The House That Stood Back

by A. C. Andrews

Wherein Is Set Forth the Adventures of the Mad Patriarch, Involving the Purple Curtains and Beauty in Distress

THE SILENCE of the dining room had not been broken since the entrance of the parlor maid and the coffee. With his pad on his knee, happy, absorbed, the house's master, Farrant, the novelist, wrote hard at a last chapter over whose beauty and eloquence the critics would, in due season, wax deservedly enthusiastic.

Barraclough, lying back in his chair, was half way through a third cigaret. On the hall, immediately facing him, hung a calendar of the kind known as "block." The date it showed was the 14th of May. His eyes rested upon it. And the smile that now and then twisted his lips was not a pleasant one.

"I conclude"—he spoke without moving—"I conclude you don't, by any chance, happen to remember the date?"

"Eh?" inquired Farrant, half glancing up. He was naturally a person of brevity.

"The 14th of May," proceeded Barraclough smoothly. "You had perhaps overlooked it? Or imagined that I had? Not at all. Or that tomorrow is consequently the 15th. Otherwise, my wedding day?"

"You didn't want me to remind you, I suppose?" said Farrant.

"Again, not at all—it was quite unnecessary," returned Barraclough levelly. He turned in his chair, laughed. "I wonder if you also recollect a talk we once had? Just before you married Margaret. You suggested that, instead of celebrating the last night of his bachelorhood with usual flareup, a man who saw his heaven opening would do better to spend it in saying his prayers. Don't know whether you carried out your own programme——"

"Yes, I did."

Ah! Well, results have justified you—I don't dispute it. I was about to say that I recollect cordially agreeing. And—privately—deciding that when my time came, if it did, I would do likewise. Which reveals me as having been a particularly crass idiot!" He stood up with a yawn. "To relapse upon the accepted parlance, I am about to make a night of it."

"Don't you"—admonished Farrant of the eloquent pen and the inelo quent tongue—"don't you get making a dashed ass of yourself!"

"The town," went on Barraclough, unheedingly, "will be painted exceedingly red. To look upon the wine when of a corresponding hue is, I presume, the shortest road to the desired result? We shall see."

"I wish"—growled Farrant uneasily—"I wish Margaret were here, confound you!"

Those who knew him merely well were wont to declare that he cared for but two things, his wife and his work. The few who knew him better were aware that he cared for at least a third thing, which was his friend. Barraclough laughed.

"I have," he said deliberately, "the highest respect for your wife. If she were here she would probably enter upon expostulations which I should be forced to disregard. Therefore I considered it rather fortunate that she is called out of town. As she may possibly, after tonight, decline my further acquaintance, I should like her to know that your hospitality for the last two months has been perhaps more appreciated than either she or you——"

"Rot!" Farrant rose. "The last two months!" he said bluntly. "I wonder if you realize what you have done for yourself in the last two months? O, I'm not thinking of your losses at cards and so on, though I happen to know they have been frightful. It's—things in general. Good heaven, you don't suppose people don't know? Why, you've not so much as set your foot inside your chambers. Look at the briefs you were getting, and at your age! Why, you'd the ball at your feet." He paused, watching the smile, again far from pleasant, that twitched the other's lips. "O, I might as well hold my tongue, of course! But I can't see you deliberately kick down your whole career and say nothing . . . Look here, if you must go—I can spare the evening—I'll come with you."

Barraclough laughed again.

"I think not," he dissented. "Margaret advised you not to let me out of your sight, I suppose? Yes, I see she did. Fortunately for her—and yourself—you are not an exponent of realism. Consequently you will remain where you are. For myself, I shall get riotously, roaringly, ravingly drunk. What may follow is on the knees of the gods. You will probably be called upon to bail me out, supposing that I am bailable. For the present—good night."

Farrant attempted no answer—the man of few words knew when it was futile to use any; he turned away with a shrug. Barraclough, at the door, stopped and glanced back. Then crossed over quickly and held out his hand. As was sometimes the case, he looked suddenly almost boyishly young.

"Thanks, old man," he said quietly. "Good night."

Farrant nodded and echoed the good night. Barraclough went out, in a few minutes was strolling leisurely through the warm, dry streets. Leisurely, because the night was still young. And before the morning there were many hours. A sudden thought, idea, presently brought him, with a laugh, to a standstill at a corner. An adjacent flower girl, observantly on the watch, accosted him. He laughed again, waving away the white rose she extended.

"Unsuitable, my dear," he said seriously. "Red, if you please. The reddest thing in your basket. A match, if possible, for—for the occasion. Ah, yes, thanks—that'll do!"

Turning away with the offered red flower in his buttonhole, he walked now at a pace which told of a settled purpose. Which purpose took him straightway to a certain famous square that is an acknowledged center of the center of things. The house he approached was brilliantly lighted and gay with flowering windows; a footman hovered, waiting, near the great cream-and-gold motor that purred by the curb; the doors stood open; there were glimpses of more flowers, more footmen, an immaculate butler, a fluttering French maid.

As he halted another figure approached, a woman's. She paused for a moment while the maid placed a cloak on her shoulders, then advanced, slowly descending the steps. The cloak was all chiffon and lace and embroideries, transparent and airy as a cloud; through it there showered the curves of a perfect figure, the glitter of jewels on neck and arms, the gleam of a wonderful frock; the light was bright upon piled blonde hair, upon the rose and white of a beautiful face; she was of a type that, while hardly past girlhood, blooms into a vivid and superb maturity. Barraclough gave a laugh, advancing. He thrust away the hovering footman, as she reached the car stood bareheaded with the door held wide.

"It is a fine evening," he said smiling, and bowed to her. She fell back with caught breath.

"O!" she gasped. "O!" and stared at him; her rose overwashed with the pallor of fright. He repeated the smile—it was very ugly.

"A fine evening," he said again. "An evening to herald a perfect day. Tomorrow should be all that can be desired. You think so?"

"Why — What do you — How — how dare——," she stammered, incoherently. And with the disjointed words sprang past into the car. "Go—go away," she panted, and cowered with scared eyes. "I—I——" Barraclough smiled once more.

"You are well content!" he suggested, suavely. "O, I do not doubt it! The diamonds are admirable. And the frock—Paquin, I think? Ah, yes—the touch is inimitable! By the way, my apologies—I once called you worthless. Most unjust! At the present moment you are, incontestably worth a great deal!"

"This—this is hateful of you! I—I won't be insulted," she cried, shrinking more and trembling. Barraclough, sweeping a bow that in its depth touched mockery, was aware of another figure descending the steps, a man pompous and portly, bald and florid; knew, as he moved away at a pace studiedly slow, that, after a moment's hurried colloquy, he was followed. His stop and turn were so abruptly sharp that the other started, almost recoiled. And, recovering, burst into speech of agitated bluster, stuttering:

"What—what's the meaning of this, sir?" he demanded. "I—I am——"

"Frightened?" suplied Barraclough, smoothly, smiling.

"Indignant, sir—most indignant! It—it is infamous that you should—I don't know whether you are drunk—"

"Not yet," said Barraclough, more blandly.

"It—it is an outrage, sir! If—if it should occur again I warn you that I shall at once——"

"Go to the devil!" said Barraclough, very pleasantly. His hand on the other's collar swung him about; he laughed and walked on. In a minute the motor passed him; he had a glimpse of a blonde head, of jewels on a white neck, and opposite a face of flushed rage and perturbation. His sauntering stride took him out of the square, took him through adjacent squares. He paused presently to glance at his watch, from it to the name of the street. Time was getting on. And near was a certain night club, heard of because unsavorily notorious, but never seen. At the back of his mind there had perhaps been some idea of the night club? This turning should be on the way—he went down the turning. A street of flat-faced houses, dull, respectable, silent. And, but for himself, empty. Odd, how at certain hours, parts of this vast London, the thronged and throbbing, could seem more utterly deserted, solitary than——

"It is gone! What shall I do? I have dropped, lost it! Ah, little imbecile I am! I cannot go! And there is nowhere else. My faith, what shall I do?" moaned a voice.

It spoke in French. A voice, broken, half-sobbing, bewildered, panic-stricken. And certainly feminine. Barraclough, walking in the roadway, swung round. On the pavement, in the shadow, a dark shape stooped, shook its garments, searched, it seemed wildly, with fresh ejaculations of dismay and distress. He advanced, hesitated, spoke.

"I beg your pardon," he began. "I——" The figure, girl or woman, started up.

"No, no! she cried. "You must not speak to me, monsieur. I—I do not answer. Go—go on!"

"But you are in trouble—have dropped,—lost something?" Barraclough persisted. "Your purse, perhaps? If so——"

"No, no! It does not matter. It is nothing, monsieur. If you please, leave me and go on."

She had shrunk back against the railings, putting out a defensive ungloved hand; from a bangle encircling the slender wrist a little silver heart hung down. A small, slight thing in shabby black, a girl who was almost a child, 16 or 17 perhaps. A delicate oval face gleaming like a pearl against dark hair. An extraordinary fine finish in the curve of the cheek, in the lines of the nostril and mouth and chin. Dilated black-lashed eyes that, as the light of a near lamp caught them, showed a mingling color of violet and green. Barraclough looked at all these—at the little, piteous, trembling, repelling hand. And he moved to stand bareheaded under the lamp.

"Mademoiselle," said in his difficult, slow French, "I have a sister who is, I think, not much older than you. It may one day chance—who can tell?—that she finds herself in a strange land, like you, in a difficulty like yours. If that should happen I hope there may be also a man to speak to her as I venture to speak to you, to offer her his services as I offer mine to you. I can say no more."

He waited. Of the face the girl's upward gaze searched. Farrant and

The curtains had moved, were parted. Barraclough dragged his eyes away—if the other turned, saw—"I am to take your drug?" he asked.

Margaret, his wife, could have pointed to lines about eyes and mouth, to a stubborn setting of jaw and a certain recklessly hardened air as things that had not been there two months ago. Perhaps, seeing, she failed to read them. Perhaps saw only a face at which women, looking once, had usually looked again. Her scrutiny lasted only a moment. She put out her hand with a diffident gesture.

"I will tell you, monsieur," she said simply.

"That is well. This is your way? We will walk on," said Barraclough. "And now—I was right? You have lost your purse?"

"Yes, monsieur. And I have no more money, not a sou—nothing! But first, if you please, I will explain. I came to England seven, eight months ago, to my brother, Charles. He had lived here several years and taught the languages, our French and Spanish and Italian—he was, O, very clever! But he wrote that he was ill, and wanted some one to care for him; he asked me to come. Our mother—our stepmother—had married again, her new husband had also children—there was no home for me, you understand. So I was glad, very glad, to come to Charles. I nursed him, but he did not get better—the doctor said he had worked too hard. In two months he died, monsieur!"

"And since?" asked Barraclough gently.

Since she had worked, she answered—all Charles' money had gone in his illness. She had tried to teach, but she knew so little, had been taught so little, and could not speak the language. She had tried to sew, but did it "O, so badly!"—people were angry, and the pay so very small; poignantly, unconsciously, she sketched a picture of a frightened child, solitary, shrinking from coming hunger—"there was no home, you understand, monsieur."

Now she had obtained a post with a South African family returning to the Cape, partly as maid, partly as nurse. It was not what Charles would have wished, or her father, but to live one must work—was it not so? They had gone to the port from which the vessel sailed; she was to follow by this night's train. Now, on her way to the station, her luggage already gone, she had missed her purse, had somehow dropped it—lost it—Barraclough met the tragic look, the little tragic gesture, with a reassuring smile.

"That, at least, need not trouble you," he said, cheerfully. "You will do me the honor, mademoiselle, of allowing me to supply what you need. It is too little to be worth thanks. And—yes—if you desire, you shall return it—I will give you my card with my address. Then, at some time in the future, when it is more than easy, you can send it back to me."

Turning back, they were now in the thoroughfare where he had halted to look at the name of the street. He took out his pocketbook, slipping a card into the folded notes he handed her, watching as she carefully placed the packet in an inner pocket of the shabby black coat. A little lower down, posted on a refuge, that most dependable feature of modern London, a policeman, was standing—with a word or two of explanation he led her across.

The young lady did not speak English; she wanted to take a certain train from a certain station; would he whistle a taxi, see her safely into it, make the driver fully understand where he was to go? he asked. The constable accepted the charge and its appropriate accompaniment with a cheerful alacrity. Barraclough bowed gravely over a little cold hand from whose slender wrist the silver heart hung down and turned away. Glancing back when he had gone some 50 yards, he saw the childish figure standing beside the sturdy form in blue and knew from the turn of the head that the violet green eyes watched him. Involuntarily the last words of her fervent thanks came to his tongue.

"She will never forget! And le bon Dieu will bless me!" he said, half aloud. "Humph! I am not past praying for, it seems! What a child to be alone! I don't think I ever saw quite so exquisite a little face!" He laughed suddenly, cynically. "Bah—a most inappropriate interlude! Now, which way do we go? Down here?"

The turning whose corner he had reached must run about parallel with the other, would suit his purpose equally. Pausing to light a cirarette, his thoughts went back to Farrant, who would probably work himself into a deuce of a stew before morning! A brick, Farrant, straight, clean, honest. But every reason to be, married to a woman who adored him and whom he adored, who would stick to him through thick and thin. A man might well run straight, make good, with that incentive—something to do it for! . . . Suppose he chucked up this rot—after all, it was rot!—went back—no, hanged if he would! He went down the turning. As badly lighted as the other, as deserted as the other. On the opposite side, area railings of what were most likely the backs of offices. On the side he walked, some empty shops—a block of evident warehouses—a patch of uneven flagstones—standing back, beyond it, a flat-faced house—more warehouses — Barraclough, stopping, swung about.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated loudly.

The lights had flared up with the rapidity of a lightning flash. Had flared up, at the moment that he passed it, in the lower windows of the house that stood back. Flared up behind blinds of a most unusual color, a deep and vivid purple. And at the same instant had come the cry. A cry there was no mistaking, for only from a woman's throat could burst that shrilly quavered moan of anguish and fear. It shivered into silence. And rose again piercingly into a wild shriek of terror, while, shadowed on one of the purple blinds, Barraclough caught the man's outline—the arm swung upward menacingly, the clenched hand grasping the knife—and shouted as he dashed across the uneven flags to the door. The door yielded as he touched it, was open—he dashed in. He dashed in and the lights went out. Something caught his foot; in black darkness he stumbled heavily to his knees. Hands were upon him in the darkness, sinewy, powerful; something damp, sweet savored, sickly, was pressed hard over his nostrils and mouth. The darkness spread to his brain, flooding the world. And out of it, far off, came laughter.

Barraclough, opening his eyes, found them stabbed by vivid light. Closing them, he slowly put up a hand to his forehead and felt it wet, was conscious of a sensation in his nostrils of something pungent and stinging. He opened his eyes again. Facing him as he lay—he was lying—a fall of drapery, of curtains. Heavy curtains, almost but not quite meeting. Purple curtains? Yes, purple. A hideous color, purple. A hateful color. Turning his eyes, they took in a patch of purple rug, part of a purple chair, a corner—there was a rustle at his head; someone was standing before him, was looking down as he looked up.

"Permit me," said a voice courteously, gently. "Dr. Casimer La Rue."

Barraclough found himself repeating the name. It was oddly difficult to do this. It had been oddly difficult to raise his head, to turn his eyes. And he looked at Dr. Casimer La Rue. A black clad figure. Tall, lean to gauntness. Remarkable in breadth of shoulder, depth of chest, length of arm. Immensely powerful, probably. Very delicately kept, long-fingered hands. White hair, rolled back from a broad forehead; white mustache and beard. A distinctly handsome face; intensely blue eyes. An expression quite extraordinarily serene, benign, benevolent. Yes. Yes. But standing so he blotted out the curtains. The purple curtains. The purple—memory stirred, struggled—Barraclough strove to lift his head.

"The woman!" he exclaimed.

"The woman——?"

"Who was here. I heard her scream."

"Pardon me—no. You heard no woman. Listen," said Dr. La Rue.

At the curtains he parted them, reaching a hand through the opening. The movement showed vaguely a dark room, faintly sketched in the darkness a square window masked by a blind. The room must lie to the front. For shadowed upon the blind—the purple blind—of such a window he had seen—there was a click. And the moan, the terrible, shrill quaver of anguish and fear, made its shuddering outcry. The doctor moved back. Barraclough met his smile, his gesture.

"A phonograph!" he exclaimed.

"Exactly—a phonograph. You find it realistic? Ah, even in her most trivial moments science is wonderful! But we will not, I think, have the scream. It is attended, necessarily, with more or less risk. Though, at this hour, with very little, very—practically none. Also realistic, was it not? And, combined with this——!"

His turn, his darting arm, were lightning swift. And the caught-up knife quivered in his clenched hand with the gesture of the shadow on the blind! Barraclough struggled; memory, complete, flooding, rushed upon him. The sudden darkness — his stumble in the darkness—the suffocating pressure that had stifled his senses—the laugh—the laugh that came now told everything. Mad! The man was mad! And, painted as though upon running water came a vision of the street, its empty shops and warehouses, its silence, desertion!

"I am bound!" cried Barraclough.

He had struggled again, desperately, futilely. His head was upon a cushion. He could raise it from the neck. His right arm was free. Nothing else was free. From throat to feet, crossing, recrossing, went broad, white bandages, securing him to the bench — it seemed a bench — upon which he lay. They were nowhere painful, nowhere tight, but they held him as helplessly as a caught bird in a closed hand. The other moved to the side of the bench.

"You are bound—yes," he assented. "But not, I trust, uncomfortably. Before explaining—I desire to fully explain—may I suggest that but for ourselves the house is empty? As for passersby—I should so much regret—I have waited so long!—but should there—Ah, no—you will not call!"

From the street, muffled but audible, had come the sound of feet; voices, laughter—Barraclough's lips had parted for a cry. And in a flash the knife point was above his heart. The sounds were close, were passing, were dwindling, were—

"I should so much regret—yet . . . But you will not call, I think?" repeated Dr. La Rue.

"I shall not call," said Barraclough.

He met the pleading eyes, the kindly eyes, the mad eyes, and felt that he looked into the eyes of death. Death that might be postponed for probable minutes, for possible hours, but, without a miracle, inevitable death. Without a miracle . . . . The doctor laid down the knife. He drew forward a chair, seating himself, and bent his whole head with a smile.

"I thank you," he said gently. "You lie without discomfort, I hope? Good. And now my explanation. Is it necessary to enter into the details of my little trap—ingenious, I think?—or into what followed your entry? No—you are intelligent—as satisfactory in that respect as in youth and physique. All, in fact, that I desire—I am most fortunate! You understand that I watched at the window? I do so always. It is long since the first time, long since all was ready. Weeks? Months? I do not know—I do not count. But I have patience—much patience. They who serve Science must possess that first of all, as they must follow her backoning through all and in spite of all. I waited. Men passed—I let them pass. They were not worthy. You came, and the honor falls to you—the honor which you shall share with me, Casimer La Rue! Share deservedly, since, understanding, you must rejoice at an opportunity so glorious. For to you it falls to prove the power of my drug!"

"Of your drug?" repeated Barraclough.

His eyes were upon the purple curtains, the curtains that hid the dark room. His brain was clear—he knew his brain was clear. But at the moment when the noise from the street was loudest, at the moment when the knife had been held above his heart, there had seemed to come a sound from beyond them—a sound like a desperately caught breath. And now? Did they move? An inch? Less than an inch? As if touched by a furtive hand. But still move? . . .

The doctor was pouring out a torrent of words. Of his drug. The drug was his life work. The drug was the most gigantic contribution to science which the century could show. Which any century could show. The drug would render the now impossible the commonplaces of every day, would open wonders in the future of which no man had dared to dream. There were no bounds or limits to the vast, the marvelous, potentialities of the drug. Throughout the ages the world's once martyred peoples would, acclaiming it, acclaim also the name of Casimer La Rue! . . . There was but one drawback, one stumbling block—he was not sure of, had been unable to ascertain with precision the force and manner of its action upon the heart. Animals were useless for experiment—the drug was for man, was—The curtains had moved, were parted; from beyond, divined, rather than seen, was flung a frantic gesture of warning! Barraclough dragged his eyes away—if the other turned, saw—Hope, wild hope, held his voice to steadiness.

"I am to take your drug?" he asked.

"You are to drink it—yes?" said Dr. La Rue.

Checked in his rhapsody, it was after a pause that he answered, and rose to his feet. His back was still toward the curtains. The curtains parted again, parted more—Barraclough saw. A miracle? The French girl! Her little figure in the shabby black, desperate terror and horror painted upon her face and in her dilated eyes, passionate encouragement in the movement of the childish hand from whose wrist the little silver heart hung down—so, for a breath's length she was visible before the purple curtains fell soundlessly together and the other spoke again.

"You will drink," he repeated. "You find that you are able to lift your head, observe that your arm is at liberty? With intention. It is my desire that you should drink freely. To the success which must henceforth be so magnificent, to the sacrifice that is so infinitesimally small! You understand? You will drink. And you will sleep."

"I shall sleep," repeated Barraclough, and felt his forehead cold. "I shall sleep. You will observe until I wake? Afterward——?"

"There is no afterward," said Dr. La Rue.

Barraclough kept his eyes upon him. But he knew that the curtains had moved again that the little face peered fearfully through. How came the child there? Being there, why did she not go? Fetch help? Could she go? Who could answer for what might hold her helpless in this frightful house? And if her nerve failed her for a moment——

"There is no afterwards," said Dr. La Rue. "You will sleep. You will wake. For a time you will suffer. Probably acutely. I think, I fear, acutely. Then will come the end. And I shall have seen, shall have made my tests—have grasped the knowledge I lack! Beside which nothing matters. You agree?"

He waited for the assent. Barraclough gave the assent. His ears were straining. Absolute silence in the street. A night—policeman within hearing? The forlornest of hopes, but not impossible. He was to drink. When the drink was brought glass and contents should be dashed in the madman's face; all the force that was in him go out in one desperate cry . . . The doctor had moved to a cabinet against the opposite wall, taken out a glass and put it down on a little stand with a marble top, and from a carefully stoppered phial, pouring some tiny tablets into his hand. The drug, he explained, was easily dissolved in wine, was colorless, odorless, tasteless. He dropped the tablets into the glass and turned back to the cabinet. Between the parted curtain Barraclough met the girl's eyes. She gave a look wildly earnest and eager, at the unconscious figure, made a gesture towards the stand, the glass, another gesture—the gesture of drinking? Of raising a glass and drinking? . . . The doctor was filling the glass. Barraclough watched the red shine of the wine—his brain groped, wondering, struggling—The doctor was putting down the bottle——

"You will drink with me, doctor?" asked Barraclough, dry-lipped.

"With you? You wish it? Request it? Then, most certainly," said Dr. La Rue very courteously, smiling.

He brought out a second glass. He filled the second glass. The two stood at opposite ends of the stand. He took up the drugged glass. Barraclough made a movement with his free hand.

"My name!" he cried. "My name that is to be remembered, to be immortal with yours! You do not know it."

"It is true—I had forgotten. A thousand pardons! If you will give it to me——"

"No. I will write it. I can do so easily if you will bring pen and paper, hold them. In the future it may have some value."

"Value? You are too modest. It will be a treasure, a treasure to posterity! In a moment," said the doctor.

He put down the drugged glass. In the same spot? Carefully in the same spot. He approached the bench. He drew out a pocket-book, a stylo pen. Between the inch-parted curtains Barraclough caught a swift little nod. And a smile—yes, a smile! He had interpreted her aright—had understood! With a step forward, an extended hand, she could reach the stand, could shift, reverse the glasses—

Barraclough took the offered stylo. The doctor opened the pocket-book, stooped, held it, steadied it. Over his shoulder Barraclough's eyes were on the curtains. On the girl's face, the girl's hand! If it trembled, blundered, that little frail hand! It moved steadily; the glasses were reversed; the curtains fell together. Barraclough wrote his name. The doctor bent his white head in courteous acknowledgement and laid the book down. He crossed to the stand by the curtains. He took up the undrugged glass. He brought it over. The undrugged glass was in Barraclough's hand. He took up the drugged glass. He stood beside the bench and raised it high.

"Drink!" he cried exultantly. "Drink, my friend! Drink with me. To Science, the pale goddess of my worship, in whose honor it is permitted that you die!"

"To science!" echoed Barraclough.

He drained the glass. And the doctor's glass was drained. Would he suspect—would—he put the glass down gently. He put the other glass down gently. He walked the length of the room and came back. He sat down, with his kindly, benignant smile, waiting. Minutes passed. With every muscle of his bound body tense, Barraclough watched under lowered lids. There lay the knife. If, before the drug got him—how long would the drug be? . . . The doctor's head was drooping. He raised it, looked about him, passed a hand over his forehead. . . . His eyes were glazing, closing. . . . He started up, moved a pace, staggered down into the chair again. . . . His body relaxed inertly; his head fell back. The drug held and conquered him; he moved no more.

And the girl, peering, waiting, ran and caught up the knife. In a minute or two Barraclough, free, got on his feet. To drop back helplessly, overcome with a horrible faintness and nausea. He mastered the qualm, and she spoke her first word.

"He is mad, monsieur," she said in a breaking, shaking voice—"quite mad?"

"Quite mad, my child." He waited. "How was it that you came?"

"It was the card, monsieur. I wished to see your name, and between the two little notes found the other. I did not think it was a mistake, no—I understood. But how, if I kept it, could I hope to repay so much? I ran after you. I was almost near enough to call when I saw you stop. It was very dark—I caught my foot and fell—in the moment that I did not see you were gone. I ran on, ran past, ran back—I was puzzled. In a moment all the windows were lighted—I saw the door was open. And lying before it the red flower from your coat. I was afraid to go in, afraid to go away—it was so strange, and I was sure you were here. But presently I ventured and listened—I could hear nothing. The door of the next room was open—I crept in. There were sounds behind the curtains—I looked through—he was binding you! I think the good God did not let me scream! What could I do, alone, so little, so weak? And where you had left me there were many people. I went back to the door. It was shut, monsieur!"

All the terror with which she had made the discovery was in her face and eyes.

"Monsieur, it was shut! There is no lock, no handle—nothing. And the lights went out—everywhere but here. I crept back and looked again. He had finished and sat watching you—I waited—I did not know at all what I should do. Once he took up the knife and tried its edge with his finger. I thought if he went near you then I would scream—I had heard him laugh, you understand, and knew that he was mad. . . . When he sat down with his back to the curtains I let you see me so that you should know you were not alone. It was only when he put the drugged glass so near that I saw I might save you if you said he must drink too. kept his attention while I changed the glasses. If you would but understand! You did understand. I did it. That is all."

"Ah!" Barraclough echoed. And stopped because many words were beyond him, and few——! "You were by the curtains. Then when he started the phonograph——"

"Monsieur, his sleeve touched me. I almost died with fear! Oh, if you can stand, let us go! He may recover——"

"No, no, he is safe. Did—did you understand——" began Barraclough involuntarily. A violent shudder shook her.

"He is, I think, French, monsieur. While he watched you he talked to himself in French. I understood.

"Forget it. Remember only that he is quite mad. Come," said Barraclough.

He rose on unsteady feet. In the doorway they looked back at the unconscious figure upon which the light was bright—the picture of a sleeping saint might have shown such a face as that of Dr. Casimer La Rue. Beside the heavy purple portiere that fell behind them a thick wire appeared, running along the wall, vanishing by the lintel of the lockless, handleless door. Barraclough pulled at this. Slowly, velvet noiseless, it glided open and stood wide. They passed out. On the uneven flags the faded red flower was lying—it showed vivid as a stain of blood. All the gray street lay hushed in the colorless chill pallor of dawn, but pale streaks of green and saffron in the eastern sky spoke of coming day. A constable passing on the opposite pavement paused and started at the two swaying figures, staggering, holding to each other. Barraclough, as they reached the curb, heard his name in a tone of loud astonishment, found himself confronting a face he knew. He pointed with a shaking hand.

"Over there!" he said and laughed weakly. "The house with the purple blinds! The house that stands back!" And then stumbled through a few disjointed sentences which, after his hasty whistle for a comrade, who was as hastily dispatched for a taxi, sent the man hurrying across to the open door. The girl spoke faintly. She was whiter than the dawn.

"He will be taken away," she said, and shuddered—"will be kept safe, monsieur?"

"He will be kept quite safe," said Barraclough gently, and repressed his own shudder. "Try not to think of it, my child. Can you walk to the corner? We shall be out of sight of the horrible place."

They walked to the corner and waited until the taxi came. Barraclough helped her in, gave a direction, and got in beside her. Her eyes turned to him questioningly as it started.

"We are going monsieur——?" she interrogated.

"A little way into the country. To a lady who was once a school friend of my mother. She is good enough

(Concluded on Page 5.)