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Joe Wharton

Sixth Street

Richard the Brazen.

By **CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY**, Author of "For the Freedom of the Sea," "The Southerners," Etc.

AND **EDWARD PEPPE**, Author of "A Broken Rosary," "The Prince Chap," Etc.

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Continued from last week.

Had a watcher been concealed in the library he might well have understood the motives of Mr. Roderick Fitzgeorge, or Mr. Jack Bibbs, for both names, among many others, chanced to appertain to the same attractive gentleman. No sooner had the door of the billiard room been closed when another form rose stealthily above the library window sill, stepped noiselessly inside, crossed the room and dropped on his knees before Mr. Renwyck's safe. The man was of medium height and slender build, wearing a mask over the upper portion of his face. But his chin and jaw appeared beneath the band of black, showing a pale, putty-like complexion.

In his work upon the safe this second nocturnal visitor did not resort to force or violence. He was far too old a hand to use such primitive means, nor did he wish to arouse the household by any sudden noise. He pressed a practiced ear against the iron safe door, then turned the dial slowly with a feather touch till at last he was rewarded by a faint metallic click as the delicate tumbler dropped into its slot. By the aid of his electric flash lamp he made a mental note of the number, indicating his starting point. Then he replaced his ear and reversed the dial as carefully as before. Again he heard the warning click.

"Left to sixty, right to thirty-five," he murmured to himself and bent to his work once more.

He tried four numbers, that being the usual combination of smaller safes, then confidently turned the dial to the right. He scored a blank. The work must now be done again, though not from the beginning, for three at least of the numbers were known to him. Twice more he tried and failed both times, but at the third attempt the dial locked and the outer door swung open when the nickel plated handle was softly turned.

The rest was simple. The burglar produced a bunch of skeleton keys and in less than two minutes had forced the lock of the inner door, which opened with a rasp of protest to the pilferer.

The man with the putty-like complexion overhauled the contents of the safe by the aid of his flash lamp, selected such valuables as seemed to be the least bulky, but most important, and stored them in several capacious pockets. This done, he carefully closed and locked the inner doors of the rifed safe, pressed upon the outer door, adjusted the nickel handle in its proper place and spun the dial of the combination lock.

For a moment the burglar listened to the low murmur of his confederate's voice in the adjoining room, smiled sardonically and slipped stealthily through the open window. Outside he crept to a point beneath the window of the billiard room, cried out in imitation of a vagrant cat, then, crouching, fled in the direction of the river, with the cases of the famous Renwyck diamonds tapping deliciously against his ribs.

CHAPTER XVIII

UPSTAIRS the music of Mr. Renwyck's sonorous slumbers still oozed through the chinks of his bedroom door, while at the farther end of the hall another closed on the sleepless Mr. Richard Williams.

The young man had heard the clock strike 3 and was still pursuing his train of tangled thought when it occurred to him that perhaps if he read for half an hour his mind might become composed enough for sleep. He remembered a partly finished book which he had left in the billiard room and started downstairs to get it. With a natural disinclination to disturb the household, he tipped very cautiously through the hall, down the flight of carpeted steps and approached the billiard room, which, like the library, was separated from the lower hall by heavy curtains. These he was about to draw aside when his outstretched hand was suddenly arrested by the sound of a voice within. It was masculine and belonged to no inmate of the house that he could recognize; also it was subdued, as one who feared to be overheard. What he heard assured him that some rascality was afoot.

"It's money I'm in need of," the voice was saying, "and that's why I took the risk of coming here alone in the middle of the night."

Richard's hand slid instinctively to his hip before he remembered the absurdity of fashionable clothes. Clearly there was some one in the room who had no business there. Yet to whom was he talking? If a member of the household, why this secrecy? He must investigate, of course. But

first he had better arm himself, as he did not know who or how many he might have to deal with.

His mind once made up, the Texan removed his slippers, crept softly up the stairs to his room, then down again, pausing once more outside the billiard room, but this time listening deliberately.

"Mr. Fitzgeorge," a woman's voice was saying, "my patience is exhausted. Why all this talk? Your scheme is blackmail—nothing else. Give me the letters, take your pay and go."

With a stab of pain the Texan recognized the voice as Miss Renwyck's, and it came with a double pang at the thought that she was meeting some unknown rascal in the dead of night—that she was buying letters from him.

"What letters?" his heart questioned jealously. He longed to rush in and kill the miscreant in his tracks, yet wisdom held his mad design in abeyance for the present. He peeped through the heavy portieres and spied two female figures on one side of the billiard table, while that of a man was on the other side, with his back toward the library door, but with his face half turned toward the spot where the Texan waited.

"Very well," whispered the man again. "I guess you are playing fair, all right." He took a package from his inner pocket. "Here are your letters. Have you got the money?"

"Yes," said Harriet softly; "I have. But wait, I must see that the letters are all here. Imogene, look over them as quickly as you can. I am afraid to turn on the light, but perhaps Mr. Fitzgeorge will be kind enough to lend us his lantern."

"Well, say," chuckled the visitor quietly, "you've got your nerve with you, all right! I'm sorry I didn't meet you before." Again he laughed noiselessly, produced his bullseye and threw a blaze of light on the pile of letters which he laid upon the table. "Look 'em over, Imogene, my dear," he continued, with unblushing familiarity. "That's every one you ever wrote me."

With a thrill of pleasure the Texan caught this last remark. The letters, then, were not Harriet's, after all, and she, brave girl, had dared to face this scoundrel in order to shield a friend. He could wing the fellow as he stood. But no. That would alarm the house and undo everything which this splendid woman had striven to hide. He could wait, and if the fellow offered no affront he would let him go rather than mortify Miss Renwyck by his own appearance on the scene. When the man was safely gone the Texan could then slip quietly to his room, and these two courageous girls would never know that a sentinel had stood guard outside the door.

Miss Imogene opened each letter to make certain that it was there, counted the pile and looked up timidly.

"They—they are not all here," she faltered. "I—I wrote fourteen, and here are only twelve."

"That's all I got," said the burglar shortly. "You never wrote but twelve." "But I did," protested the trembling Imogene. "You know I did, Rod—er—I mean Mr. Fitzgeorge. Oh, Harriet, won't you make him give me the other two?"

"Yes, I will," said Harriet firmly. "Mr. Fitzgeorge, we have acted in good faith toward you and expect at least a fair return. You demanded \$100. I have the money here in my hand, but I tell you once for all that I shall not pay you unless you surrender all the letters to this child."

"I haven't got any more," the burglar answered sullenly. "And, what's more, I— He paused at the sound of a cat call from without and began fumbling in his pockets. "Why, here you are!" he exclaimed in well feigned astonishment, producing the missing letters. "I didn't know I had 'em, I

swear I didn't. Take 'em, my dear. Pay up and we'll call it quits."

"And—and you won't publish the copies?" quavered Miss Imogene as though terrified at the sound of her own whispers.

"No," said the man; "I give you my word as a gentleman," with a singular misapprehension of the meaning of the term. "Hurry with the dough. It's getting late."

Assured that the letters completed Miss Imogene's indiscreet list, Miss Harriet tossed a roll of bills in the circle of light which was made by the bullseye lantern.

"You would better go now," she said in a tone of disgust which she made no attempt to disguise. "I will close the window after you."

The man counted the money hurriedly, slipped it into his vest pocket and closed the slide of the lantern.

"Thank you," he murmured, with a most elaborate bow. "I'm much obliged to both of you. Rich people like you won't ever miss a little sum like this, and it will make me remember you for many a day, even without the recollection of your pretty faces. You've been square by me, and I'll be square by you. And now one kiss all around, and we'll say good night."

"You scoundrel!" breathed Harriet, furious to her finger tips. "Go instantly or I will call for help."

"Oh, no, you won't, my beauty!" laughed the man. "I'll bet you've kissed uglier men than me before, and I'm going to take you down a peg. You holler once and I'll shoot the man that comes to help you."



"Look 'em over, Imogene, my dear," he continued.

Miss Renwyck, with the limp and whimpering Imogene clinging to her waist, moved slowly around the billiard table, while the burglar watched her, breathing hard and following with a catlike tread. He had taken perhaps six steps, and his back was now turned toward the door which led into the hall. Suddenly he felt a savage grip about his neck and found himself with outflung arms, his mouth and nose smashed flat against the table, while a tiny ring of cold steel was pushed behind his ear.

"Steady, you hound, or I'll give you a shot that you never saw in billiards!"

The tone was low, but masterful, and Mr. Jack Bibbs was far too prudent a gentleman to jeopard his health by futile disobedience. Therefore he made no immediate attempt to move.

(Continued on Seventh Page.)



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