to the person whom he called upon the telephone immediately after being shown to his rooms. But then he was speaking to his old friend and man of business, Mr. Digby.

Within another ten minutes this last was in conference with his employer:

"I think you must be out of your head," he insisted nervously, once their first greetings were over. "You might just as sensibly throw yourself from the top of the Metropolitan tower as come to New York while Trine lives and knows you're this side the water."

"Nonsense!" Alan laughed. "Remember this is New York—not the backwoods of Maine!"

Alan paused and smote his palm with a remorseful fist. "By the Eternal, I'm forgetting Barcus!"

"Barcus?"

"Chap whose boat I chartered in Portland—sheer luck on my part; he's one of the salt of the earth. First, something must be done for the boy. You've got influence of some sort in New Bedford, surely?"

Digby reflected: "Some, There's George Blaine, justice of the peace—"

"The very man. Telegraph him in Barcus' interests immediately. And telegraph Barcus as well—send him a hundred for expenses, and tell him to join me here in New York as quick as he can!"

"Your friend's address?" Digby inquired, mildly ironic as he sat down at the desk and fumbled with the supply of stationery.

"New Bedford jail, of course!" Alan chuckled—but cut his laugh in two as something fluttered from the pack of envelopes which Digby had disturbed and fell to the floor between the two men.

Face up, it grinned sardonic mockery of Alan's confidence: it was a trey of hearts.

With an athen face and a trembling hand, Digby stooped to pick the damned thing up; but Alan was beforehand with him, and got his fingers first upon the card.

"Now will you believe?" Digby demanded humbly.

"In what? A simple coincidence?" Alan flouted. "Not I! Who knows I'm in New York—or that the Arthur Lawrence for whom your agent engaged these rooms was Alan Law. No, my friend: it's a bit too thick for me. Take my word for it, this is nothing more nor less than a souvenir of a poker-party held by yesterday's tenant of this suite."

"Perhaps—perhaps!" Digby assented, stroking tremulous lips. "But I'm afraid for you, my boy. Who knows that Trine's spies were not watching my man when he made this reservation? Who knows but that 'Arthur Lawrence' was too thin a disguise for Alan Law? I tell you, I'm frightened of the marrow of my old bones! Do me this favor at least, my boy: now that you've been warned, whether by accident of design—we won't argue that—do leave town—go incognito to some quiet place near by and wait

there for the sailing of the next transatlantic steamer. Oh, surely you can't deny me this one wish of my fond old heart, my boy!"

With a gesture of unfeigned affection Alan dropped a hand on Digby's shoulder.

"There's nothing on earth I would not do for you," he said: "you've been a father and a mother to me ever since I can remember, even if we were separated, most of the time, by three thousand miles of salt water. But this thing—I can't do it, even for you. I can't do it even for myself. I can't do it here in New York, in the hands and at the mercy of her father and sister; and you may judge what their mercy will be when you learn all that she has done for me. I won't go and I can't go until I find her and take her with me. And that is final."

"Then," Digby struck him, grasping wildly at a straw of hope, "I have your word you'll go, providing I find and restore Rose to you?"

"You have my word to that, unquestionably. Bring Rose to me, and I'll gladly shake the dust of New York from my shoes, and never return till Trine is put away comfortably in his grave."

"It shall be done," Digby promised. "It must!"

"You believe that?"

"In twelve hours Rose shall be restored to you."

"Will you make a book on it? I'll bet you something happens—and hope I lose into the bargain. If you believe you can carry out your promise, wire the White Star line to reserve the best available suite on the Oceanic, sailing tomorrow morning at ten— and make arrangements for a marriage before the boat sails."

"I'll go you," Digby agreed: "and if I fail, I forfeit the cost of the reservation. But about this marriage—"

He hesitated.

"You'll have to have a license in this state—and can't get one except

what seemed an uncommonly stubborn reluctance, and got his way.

He could not know that another skulked behind a barrier of lime barrels and overheard all that passed and, when Alan had docketed smartly into the unfinished building, rose and stole after him with footsteps as noiseless as a cat's and a face that had the savagery of a tiger's when it was transiently revealed in a shaft of moonlight.

At length Alan gained the gridiron of girders on a plane with the lighted window across the way, and crept along one of these, gingerly on his hands and knees, until he came to its end and might, if he cared to, lock down a hundred feet to the sidewalk.

That view, however, did not tempt; he kept his eyes level; and was rewarded with a bare glimpse of a prettily-papered wall, framed in the face of half-drawn curtains.

And of sudden—whether through fortuity, or instinct, or the psychological attraction of his breakfast concentration—the tenant of the room came to the window and stood there for a little, looking pensively out, although unconsciously of the watcher in his aerial coil.

Again a horrible uncertainty harassed him. Was the woman Rose or Judith? That she was one of those he could plainly see. But which? Dared he assume his hopes fulfilled?

With difficulty he detached his hungry vision from her, and drawing from his pocket a small notebook, tore out a blank page, placed this flat on the girder, found a pencil, and with the assistance of a ray or two of moonlight scrawled a message of almost stenographic brevity.

When he looked up from this task, she had vanished.

Sitting up, astride the girder, he took his watch—a cheap affair he had picked up when reclothing himself in the garments of civilized society, at Providence, that morning—opened the

factor in the duel. In the end, they served together with that steady, relentless downward and outward drag, to break the grip of the man's locked legs.

Abruptly he pitched forward on his face along the girder, kicking wildly, grasping at the air. The stiletto fell from an instinctively relaxed grasp, and disappeared. And before Alan could release his hold, or ease the strain upon the right arm of the assassin, this last had slipped bodily from the girder and hung helpless in space, dangling at the end of Alan's arm—with no more than the grip of five fingers between him and death.

The shock of that unprepared turn brought Alan forward and flat on his stomach. And the strain on his left arm was terrific. He doubted if he could maintain it for another minute. Nor was there any reason why he should retain it. The end he had desired for his victim was merely his just desert.

And yet Alan could not let him go.

Thus the battle began anew—but now it was a battle with a man half-cracked and struggling so madly that he well-nigh frustrated the efforts of his rescuer.

In the upshot the assassin lay like a limp rag across the girder, head and arms dangling on one side, legs and feet on the other, bent with his terrific exertions and physically sick with terror.

And in this state Alan left him: he had done enough; let the man shift for himself from this time on.

CHAPTER XXV.

Changeling.

In the vague, chill gray of that dull and desolate dawn, Judith stirred abruptly on the couch of a sleepless night, and with the rapidity of one who has arrived at a settled purpose after a long period of doubt and perplexity, rose and bathed and dressed herself in negligee.

In the adjoining room she could hear small, stealthy noises—the sounds made by her sister moving about and preparing against the unguessable moment when her rescue would be attempted, according to the information conveyed in that midnight message.

For chance had conspired with her insomnia to station Judith in the recess of her darkened window, idly viewing the gaunt framework of the unfinished building from an angle which, when Alan edged out along the girder, showed him plainly in silhouette against the sky.

In Judith's eyes his identity was unmistakable. She had hardly needed the night-glasses which presently she brought to bear upon him at the moment when he was laboriously lulling his message—while grim death stalked him from behind.

She had seen him throw the watch and had heard the double thump of its impact with the wall and floor of Rose's bedchamber.

And she had witnessed with wildly beating heart that duel in the air—able to surmise its outcome only from the fact that the victor spared the life of the vanquished.

The clock was striking six as she left her room; across the street workmen were streaming into the building to begin the labors of the day.

Brushing unceremoniously past the drowsy and indifferent guard in the corridor outside the door to Rose's room, Judith turned the key that remained in the lock on the outside, removed it, entered, and locked the door behind her.

Without any surprise she found her sister already dressed to the point of donning her outer garments.

Rendered half-frantic by this unexpected interruption, threatening as it did the perilous scheme that Alan had proposed, Rose greeted her sister with a countenance at once aghast and wrathful.

"What do you want?" she demanded tensely.

"To come to an understanding with you," Judith told her coolly.

"There is no understanding possible between us: you know that as well as I."

"Yet one there must be."

"I insist that you leave this room at once!"

"Insist by all means—and be damned! I may leave this room—and I may not, dear little sister. But one of us will never leave it alive."

With a start of terror, Rose shrank back from this strange, wild thing that wore the very shape and semblance of herself.

"What do you mean? You cannot mean to murder me in cold blood, Judith!"

"Not I!" Judith laughed harshly. "But, since it has pleased Destiny to decree that we must both love one man—let Destiny decide between us and bear the blame of murder!"

"Judith!"

"One moment!" Crossing to a side table, Judith took up a glass from a tray that held a silver water-pitcher, and returned with it to the table that occupied the middle of the floor. At the same time she opened a hand till then fast clenched and disclosed a small blue bottle with a red label shrieking the warning "POISON!"

"Strychnine," she explained composedly, "in solution." And emptied the bottle into the glass.

A measure of courage returned to Rose. "Do you expect to be able to make me drink that?" she demanded contemptuously.

"Not I—but Destiny, if it will! See here." From a pocket of her dressing-gown Judith produced a sealed deck of playing cards. "Let these declare the will of Destiny toward us. I will break the seal, shuffle the cards, and deal," she explained, suiting action to word,

"The one who gets the trey of hearts will drain that glass! Is it a bargain?"

"Never! Oh, now I know that you are altogether mad!"

"Perhaps. Are you ready?" And Judith made as if to deal.

"No—never! I tell you, I refuse!" Rose chattered, terrified.

"You dare not refuse."

"Why?"

"Because of this."

Whipping a small revolver from another pocket of her dressing-gown, Judith placed it on the table, ready to her hand.

"You will shoot me if I do not consent?"

"Not you—but him. If you refuse, little sister, I will shoot Alan Law dead when he comes to keep his appointment with you."

"Ah!" Rose cried in mingled fright and amazement. "How did you find out?"

"Never mind. Is it a bargain, now, about the trey of hearts? Remember, I shall keep my word about this pistol."

With a shudder Rose bowed her head.

"Deal," she muttered fearfully, "and may God judge between us!"

One by one she stripped the cards from the top of the deck, dealing first to Rose, then to herself.

One by one they fluttered to the table on either side the glass of poison, and fell face uppermost.

The trey of hearts fell to Judith. There was an instant of silent dread, ended by Rose, as Judith's hand moved steadily toward the glass.

"Judith!" she implored. "Don't—I beg of you—I didn't mean it—I take back my consent—"

"Too late!" said Judith, lifting the glass and eyeing its contents with a strange smile.

"Judith! you cannot mean to drink it?"

"Can't I, though?" the other laughed mirthlessly. "Just watch me!"

With a strangled cry Rose covered her face with her hands to shut out the sight, stood momentarily swaying, and dropped to the floor in a complete faint.

Delaying only to recognize this phenomena with a pitying smile for the weakness of spirit that caused it, Judith's glance darted through the window and saw that which caused her to stay her hand an instant longer.

On the topmost tier of girders of the building opposite, Alan Law stood amid a little knot of amused and animated laborers, one foot in the great steel hook of the holting tackle, both hands clasping the chain that linked it to the gigantic block.

And as Judith stared, he smiled at something said by one of those about him, looked back, and waved a hand to some person invisible.

Immediately the arm began to lift, the tackle to move slowly through the blocks. Very gently he was swung up and outward.

With a cry Judith flung the poison heedlessly from her, leaped across the room, and snatched up the street garments Rose had dropped at her sister's entrance.

In another moment she was struggling madly into them.

Before the shadow of Alan, clinging to the hook and chain, fell athwart the



Rose Turned on Her Passionately.



Alan's Appearance at the Hotel Monolith.

by applying in person with your bride-to-be. There won't be time—"

"Then we'll marry in Jersey!" Alan insisted. "Dig up some clergyman over there, if you don't know one yourself—"

"Oh, I'm well acquainted with the very man!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Time o' Night.

Not ill-pleased to be left to his own devices (whose proposed character Digby would never have approved had he so much as suspected them) Alan none the less deferred action until after midnight.

And espionage was all he feared—save and except always, of course, failure to find his Rose.

It was about one in the morning when he arrived inconspicuously (but not so much so as to seem deserving of police surveillance) in the neighborhood of the Riverside drive home of his mortal enemy, a grim white house that towered, stark and tall, upon a corner.

His preliminary reconnaissance provided little more than comfortless exercise. Huge, still, its wall bathed in the milk and ink of moonlight and shadow, all its windows dark but one—and that one, in the topmost tier, showed only a feeble glimmer, so slight that Alan almost overlooked it.

But once discovered, it focused upon itself his thoughts with a power little less than hypnotic.

He believed with small doubt that Rose was a prisoner within those walls; that Judith must have conveyed her there with all speed.

And, this being the presumptive case, that small, high window of the light might well be hers.

Directly across the street from the Trine residence, on the opposite corner, a colossal apartment structure stood half-finished, stonework to its second story, gaunt iron skeleton rearing above.

To his infinite disgust, Alan found the guardian very wide awake, very much on the job: no chance here to steal unseen into the building.

This in itself might have been deemed a suspicious circumstance; not for nothing does an honest night watchman so deny the laws of nature and the tenets of his craft. But Alan merely praised the man while cursing the very fact of his existence; and, accosting, overcame with bank-notes

back of the case, and closed it upon the folded message.

Then drawing back his arm, he breathed a silent prayer to the god of all true lovers, and cast it from him with all his might—with such force that it almost unseated him at the end of the swing. But nothing less would have served to bridge that yawning chasm.

And the watch flew straight and true, squarely through the lighted window and to the further wall. . . .

At that very instant of his exultation over an obstacle overcome, he heard a sound behind him of heavy breathing.

The assassin had come that close upon his prey when Alan turned and discovered his peril.

The same moonbeam which had aided Alan in the composition of his message struck across the other's face, and showed it like a hideous Chinese mask of deadly hatred, with its eyeballs glaring and its lips drawn back from the naked blade gripped between its teeth—a stiletto nothing short of a foot in length.

With a sharp, startled movement, Alan swung himself bodily about, so that, seated again astride the girder, he faced the assassin who sat up, straddling the girder, his feet hooked beneath it a stiletto poised in his right hand to strike.

But even now Alan was in little or no better case than before. If he faced the thug, he faced him with no arms other than his bare hands. He had not even a pen-knife in his pockets.

With a low cry of desperation Alan snatched off his hat, a soft and shapeless felt affair, and flung it squarely in the fellow's face.

Before he could recover—before, that is, it dropped away and cleared his vision, Alan had bent forward and grasped the wrist of the hand that held the knife.

He snatched simultaneously at the other hand, but it eluded him.

Alan had this advantage, as long as the knife might not strike—that his right arm was free, while the assassin had only his left. With this he strove persistently to reach his knife-hand, and possess himself of the weapon. As persistently Alan foiled his purpose by dragging the knife-hand toward him and swinging it far out to one side. At the same time he struck repeatedly with his clenched right fist at the other's face. His blows did little damage beyond disconcerting the other; but this proved a very considerable



"Not I—but Destiny, if it will!"

window, she was dressed and clamored upon the sill.

"Sweetheart! My bravest little woman!"

The hook hung steadily within six inches of the window-ledge. Alan extended his arm.

"Nothing to fear, except lest I hold you too tight, dear one!"

Without a word Judith set her foot beside his in the hook, surrendered to his embrace, and closed her eyes.

Immediately they were swung away from the window, over toward the opposite sidewalk, and gently lowered to the street.

"Maybe this isn't a good scheme!" Alan exulted in the innocence of his heart. "But I think it is. And those workmen think it a great lark—I told them the simple truth, you see: that we were eloping!"

By way of answer Judith breathed only a word of tenderness.

And that instant the hook paused and Alan stepped off upon the sidewalk.

"Safe and sound—and not a soul over there the wiser as yet!" he declared with a derisive nod toward the home of Trine. "Come along. Here's a limousine waiting. In twenty minutes we'll be at the ferry, in forty over in Jersey, within an hour married, within four hours safe at sea!"