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The Price of A Threat

By ALEC BRUCE

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"Marie! You are in trouble, ma'am-selle? Your face, it is so white!" whispered Pierrot, stepping noiselessly toward her on the little sawdust circle before the performers' entrance. "Oui, oui! I—I—am in trouble—grave trouble, Pierrot," she answered brokenly.

"Ah, ma'am-selle, and you know not what to do. That is it?" he questioned quickly and inviting confidence with his earnest, searching little eyes. "But, Marie, ma'am-selle," he muttered, stepping closer to her, so close that she felt the warmth of his breath on her cheek, "maybe—maybe Pierrot might know—if—if you would tell him, hey?"

"Ah, Pierrot, non!" she faltered, covering her face with her hands. "You—you could not, non, you—you— No other words would come. Her lips quivered. Her eyes filled.

"Marie, Marie," he urged, "maybe I—I—ah, you think not, hey?" And his broad breast swelled with a smothered love, a love that had known no utterance, for he was "Pierrot, the fool," a groom! And she? She was "Ma'am-selle Mirabeau, premier equestrienne," in Barkalow's big circus ring.

Suddenly ting-ting, ting-ting-ting! "Ma'am-selle, ma'am-selle," whispered warningly, "the first bell! You hear? Thirty minutes and you go on. Just thirty, Marie!"

But still she did not answer. "Ah, I am only Pierrot, Pierrot, the fool," he murmured, "and you—you will not tell a fool, ma'am-selle. No, no. Why should you?"

"Pierrot!" From her tear dimmed eyes she dropped two small, pink starfish hands and faced him. "Pierrot, a fool? You said a fool!" she quavered. "Ah, to ma'am-selle you must not say so once again. I know you. A fool? Non, non! You say I will not tell you, I will not trust you, mon ami. Leesten, leesten! That Hercules, the dead weight lifter, bah!" and she shuddered violently. "Again, today, he say, 'Ma'am-selle, you will marry me, oui? Already six times he haf said so. Oh, Lala, how persistent! Ah, Pierrot, you do not know. And for answer I say: 'M'sieur, no—no. No—no—no.' Six times I say so, and of heem I think no more. But today, today, it is different. I am afraid. He look so black, so terrible when he say: 'Ma'am-selle, you will marry me. No? Ah, no more trifling, I say, none at all. Gif me your answer. You haf till 7 o'clock tonight; that is all! And Pierrot, number eight on the programme, oui, number eight, tonight! Look at it, and—and you will understand!"

"Number eight, ma'am-selle, number eight on the programme, tonight? I have one somewhere," he mumbled, searching doubtfully among the frilled yards of red, white and blue at his pockets. "Ah!" At last with trembling fingers he unfolded the crushed crimson sheet. "Hercules, Hercules, Hercules! The dead weight lifter! Tonight, tonight, tonight!" it read. "Head downward from a swinging trapeze twenty feet above the circus ring this worldwide champion will dangle in his teeth 100 pounds of solid steel. Is that all? No! We tell you no! But see for yourselves the most marvelous sight ever seen. From a ring beneath the suspended weight he will hold fast the added burden of our premier equestrienne, and backward and forward in midair she will swing and hang until at length she drops, dancing and pirouetting on her galloping steed below."

"Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!" muttered Pierrot when he had read the bill. "I understand, I understand, ma'am-selle. Tonight you must answer 'Oui,' or he will drop the dead weight from his teeth when you hang below!"

"Pierrot, Pierrot," she cried, "I cannot, I will not perform tonight! See—see—I tremble; I could not stand; I could not ride Comanche Bill. I must beg off. I am sick. I—I will tell the manager!"

"Ma'am-selle! No, no, ma'am-selle; one moment, one moment!" cautioned Pierrot, detaining her and pressing his hand against the crimson diamond on his forehead.

"But, Pierrot, Pierrot," she insisted, "I must, I must, I—"

"Non, non, ma'am-selle, you must not!" he whispered. "I have it; Pierrot has it!" And again he glanced intently at the programme. "Bien, bien, I have it! In number seven you ride Comanche Bill. Ride him, ma'am-selle. Pirouette! Jump! Jump through the drum. I hold it, ma'am-selle. Look, number seven, 'Mirabeau on Comanche.' Bah, beg off? Non, non; trust Pierrot. Have no fear. You will not swing from Hercules' weight!"

"But, Pierrot, how? How? You must tell me!"

Ting-ting, tin-ting-ting!
 "Second bell, ma'am-selle," he interrupted, "second bell!" and, grasping the curtains, he peeped through the faded fringe. "Ah, the tiers; they are black with people—black, ma'am-selle! There is no time, no time to tell. Trust Pierrot, trust, trust!" And in a moment he was gone.

Fifteen minutes later, with an angry scowl, Hercules, the dead weight lifter, raised the flap of the manager's tent and entered. "Sir," he announced, "my weight—my weight! It is stolen. Some prowlers, curse them! T—the last moment too!"

"Stolen, stolen!" repeated the manager in his highest key. "By heavens, man, and we have 3,000 unbelievers in that tent all waiting to see your act. We've nostered 1,000 bills; we've adver-

tised it for a month. We've—we've—Hercules, what is to be done?"

"Well, sir," growled the champion darkly, "it ain't my fault. No, sir! But there's one way out of it; one way, I think."

"What way?" snapped the manager. "It's—the paper mache weight, sir; light as a feather. I—I used to practice with it," stammered Hercules. "But they—they wouldn't know it from the real thing, sir; not on your life. Git two of the grooms, Dan'l and Pete, sir; I know 'em well enough. They'll perspire an' putrend a bit when they bring it on. Savez the idee, hey? I reckon you do, sir—ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the manager heartily. "Splendid, Hercules, splendid. 'I'll write to Barkalow. You get a bonus for this—ha, ha! And we can stave off challenges for one night, eh? Tomorrow we'll invite inspection. Very good, sir, v-very good, indeed!"

And so it was arranged. Came 8 o'clock dinging and dying amid railway siding sounds, and six items, like snow in a tropical sun, had melted from Barkalow's big wonder list. Comanche Bill, pink nosed and piebald, with Mirabeau, was prancing around the mammoth ring. Whoop, whoop, whoop, whoop! Crack! Through ribbon ring after ribbon ring the ma'am-selle jumped, landing always fair and dancing on her plush platform saddle. Suddenly whoop, whoop, swish! A tissue drum went into shreds, and Pierrot stepped down from his pedestal and looked proudly at the lady. "Hurrah, hurrah!" The audience cheered and clapped their hands. "Well done, well done!"

But now it was number eight on the programme, and all eyes were focused on the performers' entrance. "Hercules, Hercules!" The excited whisper gathered force and chased along and up and down the tiers. Jauntily the manager advanced and made a brief announcement. Two blue coated, quick action grooms spread out a brilliant carpet star, and two others, red faced and with straining arms and shoulders doubled over, brought on the plaything of the giant.

"Ha!" In a moment he was there before them, smiling and bowing, a spangled vision in scarlet and gold, a miracle of physical strength and bigness. He stretched out his long right arm, his left, too, and the muscles of them rose up like plaited whips. Then he breathed, and every man breathed with him. He broke a poker across his thigh, and the cheers rang wild and deafening. He looked at the weight, at the trapeze above, at ma'am-selle with critical eye, and again the audience cheered. If before they had doubted the claims in number eight, it was evident now that they believed.

Mirabeau? White as chalk beneath her mask, she held her breath and glared from her steed at Pierrot. And Pierrot? Eyes bulging outward, he transfixed the little trapdoor in the ceiling below the orchestra stand.

Suddenly the giant stepped before the weight and faced the high priced seats. Above his head he raised his hands. "Once, twice, thrice!" On the third call he would swing and grasp and juggle with the dead weight as with a toy.

Click! Click!
 Pierrot, and only Pierrot, heard it. The violins and the flutes were murdering sound, and the clown's heart thumped his chest like a drumstick beating the time.

Click! Click!
 Up went the trapdoor, and a boy, a very little boy, hatless, but with a sun crisped thatch of curly hair, struggled through the ring. For a moment he hesitated, blinking his big blue eyes in the glare of light; then quick as a flash he was over on the big carpet star.

"Pierrot, Pierrot," breathed ma'am-selle, squeezing the cold fingers resting on her saddle.

"Once, twice—once, twice—whoop-lah!" shouted Hercules, bending swiftly and throwing his mighty arms between his legs.

But the boy was first. In his tiny hand he grasped the weight and, hoisting it to his slender shoulder, sped with it like a startled hare across the ring and out through the quivering curtain.

"Ah, ha! Ha, ha, ha!" It was one brief trickle of laughter accentuating the intense silence that followed, for in the thrill of a flute it all happened, and no one had attempted to stop him.

Rat-tat-tat!
 "Now, all together!" commanded the leader of the orchestra, coming gallantly to the rescue, and a bunch of mandolins and violins ripped the air. But music had no charms for the outraged audience, and at last the storm broke. Loud, long and deep voiced it raged—ribald laughter, shrill jeers, dark threats and hisses like the angry exhaust of steam.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!"
 In vain did the manager attempt to stem the avalanche, but like a sick man's whisper against a battery cannonade his explanations and apologies melted on soundless lips.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, one minute, and I will explain, I—"
 "Ye's can't do it! Ye's can't do it!" piped a thin, querulous voice.

"Tricksters! Swindlers! Money back! Money back! Boo for Barkalow!" chorused the galleries.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, I must tell you—I must tell you—"
 "Tell nuthin', nuthin' at all!" volleyed the leaders. "Square the deal at number eight an' screw out yer lights!"
 "Gentlemen, order, order!"
 "Hiss, hiss, hiss-s-s-s! Square the deal at number eight!"
 "Gentlemen, gentlemen—"
 "Hiss, hiss, hiss-s-s-s!"
 And in the ticket office a few minutes later, though he knew it not, the manager was paying back the fabulous price of a threat.

ANECDOTES OF ROYALTY.

A Good Story of the Late Duke of Clarence—Face, the Jester of Queen Elizabeth, and His Bitter Retorts.

The Emperor Charles VI. of Germany was passionately fond of music, and the composer Fuchs congratulated him on his skill, saying, "What a pity, sire, you are not a conductor."

"Well it can't be helped," replied Charles. "I am only an Emperor, and must make the best of it."
 Author's Gift.
 On being presented with the second volume of Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester (George III.'s brother) received the distinguished author with great affability, saying to him, as he laid the "quarto" on the table: "Another d—thick, square book! Always scribble, scribble, scribble! Eh, Mr. Gibbon?"

Seemed Familiar.
 Several amusing stories have been told of the late Duke of Clarence, who was King Edward's eldest son. The Prince was visiting his friend and tutor, Mr. Oscar Browning, at the latter's rooms in Cambridge University. There hung upon the walls an engraving of Windsor Castle, taken from a point of view unfamiliar, perhaps, to the young Prince.

"What a beautiful place!" he exclaimed, as he looked at the picture. "Somehow, I seem to know it. I think I must have been there!"
 "Windsor, sir, Windsor," said Mr. Browning. Of course, the Prince and everyone laughed heartily.

No Laughing Matter.
 The Prince Imperial, killed in South Africa in 1879, was one day talking with the young King of Spain, then Prince of Asturias.

"What," asked the former, "is the lesson you find hardest to learn?"
 The future King of Spain, in a lugubrious tone, replied, "Not to laugh at the theatre when I am amused!"

"They let me laugh as much as I like," replied the Prince Imperial. "But," he added, referring to Bismarck, who had come on a visit to Napoleon III., the Prince's father—"what I don't like is to be obliged to smile and look pleasant to men who I know are my father's enemies."

Strange Lingo.
 Prince Lucien Bonaparte, who died in 1891 at the age of seventy-eight, was a nephew of the great Emperor. He was a noted philologist, and lived long in England. The following story used to be told of him.

He was once presented with an address by an Irish municipal body, and by way of special compliment the document was composed and read in French. After listening to it the prince rose and, speaking in English, expressed his gratitude, but added that he could not reply to the address as he would have wished, since it was his misfortune not to understand the Irish language!

Met His Match.
 King Frederick William III. (of Prussia) was very spare of words. One day he learned that there was at Toplitz, where he was drinking the water, a Hungarian magnate still less talkative than His Majesty himself. An opportunity for a meeting was soon managed, and the following conversation took place, the King beginning: "Bathing?"

"Drinking," was the reply.
 "Soldier?"
 "Magistrate."
 "Good."
 "Policeman?"
 "King."
 "Compliments."

One Fault.
 The Emperor Francis of Germany one day took Lauderer, his eccentric Court chaplain, over his model farm at Laxenburg. On entering the stables, which were floored with marble, and fitted up in the most luxurious style, the Emperor said to his companion:

"You are much given to fault-finding. I know, but I fancy you will find nothing missing here."
 "Nothing, Your Majesty, except a sofa for each horse," was the reply.

Sharp Face.
 Pace, jester to Queen Elizabeth, was so bitter in his retorts upon Her Majesty that he was forbidden her presence. After an absence of some time friends intervened and entreated Her Majesty to receive him back into favor, engaging for him that he would be more guarded in his wit for the future.

The very first time they again met, however, Pace was as bad as ever. "Come on, Pace," said the Queen, in a gracious humor; "now we shall hear of our faults."
 "No, madam," replied Pace: "I never talk of what is discoursed by all the world!"

Painful Experiment.
 William Carstairs, the Scottish divine, was suspected of being implicated in the Rye House Plot, but when put to the excruciating torture of the thumbscrews he endured it heroically, without confessing or implicating others.

Some time after he became confidential secretary to William III., and was presented with the instrument by which he had been tortured. The King, wishing to see the measure of fortitude necessary to endure the terrible torture without making a confession of some sort, placed his thumbs in the machine and told Carstairs to turn the screw. He turned slowly and cautiously.

"It is unpleasant," said the King, "yet it might be endured. You are trifling with me; turn the screw so that I may really feel pain similar to that you felt."
 Carstairs gave a sharp turn. The King shouted with pain, and when released said that under such agony he would have confessed to anything, true or false.

Queen Cophetua And the Beggar Man By KEITH GORDON

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"Oo, no," concluded Askew, regarding his hostess intently with just that touch of cool mastery in his glance which always made her wonder if the telltale blood were rising in her cheeks and which, at the present moment, caused her somewhat haughty eyes to avoid him, like quivering, cornered animals. "A man's manhood is a greater thing even than his love! And the poor man who asks a rich woman to marry him is like the chap who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage."

"You place a high value upon love!" she murmured, and despite her efforts there was a little catch in her breath.

"Yes, I think I do," he resumed imperturbably, "so high a value, in fact, that I would place it above all suspicion—above even the suspicion of suspicion!" he ended in an emphatic tone.

Considering that the two were platonic friends of several years' standing, the air of the drawing room seemed curiously surcharged with meaning. Though they sat in silence with their eyes fixed upon the open fire for some time after Askew's last remark, each was fully aware of the other's thoughts, and each listened to the regular ticking of the clock with a vague impression that the sound was ominous with love and heartbreak.

Askew was a man of thirty, with a square jaw, strongly cut features and that pronounced air of masculinity that caused Miss Vance to reeZe with a thrill that to such a man his manhood, as he had said, must be first! It could not possibly be otherwise. Deep down in his heart of hearts a woman might reign—loved with the passion that only such natures can feel, but never really dominating his life.

Always he would be complete master of himself—and of her! He would love her with a tenderness strong and deep. In her own domain she would be supreme, but that domain would never be coextensive with his own larger life. And yet, to the tips of her fingers, she felt that she would rather be loved by him than by any other man in the world!

Moreover, she was loved by him! She knew it, though he had never by so much as a word admitted it. She was as sure of it as she was of her own love for him, and at the mere thought the blood danced riotously through her veins and her head involuntarily went up. No queen could be prouder, no mere woman more humble, than that thought made her.

Few of her associates would have recognized the expression that softened and glorified the face of the "haughty Miss Vance," as she was called behind her back, as she turned more fully toward Donald Askew and demanded softly:

"Do you mean to say that if you happened to fall in love with a rich woman—and—and—"

"And?" he interrogated.
 "And she loved you—or you had reason to think that she did!"

For the second time she paused with a confused impression that the air of the room was suddenly exhausted and that breathing was by no means the simple, natural matter it had always seemed.

"Do you mean to say," she blurted out, with schoolgirlish impetuosity, "that you would not tell her that you loved her?"

"Never in the world!" was the deliberate reply. "Never!" Then he added coolly, "But I should be careful not to do anything so asinine as to fall in love with a rich girl in the first place, knowing, as I do, that the money-making talent is not one to which I can lay claim."

For a moment her heart turned to ice. Then the blood flowed back warm and strong, and she understood. He was taking this stand in the hope of throwing her off the track, because his fantastic sense of honor put him out of the running, and he wished to divest himself even of the interest that an undeclared love might arouse in her. She could have laughed for very joy at his dissembling.

"What would you do assuming that in spite of yourself you should fall in love with an heiress?" she persisted.

He fenced manfully. "Well, I think I should clear out. It would be the best thing to do in a case like that."
 Miss Vance, the haughty Miss Vance, the heiress of the Vance millions, regarded him demurely. She was a person who was accustomed to having her wishes complied with. She wondered vaguely what it was about the man before her that made her ready, eager even, to step down from the regal position she had always occupied and sue for his favor; why in her eyes he should seem the king! And when at last she spoke her voice was almost wistful.

"But what about the woman—the poor rich woman? Perhaps—perhaps she might hate her riches—she might just loathe them. But what could she do? Perhaps they came to her and she could not get rid of them any more than she could change the color of her eyes or the shape of her nose! And what if, in spite of it all, she loved you? Shouldn't you consider her at all?"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Askew, with mock dismay. "How did we ever get into such a sentimental discussion—two good comrades like you and me? By the way," he went on quickly, "have I happened to mention to you that I'm going off for a while—possibly for good?"
 "It's an excellent business offer, but

it takes me to the other side of the continent. I have not actually seen, but I shall doubtless accept, I can scarcely afford not several reasons."

He did not look at her, and she perturbation on his part. A quick lution seized her. It was leap—blessed thought—and why should a woman, once in a thousand years, stand up and demand her fearlessly and directly as a man do? Had she not, by every woman may use, tried to make knowledge his love for her? never—never would he ask her why she loved him because of her millions, then, she would ask him!

The first tumult of her resolve, she felt a strange exhilaration. Even the thought that intruded, like a specter between them—the ability that she might have in his feeling toward her—did not her.

If she were rejected? Well, she rejected a number of men in her and there would be a certain justice in his meting out to her she had meted out to them!

While these thoughts were through her mind she had touched bell.

"Remember, Smithson, I am a be disturbed," she threw over her shoulder to the butler.

"You might light a cigar if you one about you," she suggested sically. "It would be a favor to you would. Men are always more proachable when they're smaren't they?"

Askew smiled assent and com with her request. Then he pe with the lighted cigar between his gers and gave her a long look, she returned unflinchingly. With effort she began to speak.

"Duncan," she said bravely, "I something to tell you. Perhaps no other woman in the world would and perhaps you'll hate me for it!"

"Hate you?" he interrupted in a whose derisive incredulity was n to her ears. "Hate you! I can't ine a good many things, but not t!"

"Well"—her voice was slightly certain, but her eyes looked into without wavering—"you see, there poor rich girl—a girl who has load money and who just hates it bec it is always cutting her off from the things and people she cares for."

"Poor thing!" sighed Askew mngly. "What a pity she can't di with me!"

"That's just what she wants to leaped from her lips. "She want give it all to you. You see—I speaking for her. She isn't in the h of saying things like this to men, she doesn't know—exactly how to it. But she wants you to know she thinks you the one man in world; that her faith in you is so g that she even dares to tell you th she—loves—you—Donald—because knows that if she has made a mist and you do not care for her you be as truthful with her as she has t with you."

Donald Askew sat as if stupe while the struggle between pride love went on within him. To be ped out as the man who married rich Miss Vance, to have it said of that he had feathered his nest w these and kindred possibilities rose in his mind and galled his spirit yond endurance.

Then his vision cleared, and he nothing, was conscious of nothing the world but a proud, sensitive f covered with womanly shame. Bef that vision his pride went down, a leaning forward, he buried his face her lap. A moment later her touched his hair.

"I'm a brute, a perfect brute," groaned, "to have made you do it!"
 "You're the brute I love, thoug was the whispered answer.

Optical Exaggeration.
 Owen Wister, writing of his experience with "The White Goat and Country," mentions a circumstance which will perhaps recall to naturalists and hunters some miscalculations their own. He had traveled across continent in the hope of killing w goats, and of course he had w goats in his eye.

By 10 o'clock the next morning, and I saw "300" goats on the mountain opposite where we had climb. Just here I will risk a generalization. When a trapper tells you he has so many hundred head of game, has not counted them, but he believes what he says.

The goats that T. and I now look at were a mile away in an air l and they seemed numberless. The ture which the white, slightly mov dots made, like mites on a cheese, clined one to a large estimate of the since they covered the whole side of hill.

The more we looked the more found. Besides the main army of were groups, caucuses, families sit apart over some discourse too intig for the general public, and be these we could discern single and moving, gazing, browsing, lying d. "There's 100,000 goats!" said T. "Let's count 'em," I suggested, we took the glasses. There were ty-five.

Good Old Stories.
 "There's no doubt about it; getting on in politics."
 "He hasn't done anything in ticular."
 "No. But they are telling the anecdotes about him that they to tell about Henry Clay and Webster."—Washington Star.

Their Start.
 "Where did they go on their moon?"
 "To the hospital. You see, th so many fool friends."—Chicago Herald.