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**MY LADY OF DOUBT**  
BY RANDALL PARRISH  
Author of "Love Under Fire," "My Lady of the North Sea"  
Illustrations by HENRY THURNE



The man addressed grabbed the limp figure far from gently, and hustled him through the door. As the others disappeared, leading the three horses, Mortimer grasped his sleeve. "That's Preacher Jenks," he whispered, "from down at the Cross Roads. What can Fagin want of him?" "If Fagin is Grant's tool, and Grant is here," I answered soberly, "I am ready to make a guess at what is up." The recollection of the captain's threat at the summer-house instantly recurred to memory. "Here, you lads skulk down into these bushes, while I try that balcony. That is the library, isn't it, Eric? I thought so; I've been under guard there twice. The window shows no light, but some one is in the room beyond. Give me a leg up, Tom, and stand close so you can hear if I speak."

It was not high from the ground, but I could not grip the top of the rail without help. With Tom's assistance I went over lightly enough, and with out noise. The window was the one which had been broken during the first assault on the house, and never repaired. I found ample room for crawling through the door into the hall stood partly ajar, a little light streaming through the crack, so I experienced no difficulty in moving about freely. A glance told me the apartment was unoccupied, although I heard the murmur of distant voices earnestly conversing. Occasionally an emphatic oath sounded clear and distinct. My first thought was that the men within would be better concealed here than in the bushes below, and I leaned over the rail, and bade them join me. Within another minute the three of us were in the room intently listening. I stole across to the crack of the door. The hall was empty so far as I could see looking toward the rear of the house, and the voices we heard were evidently in the dining-room. Occasionally there was a clatter of dishes, or the scraping of a chair on the polished floor. One voice sang out an order to a servant, a nasal voice, slightly thickened by wine, and I wheeled about, gazing inquiringly into Mortimer's face.

"That's Grant," he said quickly, "and half drunk."

"I thought so; that's when he is really dangerous. Stay close here; if



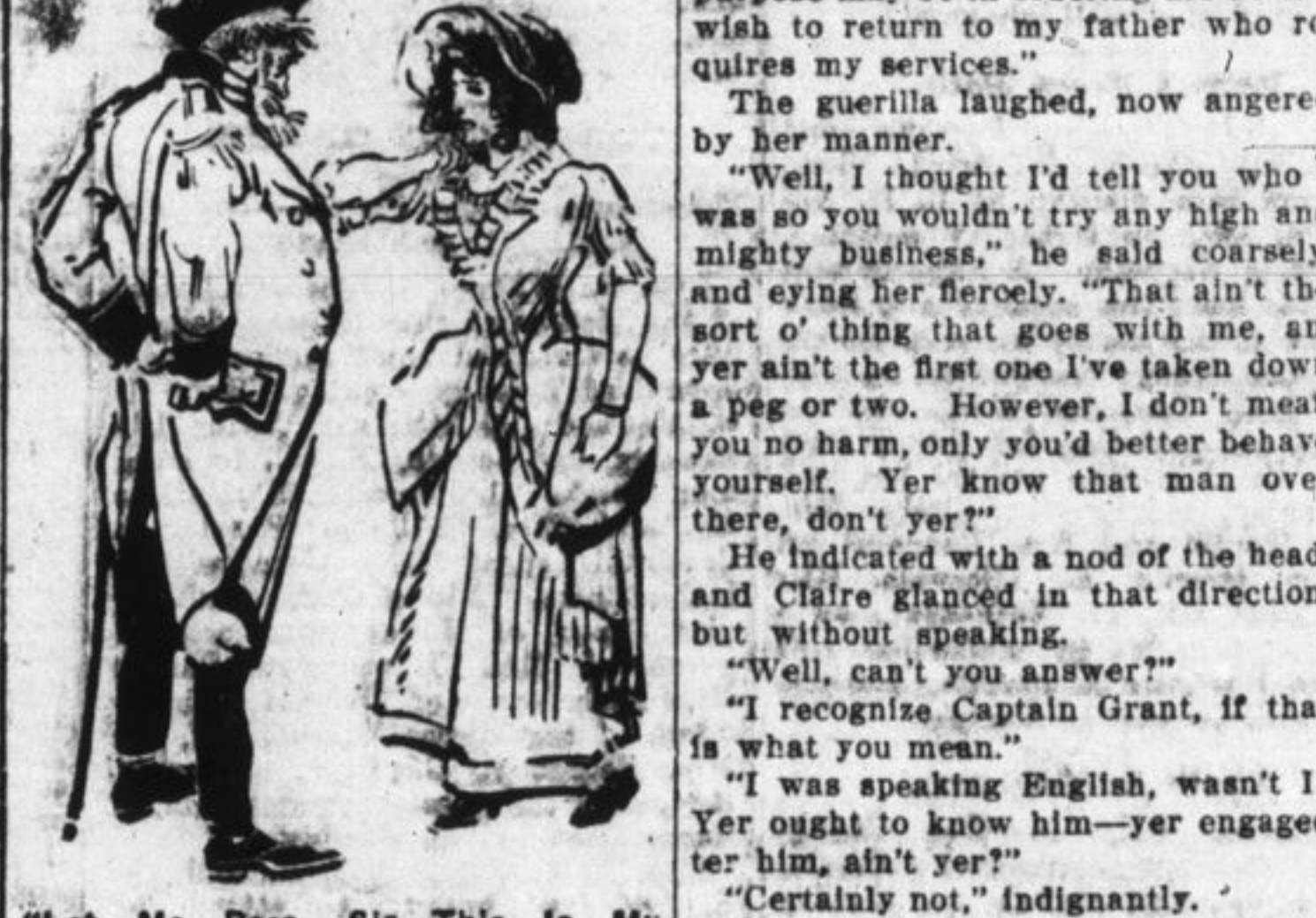
**Fagin Roared Out: "What is it Now? Heard From Culver?"**

the hallway is clear I am going to get into the shadow there under the stairs. Have your weapons ready."

Where the fellow was who had been at the front door I could not determine. He had disappeared somehow, and I slipped along the wall for the necessary ten feet like a shadow, and crept in beneath the shelter of the staircase. From here I could look into the room opposite, although only a portion of the space was revealed. There was no cloth on the table, and but few dishes, but I counted a half-dozen bottles, mostly empty, and numerous glasses. Grant was at one end, his uniform dusty and stained, but his eyes alone betraying intoxication. Beside him was a tall, stoop-shouldered man, with matted beard, wearing the coat of a British Grenadier, but with all insignia of rank ripped from it. He had a mean mouth, and yellow, fang-like teeth were displayed whenever he spoke. Beyond this fellow, and only half seen from where I crouched, was a heavy-set individual, his face almost purple, with a thatch of uncombed red hair. He wore the cocked hat of a Dragoon, pushed to the back of his head, his feet were encased in long cavalry boots, crossed on the table, and he was pulling furiously at a pipe, the stem gripped firmly between his teeth. Who the bearded man might be I had no means of knowing, but this beauty was without doubt Fagin. I stared at him, fascinated, recalling the stories of his fiendish cruelty, my heart thumping violently, while my fingers gripped the butt of my pistol. Then, without warning, a man stepped out of the darkened parlor, passed within three feet of my hiding place, and stood within the dining-room door. The three within looked at him, and Fagin

men were close at hand. Within a minute the entire squad would be crowded into that room, eager for trouble to begin. Probably Fagin did not have a half-dozen fellows in the house. If we could strike swiftly enough we might overpower them all, without creating alarm outside, where the main body lay. Some carelessness had brought us good luck in having the front of the house left unguarded. These thoughts swept over me, and left me confident. The time had come when I was to serve her, to prove my own worthiness. I felt ready and eager for the trial.

I caught a glimpse of Jenks' face, as Bill jerked him forward. The man was gray with terror, his parchment-like skin seamed and contorted. He



**"Let Me Pass, Sir—This Is My Father's House."**

was a tall, loose-jointed creature, wearing a long black coat flapping about his knees. The guard fairly held him up in the doorway, and both Fagin and Jones laughed at the pitiful sight, the former ending his roar with an outburst of profanity.

"Go on back to the front door, Bill," he ordered roughly. "This fellow'll never run away; his legs wouldn't carry him. Now, Mr. Preacher, following savagely at the poor devil across the bottle-strewn table, "do you know who I am?"

Jenks endeavored to answer, from the convulsive movement of his throat, but made no sound. Fagin cursed again.

"If it wasn't such a waste of good liquor I'd pour some of this down your gullet," he exclaimed, shaking a half-filled bottle in his fist. "Then maybe you could answer when I spoke to you. Now, see here, you canting old hypocrite, I'm Red Fagin, an' I guess you know what that means. I'm pisen, an' I don't like yer style. Now you're goin' to do just what I tell you, or the boys will have a hangin' bee down in the ravine. Speak up, an' tell me what you propose to do."

Jenks wet his dry lips with his tongue, clinging to the sides of the door with both hands.

"What—what is it you wish of me?" his uncertain gaze wandering over the three faces, but coming back to Fagin.

"You are to marry this officer here to a young lady."

"What—what young lady?"

"Mortimer's daughter—Claire is the name, isn't it, Grant? Yes, Claire; you know her, I reckon."

I could hear the unfortunate man breathe in the silence, but Fagin's eyes threatened.

"Is—she here?" he faltered helplessly. "Does she desire the—ceremony?"

"That doesn't happen to be any of your business," broke in Fagin bluntly. "This is my affair, an' the fewer questions you ask the better. If we want some fun, what the hell have you got to do with it, you snivelling spoilsport? I haven't much chance to get out, does there, parson? Well, I reckon it won't hurt your conscience, particularly, Bill! Where's Bill?"

"You sent him to guard the front door," explained Jones.

"That's right, I did. You'll do just as well. Go up stairs, an' bring the girl down. She's with the old man, an' Culberson is guarding the door. Better not say what she's wanted for. Just tell her Captain Grant wishes to speak to her a moment."

Jones straightened up, and pushed past the preacher, the stairs creaking under his weight as he went up over my head. Grant arose, and stood looking out the window into the glow of the sunshine, and Jenks dropped into the nearest chair, still sitting across the table at Fagin. For the first time I seemed to entirely grasp the situation. I got to my feet, yet dare not move so much as a step, for Fagin was facing the hallway. It apparently would be better to wait until after the girl came down stairs, until those in the house were all together, before we struck. I wanted to know what she would say, how she would act, when she understood what was proposed. The time allowed me for decision was short, as it seemed scarcely a minute before I heard their footsteps above.

**CHAPTER XXXII.**

**A Threatened Marriage.**

Fagin heard them coming, and took his boots from the table, and sat up straight in his chair; the preacher pushed his back until half concealed behind the door; Grant eyed Jenks

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