

## THEIR STRANGE FIRST MEETING

### I.

From the very moment that Jones' boarding house opened its doors to the Bensons, and extended to them its unrivalled hospitality, I was seized by a premonition of impending evil.

I took a violent dislike to Benson from the moment I was introduced to him.

I shall never forget our first meeting. It was just prior to our entering the dining-room. Benson acknowledged the introduction with a sinister glare and an unintelligible mumble that fairly sent the cold chills creeping up and down my back.

How utterly different—of what superior clay was Alice Benson. It seemed impossible to realize that they were man and wife. Surely love could not have impelled her union with this man.

She was beautiful to a shade of loveliness that words fail to justify. She appeared of such a gentle and winning disposition, a woman capable of so much affection, of loving and being loved, that almost unconsciously I found myself idly debating whether she would not be happier as another man's wife.

At times I detected a look in her eyes that I did not fancy. A wild, haunted look of dread seemed to find expression in their depths, as though she lived in constant fear of something. Perhaps this modern Bluebeard of a husband ill-treated her. Heaven! I was beginning to hate the man though I hardly knew him.

"I am more than pleased to meet you," she said, simply, with a depth of feeling that sent a pleasurable thrill tingling through every vein. "I feel sure we shall be friends—the best of friends."

Perhaps I echoed the sentiment with a little more fervor than the occasion demanded, but I expressed myself in all sincerity. As I seated myself, a feeling of contempt swept over me against the man to whom she had linked her destiny.

During the course of the meal, Benson maintained a rigid silence. His wife entered gaily into the general conversation, but refused to discuss her own affairs. Occasionally she would look intently at her husband, and that troubled look crept into her eyes.

A number of times during that half-hour I found myself stealing an apprehensive glance at the silent man across the table. Twice I caught his lips moving, as though he had something on his mind and could not help repeating it.

After finishing their meal the Bensons left the room. A few moments later we heard the street door close behind them.

That evening they did not return to supper. Having no engagement that necessitated my leaving the house, I retired to my room shortly afterwards.

My lady nicotine wooed my mind to strange conceptions. Slowly the shifting cloud of smoke surrounding me assumed the form of a woman's face. The radiant, smiling features of Alice Benson floated before me. Dazzled, bewildered, I leaned towards it. The vision faded. Again the smoke swirled and shifted. Again a form slowly evolved itself. Horrible fantasy! A serpent's head of hideous proportions hung suspended! I shuddered and closed my eyes. When I opened them all was gone.

How long I sat there I do not know. I was aroused by hearing someone mounting the stairs, and by the sound of subdued talking concluded it was the Bensons going to their room. They had been assigned the apartment adjoining mine.

Upon entering my room I had unintentionally left my door slightly ajar. The couple halted as they came opposite the opening, and I could easily distinguish their voices.

"John, to-night is your last chance. There must be no mistake." I found myself listening intently for Benson's answer. His wife's words savoured of mystery.

"Have no fear that I shall fail," answered Benson firmly. "I will despatch Freeman in such a manner that no one will ever suspect it of being the work of an amateur. The role of killing a man is new to me, Alice, but I'd murder a dozen if it made you any the happier."

I gripped the arms of the chair in a frenzied grasp of horror.

"I know it, John," murmured the woman softly. "You're the best husband in all the world, and—and I love you for it. But you are sure you will not weaken at the crucial moment? It's a terrible thing to face such an ordeal."

"Tush! My little woman, you are nervous. A Benson lose his nerve! Absurd! Freeman will be here shortly."

For a moment the horrible realization of what I had overheard fairly stupefied me. My first impulse was to rush after the plotters and confront them with my knowledge of their dastardly intentions. A moment's deliberation proved its futility.

This creature, whom I had placed upon the highest pedestal of ennobling womanhood was only fit to

rank with the lowest of degraded criminals. Her beauty was merely a mask, the smile on her lips the siren's bait to lure men to destruction. Her husband's face bore the inflexible stamp of crime—fixed and unchangeable—but she, this irresistible goddess of infamy, was far worse than he.

The unutterable suspense that I endured for the next half-hour can well be imagined. The slightest noise on the lower floor I interpreted as the arrival of Freeman. When the door-bell finally rang, the deep, continuous peal stabbed me to the heart like a point of steel.

I heard Benson leave his room and go to the head of the stairs. A moment later he greeted someone effusively. My blood was at fever heat to warn Freeman of his danger, but a hasty demonstration on my part would avail nothing beyond placing me in an awkward position.

The two passed through the hall and entered Benson's room. I heard the metallic click of a key in the lock as the door closed behind them.

### II.

Leaving my room I crept softly to Benson's door and listened. It was impossible for anyone in the room to surprise me. He would first have to unbolt the door. This would enable me to retreat.

The first sound that reached me was the woman's voice. She appeared to be speaking to the visitor, and her tones betrayed some excitement. Finally, Benson broke in with a question, and the discussion that followed was spoken in lower tones. Strain as I would I could not hear it.

Occasionally I caught a word or two, but they came at such disconnected intervals as to give me no clue as to the conversation.

I was about to abandon my position in disgust, when Benson's voice rang through the room with blood-curdling emphasis.

"Then die, you fool!"

There was a quick movement upon the part of someone, sounding like two bodies coming in sudden contact, followed by a fall and a half-smothered groan. The woman gave a half-stifled scream—then the silence of death.

The horrible truth flashed upon me like a thunderbolt. Freeman had been murdered almost before my very eyes, and I had not so much as raised a hand to save him. What a gruesome failure I had made of it!

The blow had been struck with so little warning, and with such deadly effect, that it gave me no chance to interfere.

Though the murder of Freeman had completely staggered me, coming with such abruptness, yet I was fired by the fierce determination that the Bensons should not triumph in their awful deed. Their scheme had been successfully planned and executed, but their escape would not be so easily assured. To catch them re-handled would prove convicting evidence. The police-station lay but a few streets away. To reach it was only the matter of minutes.

I was down the stairs and out in the street in a moment, sprinting for the station like a madman. I forgot that I had on my smoking-jacket, and was hatless. People stopped and stared. I flew on unheedingly.

I reached my destination distressed and breathless, but nerved to my duty. By chance I found the inspector at the sergeant's desk. Inspector Little was a man of action. Scarcely three minutes elapsed from the moment of my arrival until we were dashing down the street.

Mrs. Jones met us at the door. The sight of the officer was the first intimation she received that something unusual was transpiring. She gasped and nearly sank to the floor with fright. A hasty explanation on my part only served to make matters worse. She followed us up the stairs, sobbing softly.

Inspector Little halted at the head of the stairs, while I silently pointed out the door.

He then walked to the door and knocked boldly. There was no response save a sudden commotion within. Little smiled grimly. No doubt the Bensons were making a hasty effort to conceal their crime. Little did they imagine that justice was already stalking at their heels.

Mr. Little was an officer, and knew his duty. Pressing his shoulder against the panel he surged forward. There was a sound of splintering wood, and the door flew inward with a shattered lock.

I took in the room at a glance. A perspiring individual in the corner stared at us in incredulous amazement. Mrs. Benson seemed on the verge of fainting. She clung to her husband's arm in white-faced terror.

Benson stood and glared, fully half a minute, crimson with unspeakable rage.

Finally he found his voice. "How dare you break into my room like this?"

I felt a strange sensation of weakness creeping into my bones. Could that man in the corner be Freeman—and alive? Could I have made a mistake? My flesh fairly crept.

"I knocked," began Little half apologetically, "and received—"

"Knocked?" snarled Benson savagely. "We heard you and thought it was some fool trying to be funny. This house is full of fools."

He ended by glaring at me.

"Your arrival completed the list," I retorted.

He would have sprung at me, but the inspector stepped between us.

"We are laboring under some delusion, gentlemen," advised Little. "Perhaps it would be wiser to get down to more logical reasoning. I was notified that a crime had been committed here. I am willing to admit that there must be some mistake."

"Perhaps the occupants of this room can explain the suspicious sounds that I heard scarcely half an hour ago," I said testily.

"No doubt the gentleman can explain," interposed Inspector Little. Benson looked at his wife and laughed, guffawed like a fool. She smiled back at him in her pretty winsome way. The man in the corner grinned like a Cheshire cat. I saw nothing funny.

Benson turned to Little with mock politeness.

"We were rehearsing!" he announced with cutting emphasis.

"Mr. Freeman, my wife, and I," continued Benson, "ignoring my effort to speak, 'are members of the Royal Greys Dramatic Company. Mrs. Benson stars as the leading lady, with Freeman in the corresponding role. I play heavy. During the course of the second act in 'Her Crime,' I am required to kill the hero. I consequently stab Mr. Freeman, otherwise James Tressis, in the back after delivering myself of the melodramatic utterance previously mentioned. Not being very proficient in our respective parts, we decided on a private rehearsal as a final test, as the company takes to the road to-morrow. I hope our realism will not impress our audiences as vividly as it has on this occasion."

The weakness in my bones was rapidly nearing downright collapse. I groaned inwardly as I gazed after the retreating form of Inspector Little. He had apologized for his intrusion, and was leaving.

I turned to Benson. "Mr. Benson," I began, "I wish to explain."

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fingers in cold weather, it is the best thing I have ever used. To be sure, it stains the fingers, but the discoloration soon wears off. The same as with an aching tooth, it forms a glazing over the wound, and at the same time allays the soreness.

"For toilet purposes, the plain tincture of benzoin is a delightful addition to the bath. This, also, I have prepared for me at the druggist's, and a few drops added to the water imparts an agreeable odor, and is very refreshing. It is also said to prevent wrinkles.

"This, you see, is quite different in appearance from the compound tincture," she said, holding another bottle up to view. "It is milky looking, while the other is of a dark brown color. A few drops of the plain in a pint of water gives a milky look and imparts a delightful vanilla-like fragrance. The bottle should be well shaken before using."

"How is your tooth?" I asked, as she ceased speaking.

"The pain has entirely left it," she replied.

I assured her that I should stop at a druggist's on my way home, and lay in a supply of benzoin.

"Be sure that you have the bottles labeled, so as to avoid mistake in using. Remember the plain tincture is for toilet purposes, and the compound tincture for cuts, bruises, etc.," she called out to me as I was going down the steps.

### DOMESTIC RECIPES.

**Hamburg Steak**—Buy two pounds of lean beef from the round and have your butcher chop it fine. If you like onion with it, mix two teaspoonfuls of minced onion with the meat and season with salt and pepper. Form into small cakes or balls and fry with a little butter or clarified dripping. Make a sauce while the meat is cooking by putting together a tablespoonful each of browned flour and butter; when they bubble pour on them a half pint—one cupful—of beef stock if you have it, water if you have not. Stir to a smooth brown sauce and season to taste. Turn over the meat which you have arranged upon a platter.

**To Spice a Beef's Tongue**—Wash and trim the tongue, rub it with a mixture of half a pint of sugar, half a teaspoonful of saltpetre, a tablespoonful each of ground cloves and allspice, with a teaspoonful of black pepper. Place in a strong brine and let it remain two weeks. When wanted, take out of pickle, wash and wipe dry, roll in a thin paste of flour and water, put in a dripping pan and put into the oven to bake. Baste with butter and water. When done remove the paste, skin, and let stand till perfectly cold before slicing.

**Oatmeal Crisps**—Mix oatmeal and boiling water to a stiff dough, knead it a little, using wheat flour to prevent from crumbling, mold it, and cut into small thin cakes. Bake twenty or thirty minutes in a hot oven. If made very thin and kept in a cool, dry place, these remain good for several days.

**Baldwin Pudding**—Put a layer of buttered bread crumbs in a pudding dish, then a layer of sliced apple with chopped almonds, lemon juice and a few gratings of nutmeg. Alternate crumbs, apples and seasoning until the dish is full, having the top layer of crumbs. Bake in a moderate oven three-quarters of an hour. Serve with whipped cream sweetened and flavored. This pudding is a sort of Brown Betty familiar to many cooks.

### SOME DON'T'S.

Don't keep custards in the cellar in an open vessel. They are liable to become poisonous.

Don't pour boiling water over china packed in a pan. It will crack by the sudden contraction and expansion.

Don't moisten your food with the idea of saving your teeth. It spoils the teeth, and you will soon lose them.

Don't use steel knives for cutting fish, oysters, sweetbreads or brains. The steel blackens and gives an unpleasant flavor.

Don't scrub your refrigerator with warm water. When necessary sponge it out quickly with two ounces of formaldehyde in two parts of cold water.

Don't put tablecloths and napkins that are fruit-stained into hot soapsuds; it sets or fixes the stains. Remove the stains first with dilute oxalic acid, washing quickly in clear water.

Don't salt or pepper your food before tasting it, and even then do so very unostentatiously—it is a criticism on the cook. Never put ice in your wine—it is a criticism on the taste of the host. The small plate at the left is for bread as well as butter. Individual butter plates of small size are out of fashion.

Don't sprinkle salt for the celery on the cloth or on your plate. Dip the celery in the small salt-cellar in front of you. If there are shakers on the table instead of cellars, put some on the bread plate.

Don't bite off celery—break off a small mouthful as you wish it. Don't butter bread and then break it off or bite it. Break off a small mouthful as wished for and butter that. Butter is not served at dinner on some tables. Don't ask for it if you don't see it.

## A FEW PERTINENT FACTS

### UPON THE CEMENT INDUSTRY OF THIS COUNTRY.

#### People in the Rural Districts Should Look Into This Matter.

In view of the great number of cement companies being formed for which the public, mostly farmers and persons having small savings in the rural districts are being asked to provide the money, anything which throws light upon the subject will be read with interest. We reprint from the Peterborough Examiner the following:

Much discussion is now going on in the press on the subject of the threatened enormous overproduction of cement in Canada. We notice in a recent issue of The Times a reference of the opinion of Engineer Rush on the subject. A few facts relative to this will not, we trust, be without interest to your readers. In the year 1902 the consumption of cement in Canada reached its highest point, namely, 1,045,000 barrels. Of this 645,000 were made in Canada and 400,000 barrels imported. Prior to 1902 only three companies were engaged in this manufacture. In the year 1902 no less than five additional companies got under way. Several of them, however, did little more than get started and supplied only about 100,000 barrels. In the year 1903 we shall have all the old factories in operation and with largely increased outputs, and also the five new companies above mentioned. The output will then be for 1903, 1,660,000 barrels, that is to say over 600,000 barrels more than the total consumption of last year. In view of these facts you will perceive that the warnings contained in the Monetary Times and Mail and Empire as to the danger of overproduction were well timed and should be carefully heeded by the investing public. But when we tell you that in addition to the five new companies so started last year we have ten new companies now being floated in the country which are to have, according to the promoters, a combined capacity of 10,200 barrels per day equal to an annual capacity of about 3,500,000 barrels, the utter folly of putting money into more cement enterprises will be apparent. Here is a list of the ten new companies with their promised output:

Company	Barrels per day
The Manitoba Portland Cement Co., of Winnipeg	1,000
The Western Canadian Portland Cement Co.	1,000
The St. Mary's Portland Cement Co.	1,000
The Colonial Portland Cement Co., Wiarton	1,000
The Raven Lake Portland Cement Co.	1,000
The Blue Lake Portland Cement Co., Brantford	600
The Superior Portland Cement Co.	600
The Kingston Portland Cement Co.	1,000
The Belleville Portland Cement Co.	2,000
The International Portland Cement Co., Hull	1,000

Making a daily product of 10,200 barrels it is clear then that whatever money is made in Canada out of the cement industry hereafter, will be made in promoting companies and not in operating them. It is alleged that gentlemen who two years ago floated the Durham Company cleaned up half a million of dollars out of the floatation on a capital of 1,000,000. The same gentlemen are found promoting, in different parts of the country, several new companies or a scale still more ambitious than the Durham Company. For instance the Belleville Portland Cement Co. is to have a capital of two and a half millions of dollars and an output of two thousand barrels per day. Can they be putting any of their own money in them? If the floatation of the Durham company could yield the promoters a half a million of dollars the thought of what there must be in store for the floaters of the Belleville Co. with a capital of two and a half millions, fairly makes ones mouth water. These promoters far surpass Engineer Rush, as dispensers of satisfaction. They gravely assure us that cement can be made in this country and profitably exported to the United States notwithstanding the American duty and notwithstanding the fact that nearly all cement machinery comes from the United States and is subject to heavy charges for freight and duty and that the coal for burning the cement is all imported from the United States and costs here double what it costs there and that the actual cost of burning cement alone is more than they pretend they can make cement for.

But then, let the promoters take courage—a sucker is born every minute and the fools are not nearly all dead yet.

In order to allay as far as possible his incessant dread of assassination the Sultan of Turkey never sleeps in the same chamber two nights running. In the Royal palace at Constantinople there are several bullet-proof bedrooms, the positions of which are unknown to the public. Which of these apartments he will occupy the Sultan determines for himself each night only a few minutes before he retires to rest.