

"Yours Truly" By FRANK HOWEL EVANS

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SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS STORIES

"YOURS TRULY" a man of insatiable curiosity, has made his way to London by means of the great...
 He is a charming man, and the story opens with a...
 After him comes Eric Maltravers. The actor-manager tried to fight off his fate by a tour of America. But becoming...
 An artist, Ross Hunt, follows his old companion to ruin. He is about to marry a rich woman when his fate...
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VI—THE END OF JELICO MERN



THIS is our geological expert, Mr. Jellico Mern, Mr. James Truly.
 The director of the great museum at which Jellico Mern held an important appointment as geologist smiled as he introduced the two men. Then, with an excuse, he bowed himself out of the room, and left the two men together.
 "Cosy room you've got here, Jellico," said Truly, looking round the private room of the expert in the museum. "I thought I'd just look in and have a chat. I've never been inside your museum before—very neglectful of me, I suppose. But as I was passing it just occurred to me that my old friend Jellico Mern would surely be there a little time, and so I thought I'd just pop in promiscuous-like."

Truly spoke easily and quietly, sank into a chair and looked amusedly at Jellico Mern, the geologist, who, but a few short months ago, had been stout and robust, but who now seemed to have fallen away, for his clothes hung loosely on him; his once rich, full-blooded cheeks were now flabby and mottled in patches; there were bags under his eyes; his mouth drooped and sagged at the corners; and his hand plucked tremulously at his collar as he moistened his lips with his tongue, and spoke hoarsely.
 "What do you want? Why have you come here to persecute me?"
 "Persecute you! Good gracious, what nonsense! It's nothing of the sort! It's simply retribution, Jellico. You're the last on the list. They're all gone, all downed and outed, as I told you at my dinner party." Truly tickled the names off on his fingers: "Sir Richard Keyne, Louis Berthe, Henry Plinth, Eric Maltravers, Ross Hunt, and now the last of all, that fat old port-wine-loving full-blooded scoundrel, Jellico Mern."
 He stabbed the air with an accusing forefinger, and it seemed to Jellico Mern as if that pointing digit had pierced him to the heart.
 "Let's see," went on James Truly, "I think I gave the rest of your little gang plenty of time in which to settle up their affairs, didn't I, before I finally finished up with them, so?" He turned his hand and wrist as if squeezing an orange. "But I think a month will suit your case, Jellico. You don't look very well, and I shouldn't like to prolong the agony too far."
 "Why don't you kill me straight out, and have done with it?" wheezed Jellico Mern.
 "Because it's much better fun to watch and see you suffering," answered Truly. "You'll waste yourself to a shadow wondering what your end'll be, and how I shall bring about your downfall. You'll pass sleepless nights while the ricked ghosts of your five comrades pass in shadowy review before your bed. You'll think in detail of the time of horror I gave them, of the days when they thought they had escaped, only to be checkmated by me at last. At every knock at the door you will start like a guilty man. Now goodbye for the present, and don't forget me. But I don't think you'll ever forget Yours Truly."
 Truly closed the door, and said goodbye cordially to his friend, the director of the museum, who, at his wish, had introduced him to the geology expert, the millionaire professing a wish to consult him, and as he walked along the street he was deep in thought, almost solemnly thoughtful.
 Jellico Mern was the last of the gang. With his downfall, Truly's self-imposed mission would be over. And when he reached home, once more he reverently took out the faded photograph, looked at it long and earnestly, and then locked it away again with a sigh that was half relief, half sorrow.
 In the meantime, Jellico Mern had collapsed in his chair in a faint, and was found by one of the attendants who had failed to get an answer to his repeated knocks. He was quickly revived, and by the doctor's orders was sent home.
 Overwork was the medical verdict.
 "Better rest at home for a week," said the doctor, "and then go to the seaside for a fortnight."
 Jellico Mern was a bachelor living in chambers of Fleet Street, attended to by a manservant, Blake, by name, who had been with him for the last year. An invulnerable man was Blake. Jellico used to say laughingly

that he supposed he robbed him, but at any rate he took care that nobody else did. The way he attended to clothes was perfect, and he was the very beau ideal of the soft-footed, discreet, polite manservant.
 He appeared deeply distressed at his master's condition, tenderly helped him into bed, and looked after him all that afternoon and evening as well as a trained nurse. He even sat up with him until late at night, and when at last the geologist drifted into an uneasy sleep, Blake saw that everything was in order, drew the clothes more comfortably round his master, and then, tiptoeing from the room, went into the study at the end of the passage, and carefully closing the door, rang up a number on the telephone, and almost whispered a short message into it.
 Jellico Mern was, of course, easily granted a fortnight's holiday, or more if necessary, from the museum, and after a week, the greater part of which was spent in bed, he decided to go to Bridmouth, a quiet, healthy, seaside town.
 The doctor said that there was no doubt about it, Mern was completely run down, and the medico privately confessed to his partner that he could not quite diagnose the symptoms. The man appeared to be suffering from sheer terror; but that could not last for ever, and could only really be put down, he supposed, to a nervous breakdown.
 While at the sea, Mern could not bear Blake out of his sight, and as he walked slowly up and down the front at Bridmouth, holding to his servant's arm, he seemed to draw some sort of courage and vitality from this strong, self-contained man who could lift him as easily as he could a child, and who was so attentive to every want. He wondered whether there could be anything in "personal magnetism," as he had heard it called, whereby the strength of one person could, as it were, be grafted on to another, and he asked Blake one morning whether he had ever heard of such a thing as healing by faith, or by influence of mind.
 Blake smiled slowly. He was a pallid-faced, clean-shaven man, with thin, dark hair, and he rarely spoke above a whisper, or indulged in facial expression.
 "You'll excuse me, sir, won't you, but that's exactly what I've been practicing on you. At one time I was what they call in America 'a mind healer.' I worked by influence, by suggestion. I could really do the things that I said I did, but the authorities—well, they said it was fraud because I charged a fee. I got into trouble over there, and I came here hoping that I might be able to continue my healing, but—perhaps you may remember the case? I took rooms in Bond street, I was charged as an impostor, and I received six months' imprisonment. That finished me with my healing altogether, sir, and I went back to the work for which I had originally been trained, that of service. And now, sir, I don't mind confessing to you that I've been trying my influence on you. I've been trying to will you to become better and stronger, and I believe I've succeeded."
 Jellico Mern heaved a deep sigh of relief. He really did feel better and stronger in mind and body; he slept well at night, and as the days went on, the threats of Yours Truly seemed to have dwindled away to very trifling importance.
 "I should suggest another week here if I were you, sir," hinted Blake, at the end of the week. "You're getting so much stronger, and I can work so much better in this pure air than I could in London. My influence over you seems stronger."
 "Get me right, get me quite fit in another week, Blake," said Mern firmly, "and I'll make your fortune. I have influence, I can recommend you privately, you can charge a high fee, and you'll be done with service for ever."



"Blake, his manservant, appeared on the platform and quietly led him away."

Blake smiled that slow, peculiar smile, and before the end of the third week Jellico Mern felt better than he had ever felt in his life. His step was springy and elastic; he felt quite muscular and vigorous; the clear light of health shone in his cheeks and his mind was easy and almost untroubled. True, there was Yours Truly always to be considered, but Jellico Mern had decided that he would face the last day of the month like a man, and if Truly did "down and out him"—to use the millionaire's favorite expression—well, he would turn to with his head and his hands, and earn a new living for himself.
 When Jellico Mern returned to town, every one was struck with the improvement in his appearance. During his absence, several demands for his opinion had accumulated; he worked on these with a free, untrammelled brain, and he banked the fees, which were at the high rate of fifty guineas for each experiment, he smiled contentedly to himself.
 "At any rate," he thought, "Yours Truly can't stop me earning fees like these when I'm feeling as well as I do now."
 He walked out of the bank with a satisfied smile, and before he went to bed he looked at the almanac in his study, and counted off the days on his fingers.
 "Three days more to the end of the month, to the end of my month, when Truly has promised to out me. Well, I'll meet it like a man. Oh, if only I could get my fingers at his throat, I feel strong enough— if I only dared, if I only dared!"
 And then his crowning triumph came.
 Working late in the laboratory of the museum on the afternoon of that third day before the end of the month, he hit upon a truth, a scientific truth which, up till then, had evaded scientists. He noted down the formula, put his instruments away and went straight to the headquarters of the Royal Society, and to one of the heads he stated what he had discovered.
 "My dear fellow," said the professor, "don't think I'm skeptical, but I can hardly believe you've found it out. But still, we've got a discussion on this very subject on Friday; come and read a paper on it."
 To be asked to read a paper before the Royal Society was an honor that might well have turned a man's head, and Jellico Mern went home, sat up half the night preparing his thesis, and then went to bed feeling as fresh as if he had not done a stroke of work. He rose in the morning triumphant and full of delight, and as he sat at breakfast, Blake, with immobile face, announced Mr. James Truly.
 "Good morning, Mern," said Truly, quietly.
 Blake left the room, and the millionaire looked at Jellico Mern.
 "You're looking well, Jellico," he said, "but don't forget that tomorrow finishes you, you know."
 Jellico Mern felt not a quiver of fear, nor a tremble in any of his limbs. He spoke quietly and firmly to Yours Truly, and not without a certain touch of dignity.
 "I fear no man. I fear nothing," he said. "You can do your worst, James Truly, for if the worst does come to the worst, I can always earn my own living. I've made a discovery which will insure my reputation and possibly fortune. Take that away from me if you can! Tomorrow, yes, tomorrow, I am due to be down and outed, as you said. But that for

your threat!" He snapped his fingers. "You won't kill me—that I know. You may ruin me. You may degrade me in some miraculous way, but you can't take from me the discovery I have made, the discovery which is now sealed and locked away in the safe at the Royal Society."
 "Well, upon my word, you take it well!" said Truly, quite amiably. "But you know, my dear fellow, it will be just the same with you as it was with the others. Before tomorrow's over, smack, you'll be out! Something will happen to you."
 "My reputation is in the safe of the Royal Society," said Jellico Mern. "The scientific world will never allow the discoverer of that secret to starve. So once more, good morning, Mr. Yours Truly."
 "Tomorrow night at 8, is it not?" whispered Truly to Blake, as the latter opened the door for him.
 The servant nodded.
 "All right! Well, I'll be there. Are you supposed to be going?"
 "Yes, I have suggested that it would be advisable to carry his bag of papers, and look after the precious document when we bring it back."
 "Very good!" answered Truly. "You'll start from here about 8.30, I suppose? Yes, all right. So-long!"
 The papers the next morning—at least those that devoted any part of their columns to scientific articles—were full of the forthcoming secret which it was rumored would be made public at the usual Friday night meeting of the Royal Society. Jellico Mern's name was freely paraphrased and eulogized; many writers predicted for him a knighthood, or perhaps even greater honors, for the discoverer had conferred a benefit not alone on science, but on the whole world.
 Briefly put, the discovery was nothing, more nor less than the secret of radium. So far it had been deemed impossible to manufacture it or procure it except from pitchblende, but here in the laboratory, in a specimen of ore which had been brought back by an expedition, Jellico Mern had stumbled on the secret. Henceforth, radium, with its wonderful properties of health and life, would be able to be produced from other ores besides pitchblende, and the healer would be within reach of the poorest. Needless to say, the discovery, or "the alleged discovery," as one of the skeptical papers called it, aroused the utmost curiosity and enthusiastic astonishment. The president of the Royal Society, in being hastily interviewed by an evening paper, the first edition being out at 3 o'clock, stated that, of course, Mr. Mern's name in itself was a guarantee that he would do nothing foolish, and as he was prepared to give a demonstration and produce his secret without any restrictions as to patents or rights, it was not likely that he would be so foolish as to appear on the platform before the members of the Royal Society unless he was convinced that he was in the right.
 During the afternoon, Mern, who had been the recipient of innumerable callers and messages at the museum, received a telegram: "Congratulations on the excitement, but do not forget tomorrow, Yours Truly."
 With a contemptuous laugh, Mern flung it into the wastepaper basket. His nerves were of steel. The influence of Blake had been wonderful, magnetizing, miraculous. He feared nothing.
 Later on a messenger boy brought an express letter which contained just the one word, "Tomorrow."
 When he reached home, Blake told him that a com-

missionaire had been and delivered a message for Mr. Jellico Mern, just one word, "Tomorrow."
 The telephone bell rang two or three times and only a voice was heard saying: "Tomorrow."
 A postcard arrived by the next post, with the word on it, in red ink, "Tomorrow."
 But Jellico Mern only laughed.
 "Put away, Yours Truly," he muttered to himself.
 "Try to break my nerve down, are you? But you can't do it, you can't do it! Let tomorrow come! Tomorrow, my dear fellow, you'll see what you'll see, but my future is safe! I think that I, at all the risk, have checked you, Mr. James Truly!"
 The next day passed without any unwelcome reminders. Truly did not put in an appearance. Jellico Mern dined lightly at a quarter to seven, and lay down for a nap afterward to rest himself before his lecture, and at half-past eight a hired motor called for him. Blake followed him with a bag containing the paper relating to his discovery which he was to read before the society, and in a few minutes they were inside the dome of the building which has welcomed every distinguished scientist for many decades.
 As Jellico Mern looked up at the bust of the famous men who lined the walls, Faraday, Huxley, Darwin and many other great men who have helped to make England's name a synonym for the highest branches of thought, he felt a little glow of exultation come over him. Let him be ruined, utterly, irrevocably ruined, he did not care, his name was safe. He had found out the secret, the great secret for which so many learned men had been striving, and on that he would take his stand or fall. He knew—for Jellico Mern was an exceedingly clever man—he knew that he was right, and he felt braced to meet any odds as he was received by the president, and as other men gathered round him whose names were household words and congratulated him in advance.
 There was a short preliminary discussion on the matter of radium, and then the president rose and announced—as they would say in music-hall circles—"the turn of the evening."
 "We who are in the inner world of science," said the venerable gentleman, "are aware of the talents of Mr. Jellico Mern and of his reputation. I will say no more, except to ask him to read his paper, and to hand to him the formula which he brought to me yesterday afternoon, sealed, and which has since been in my safe. Mr. Jellico Mern."
 They are not dramatic, these scientists. Just simply a bold statement of facts. But all the same, a thrill ran through the audience as Jellico Mern walked to the platform, took an envelope from the president, opened his papers and began to read his theories. They were good, sound, well-reasoned theories, but to the experts they were not strikingly new. They had all been advanced by clever men before, and Jellico Mern was simply going over old ground. It was the new formula for which they were waiting.
 At length he came to the pith, the kernel of his discourse. He opened the envelope, and, quietly adjusting his glasses, said:
 "I will now read to you the formula which will prove to you that radium can be manufactured from substances other than pitchblende."
 And as he read, a sort of dawning horror began to spread over the audience. He was simply repeating a farrago of the utmost nonsense, proving that he knew nothing whatever about his subject, and at length one or two began to titter; it swelled into a laugh, and the president struck the bell for silence, and was about to rise, when suddenly everybody was silent for an instant with an awful sense as they looked at Jellico Mern.
 The man seemed to be shrinking before their very eyes; his cheeks fell in; his robust frame seemed to collapse, and to their horrified eyes it looked as if he were growing grayer before them. His face took on the color of chalk, of a corpse almost; his knees sagged together; the paper dropped from his limp hands; his head lolled from side to side; he bubbled out a few incoherent words, and then burst out crying.
 Blake, his manservant, appeared on the platform and quietly led him away.
 In a few words expressive of horror at the sudden illness of Mr. Jellico Mern, the president broke up the meeting, and the general opinion was that the geologist had suddenly gone off his head.
 At 10 o'clock next morning as he turned feebly in his bed, hardly remembering how he had been brought home by Blake and put to bed, Jellico Mern felt that something dreadful had happened to him. As he struggled round feebly, he saw standing by his bedside Yours Truly and Blake.
 "You can leave, Blake," said Truly.
 And when the servant had left, he turned to the bedside.
 "I told you that as sure as fate your hour would come, Jellico Mern, and come it did last night at twenty minutes past 9. You senseless fool, to think that you could get the better of me! Let me tell you now that whenever it has suited my purposes I have changed places here with Blake, your servant. I have got to know every inmost thought, every doing, every word of yours. It was I who as Blake, the servant, took you down to Bridmouth. It was I who used my power of influence, or fluence, or whatever you would call it, for there is such a thing as healing by will. It was I who saw to all this, that your fall might be the greater, I let you go on, forgetting me, fearing nothing, secure in your happiness at the discovery of radium."
 "But I did, I did discover it!" croaked Mern, still with the pride of the scientist on his lip.
 "Exactly! I know you did!" said Truly, grimly. "But when you wrote out the original formula and sealed it up in the envelope for the president of the Royal Society it was easy enough for me to substitute another."
 "The original, the original thought!" shrieked Mern.
 "I burnt it," was the simple answer. "Remember it if you can. And at the very moment, Jellico Mern, that you were making such a fool of yourself on the platform, I removed my influence like that!"
 Once more he snapped his fingers.
 "You collapsed," he went on. "Your strength left you sooner than it had been given you. You'll never be fit for much again. Your post at the museum will be taken from you. You will earn no more huge fees, and I shall allow you £2 a week and the best medical advice to insure your living to a ripe old age. That is your fate, the fate of the disappointed and humbled scientist, Jellico Mern."
 The door closed, and Jellico Mern was left alone with his thoughts—and his future.
 [The concluding story, next Sunday, will contain the solution of James Truly's revenge.]