

A BURGLAR PRO TEM

The summer night was soft and still, and the purple heavens were ablaze with myriads of stars. Even in the great London park a hush seemed to have fallen, which communicated its influence to those who sat beneath the tall, motionless trees. In the far distance could be heard the faint rumble of traffic, but this only seemed to intensify the silence within. It was a night when strange, sweet confessions drop from faltering lips, and hearts, despite themselves, tell out the story of love's awakening.

Even in the fashionable West, a great London park is scarcely the place where one might expect to find the daughter of a Baronet, seated in the dim shadow of the trees, listening to the warm words of love which were being whispered in her ear with a sweet sense of pleasure that she did not even attempt to conceal. Yet so it was. The tree under which they sat was broad and leafy, and afforded them concealment from the public gaze. And that was all they wanted.

Dulcie Hawthorn was the daughter of Sir Percival Hawthorn, Bart., the Chairman of Directors of the great shipping-house which, in the last few years, had leapt into such prominence. Indeed, the Anglo-Australasian Steamship Company had not only become a formidable rival to the older-established shipping firms, but had actually surpassed many of them, and the Baronet was now one of the most prominent figures in the commercial world.

Dulcie was not his only daughter, but her sisters were wont to confide among themselves that "she could do anything she pleased with dear old dad." And now this "Baronet's darling" had given her heart to a man wholly unequal to herself in station, and an employee in the firm of which her father was head.

Love is never amenable to reason in this respect. But perhaps it is not Love which is at fault, but artificial conventionality. Be that as it may, Max Villiers was only one of the many "heads of departments" in the great shipping house, with a salary of £600 a year, and the thirteenth part of a prospect—which he shared with twelve other "heads of departments"—of improving his position at the next vacancy. And the daughter of a wealthy Baronet loved him.

"Dulcie," he said, with her hand in his, "I wonder what Sir Percival would say if he were to drop down here before us now. But perhaps he might not say anything. There are some occasions in a man's life when speech deserts him."

Dulcie laughed. "I'm not so sure," she said. "Do you know, Max," and she drew a little closer to him, "I sometimes think Dad more than half suspects the truth already. He mentions you sometimes, when he is speaking generally about the business to us at home. And, when he does so, he gives me such a queer little look that makes me blush dreadfully. And then he smiles and turns his head away."

"My goodness!" ejaculated Max. "You don't mean to say—"

"I don't know," said Dulcie. "But it makes me wonder sometimes."

The man was silent. This was a new and startling aspect of the case. "Max," went on the girl, "is there no chance of your present position being improved? I thought I heard Dad speak of a coming vacancy in the Sydney establishment. The present managing director there is, I believe, retiring from active work, and someone will be appointed to take his place."

"Yes," responded Max gloomily. "We have heard all about that. But in all probability the new man will be chosen from the present staff at Sydney. And even if this is not the case, there are others in the London house who are my seniors, and who may therefore take precedence over me. I'm afraid I cannot count on that appointment."

Dulcie pouted. "For two pins," she said, "I'd risk Dad's fury and indignation, and ask him plump to give you the appointment."

The man gasped. "You would!" he said in astonishment. "Why, he would order my instant dismissal! For Heaven's sake, don't do anything so rash. My chance will come some day, and we must have patience. I am not unrecognized even now by Sir Percival, for he is always most kind in his treatment, and sometimes even does me the honor of asking my opinion in regard to certain matters of business connected with my department. Yes, we must have patience, darling, and wait! I sometimes think it won't be very long in coming, though I have no reasonable or tangible ground for such a presentiment."

"Well," replied Dulcie with decision, "if it doesn't come quickly, I shall lose patience, and then I shall do something desperate."

Max laughed, and Dulcie, catching the infection, laughed too.

"Something may turn up before then," said the man. And, rising they returned to their respective homes.

It was about two in the morning

when Max Villiers awoke from a deep sleep to the consciousness that something unusual was in the air. Sitting up in bed, he peered about the room, and, to his astonishment, saw the dim outline of a man seated comfortably in his easy-chair. The man rose as he moved, and, slowly walking across the room, turned on the gas.

"Glad you're awake," he said coolly. "I want to smoke, and didn't like doing so before, for fear of giving you too big a fright when you awoke."

He took out his cigar-case, and carefully lit one of the cigars which it contained. Then he offered the case to Villiers. But the latter declined.

"No?" said the stranger in affected surprise. "That's a pity. Nothing like smoking to clear the head for business!"

"Business?" echoed Max, growing more and more indignant at the intrusion as he recovered his winking faculties. "I should like to know, first of all, what 'business' you have here?"

"Oh, there's no hurry for that!" said the man complacently. "I am here, as you see, and how I got here is easily explained. I took the trouble to procure a latch-key which would open the outer door of your flat. Your inner doors, I notice, you leave unlocked, which is unwise, not to say encouraging, to men of my profession. The night-watchman in the hall below admitted me with a little persuasion, and thus the usual obstacles were easily surmounted."

"But what, in Heaven's name, have you gone to all this trouble for?" asked Villiers.

"Well," responded the stranger, "since you are so persistent, I suppose I must explain the object of my visit. But I can't talk and smoke too, so please allow me to finish this cigar before I enter into business matters."

He leant coolly back in the easy chair, which he had again occupied after lighting the gas, and smoked for some minutes in silence. When he had finished, he tossed the stump of his cigar into the grate, and turned to Villiers.

"Now," he said, with a sharp precision which had not previously characterized him, "we can get to business. As you have doubtless already concluded, I am a member of that class of the community who subsist on the credulity and simplicity of others. The pickpocket is the lowest member of this great class. I belong to the highest, where intelligence, ingenuity, mastery of circumstances, and fertility of conception are required. You, on the other hand, are an honest, hard-working plodder in the service of the Anglo-Australasian Steamship Company. And I have need of you."

"Need—of me!" repeated Villiers in bewilderment.

"Precisely," said the stranger, brushing a speck of cigar-ash from his immaculate frock-coat. "Let me explain further. The department of which you are the head is responsible, among other things, for the arrangements connected with the shipment of specie, bullion, and other valuables. A few days ago you received an advice from Messrs. Rosenstein and Gluck, of Hatton Garden, intimating their desire to ship a parcel of precious stones to Sydney by the steamship *Druid*, which sails on the 23rd."

Villiers looked at his visitor in amazement. But he did not express his surprise, as to do so would have been to tacitly admit the truth of the statement.

"The value of this parcel," continued the stranger airily, "was estimated by Rosenstein and Gluck at £40,000. Two of their most trusted representatives will convey the parcel to the ship an hour before she sails, and it will be your province to accompany them, in order that, on your side too, the deposit of the stones in the strong-room of the ship may be testified to. The captain of the *Druid* will have one of the three keys which will open the door of the strong-room. A second is in possession of your Sydney representative, and you have charge of the third."

"Now what I want of you is this. I shall accompany you when you go to the office in the morning. It will be quite easy for me to satisfy any

curiosity which this step may arouse in your clerks, by assuming the role of an intending shipper and making the usual inquiries as to bills of lading. Then you can take me to your private office, where, without being observed, you can show me the key of the *Druid's* strong-room. I shall merely require to hold it in my hand for a second or so. A little wax will do the rest!"

There was an angry light in Max Villiers' eyes as he listened to this criminal proposal. Leaping out of bed, he began hastily to dress himself.

"You infamous scoundrel!" he said with gleaming eyes.

The burglar smiled, crossed his legs, and looked meditatively up at the ceiling.

"As soon as that is accomplished," he resumed in his evenly modulated voice, "I shall come out to you the sum of £10,000 in Bank of England notes, as a trifling appreciation of the service you will have thereby rendered me. You see, I trust your honor implicitly, and make no stipulation that you must wait for your recompense until the successful termination of my plans. I think I know you, Max Villiers, and I am confident that, after helping me in this matter, you will have the wisdom and good taste to forget the whole affair. £10,000 is a nice little nest-egg, and it might go a long way to soften the heart of a certain gentleman when he considers the question of a prospective son-in-law."

Max Villiers paused in the process of putting on his coat.

"I don't know who you are," he said in bewilderment. "But you appear to possess some knowledge of things concerning myself which I imagined were shared by none. Be that as it may, however, the temptation you put in my way is one which, though it benefited me in no inconsiderable way, would deprive me of all self-respect. You do not appear to have reckoned that in your proposal."

The burglar laughed softly. "Self-respect is an elastic term," he said with evident amusement. "And if, by any chance, you wound this imaginary moral organ, the sum of £10,000 will amply suffice to heal the wound so caused. Let us be practical. I have made you a proposal, for which I have offered you a handsome return. And this proposal you have absolutely no alternative but to accept!"

"Indeed!" said Villiers. "We shall see! In a few minutes I shall signal a policeman, and give you into custody for housebreaking."

"My dear fellow," said the burglar, "you do not really suppose I came in here without having foreseen some such intention on your part? Your simplicity is positively refreshing! I have here—" he took from his pocket a small six-chambered revolver and toyed with it carelessly—"a little instrument whose business it is to persuade obstinate people into doing that which I ask them. I don't often use it—but when I do—"

He looked steadily into Villiers' eyes and left the sentence unfinished. "It is fortunate you have only your sister living with you, as that might complicate matters. You can easily explain to her that I am an old school-friend of yours who has run in to have breakfast with you, preparatory to transacting a little business, with which I have already acquainted you. Then we will go down to the office of the Anglo-Australasian Steamship Company, where you can carry out the plan I have expressed, and for which you will receive immediate payment."

Villiers smiled incredulously. "You surely do not think me simple enough to take that in?" he said.

For answer, the burglar drew from his pocket a roll of notes, which he laid on the table.

"You are at liberty to count them," he said coolly. For a moment Villiers was staggered. Then he shrugged his shoulders. "If you can control my actions here," he said, "you can do so at the office, and when you have obtained that for which you came, the same weapon with which you recently threatened me would stop any demand on my part for these notes as the fulfilment of the bargain."

A strange look came into the burglar's eyes.

"So you doubt me?" he said. "Let me give you an illustration of the phrase, 'Honor among thieves.' Give me your word that you will strictly fulfil your share of the proposal, and, in return, I will so far trust you that, before leaving this house, I will hand you these notes for you to conceal wherever you please."

"Your opinion of me is highly complimentary," said Villiers with a mock bow. "I will endeavor to prove that trust is not misplaced, by declining to violate that trust reposed in me by the Directors of the Anglo-Australasian Steamship Company. I cannot hinder you from following me down to the office, but I shall certainly not do what you require of me."

The burglar smiled confidently. "I think you will," he said, and silence fell on the two.

Max Villiers moved restlessly about the room, not daring to approach the door, for fear of that terrible weapon which the burglar still held in his hand. He was in a quandary, from which he felt powerless to extricate himself.

There was something almost compelling in the manner of his tempter, whose forceful, determined personality made him realize the more his own weakness. He was firm, however, on one point. He would not, under any pressure, betray the confidence of his employers. But how he was going to escape from his present difficulty he had not the faintest idea.

So the hours wore on, and at half-past eight they left the room together, with an admonishing look from the burglar, and entered the breakfast room. There was no cause for him to alarm his sister, so he briefly explained the presence of the burglar in the way the latter had suggested. Then they left the house, and walked in the direction of the office. The burglar was a pace behind him all the way, and Villiers had an uncomfortable feeling that the man's hand was thrust into his breast-pocket, ready on the smallest provocation to carry out his threat.

At last they reached the office. Villiers went straight into his own department, and the burglar followed him in. Slowly he went into his private office, the burglar at his heels, and shut the door behind them.

"Now," said the burglar. "Look sharp! I have no time to waste!" Max Villiers faced him boldly. "I will not do it!" he said firmly. "You must!" said the burglar, and he drew the revolver from his pocket and pointed it at Villiers' head.

For a moment there was silence. Then, in a voice clear and resolute, Villiers said: "Kill me if you like, but I will not betray the confidence of my employers!"

The burglar put the revolver in his pocket, and, going to the door, opened it. Sir Percival Hawthorn was outside, and, in response to a nod from the burglar, he walked in.

"He's all right," said the burglar. "No more than I expected," said the Baronet.

Villiers sank into a chair. It seemed as though his senses were deserting him.

"Mr. Villiers," said the Baronet, "I see we must put this little matter to rights, and put you at your ease. As you have doubtless heard, the post of general manager at our Sydney house is now vacant. The salary is £2,000 a year. For reasons into which I need not now enter, I have had a growing inclination to promote you to the appointment. But you are a young man, and, for the sake of my fellow-directors, it behooved me to make sure that you were proof against temptation. So I mentioned the matter to my friend, Detective Grace, and he consented to help me. You have stood the test well, and I am glad of it. You will be allowed a month's leave of absence, at the end of which time we shall expect you to start for Sydney, there to take up your new appointment."

He came and laid his hand kindly on Villiers' shoulder.

"This has given you a bit of a shaking," he said with a smile. "Well, we must make amends for that. Suppose you come to 'The Chestnuts' to dinner this evening. I fancy I shall not be the only one there who will be delighted to see you."

And he looked meaningfully into the still bewildered face of Villiers.

And he was right. For Dulcie laid wait for him as he came in, and, drawing him softly into a room where none but themselves might see, she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"Oh, you dear old boy!" she said. "Dad told me all about it this afternoon. And now we can be—"

And she broke off in confusion.

But Max finished the sentence for her.—Pearson's Weekly.

PICTURE OF LONDON LIFE

HOW THE UNDERGROUND DWELLERS LIVE.

Little Better Than Wolves, and Terrible Affrays Are Frequent.

The story of the movement to oust the St. Pancras cave-dwellers from their haunts in the interests of the community reveals many extraordinary facts says the London Express.

A great number of the underground dwellings are situated in an area which has been condemned, and which will be pulled down as soon as room is available in which to re-house some of the tenement holders. For just fifty years the cave-dwellers have been living in these places in open defiance of the law.

In 1901 it was felt that the existing state of affairs could be tolerated no longer. Correspondence passed between the County Council and the St. Pancras Council on the subject. The L. C. C. wanted the whole of the underground dwellings to be done away with at once. The borough Council pointed out that the well-being of the poor would best be served by elasticity in the enforcement of the laws.

For the sake of mercy, it was decided to give them three months' notice in each case, so that they might find shelter elsewhere in the time.

Whether this scheme will work or not in the worst slum areas is doubted by experienced men of the district, who say that the only real remedy is to pull the rookeries down and have done with them once and for all.

The commercial life of these people is one of the great troubles of sanitary inspectors and police alike. They shelter each other, and are ready at a moment's notice to make common cause in the

DEFENCE OF EACH OTHER.

If a man is wanted at night-time 20 or 30 will rush into one house, make for one of these underground dwellings, and there remain in defiance of law and order. To bring them out is almost impossible without real danger. The lights are all extinguished, no light from the outside can enter the dens, and the crouching semi-savages will not stick at murder if necessary. Most of them are maddened by drink at night-time.

Among themselves they are little better than wolves. If no common enemy is on the scene terrible affrays in which men, women, and children are injured, are too frequent to attract more than an hour's gossip from an interested audience.

The clearing out of these hells is the devout desire of all the police who are unfortunate enough to be on duty in St. Pancras slums. The difficulty of tackling trawlers of the peace is accentuated by the fact that often the slums are not silent, narrow, back streets, but courts and alleys hidden away at the back of the back streets, accessible only by passages that will not admit more than one person at a time.

How these people live is a puzzle to everyone. The average lot eat scarcely anything. They keep themselves alive by drinking beer and the vilest of spirits. For the children there are crusts and crumbs that are given away from restaurants, bakers, and eating-houses.

There is no money left for food or clothing after the drink and the rent are covered. The rent of these nauseous cells is rarely less than 4s or 5s a week. There are some persons who are driven to these slums cells for no other cause than

EXCEEDING POVERTY.

By the rest of the underground dwellers they are counted as Ishmaelites, and spend their lives in a gradual decline towards despair and degeneration until they, too, reach a moral level when even the wolves of the slums cease to distinguish them as being other than themselves.

Statistics of nature of the underground rooms, not merely in these slums, but all through the borough, show how unfit they are for living purposes.

There are 113 rooms less than seven feet high from floor to ceiling 527 with the ceiling less than one foot above ground level, 92 where the ceiling is below the ground level, 527 where the ceiling is level with the ground, 259 where the area is not six inches below the floor of the room, and 143 where the area is not open to the sky.

Life in these holes in bad weather may more easily be imagined than described. It is not surprising that under such conditions of life the roll of pauper lunatics is swelling in such an alarming manner as is indicated by the official statistics.

The determination of the St. Pancras Council to sweep these haunts away is received by the whole community with approval and gratitude. Their forbearance has been most praiseworthy; the prompt manner in which they are acting now that the way is clear for action is equally so.

RAINBOW GUNS.

The new method of masking a battery by painting guns rainbow fashion, with streaks of red, yellow, and blue, rendering them indistinguishable against any background, has stood a very remarkable test at Aldershot. A section of Horse Artillery sent to engage the guns did not locate them until within a distance of 1,000 yards. This method is the invention of a military officer.



Country Doctor—Wal, Silas, yer wife has gastric fever. Silas Hayrick—Don't see how that kin be. We've never burned gas—always used lamps.

MARVELLOUS BEACON.

The Island of Heligoland now possesses a beacon which is not only the most powerful ever yet constructed, but is in itself an electric marvel. Instead of the costly Fresnel lenses which have hitherto been considered indispensable for large beacons, the German engineers have used parabolic mirrors of glass, and the experiment seems to be crowned with perfect success. A flash of 30-million candle-power is produced on the *Busun*, a distance of forty miles.