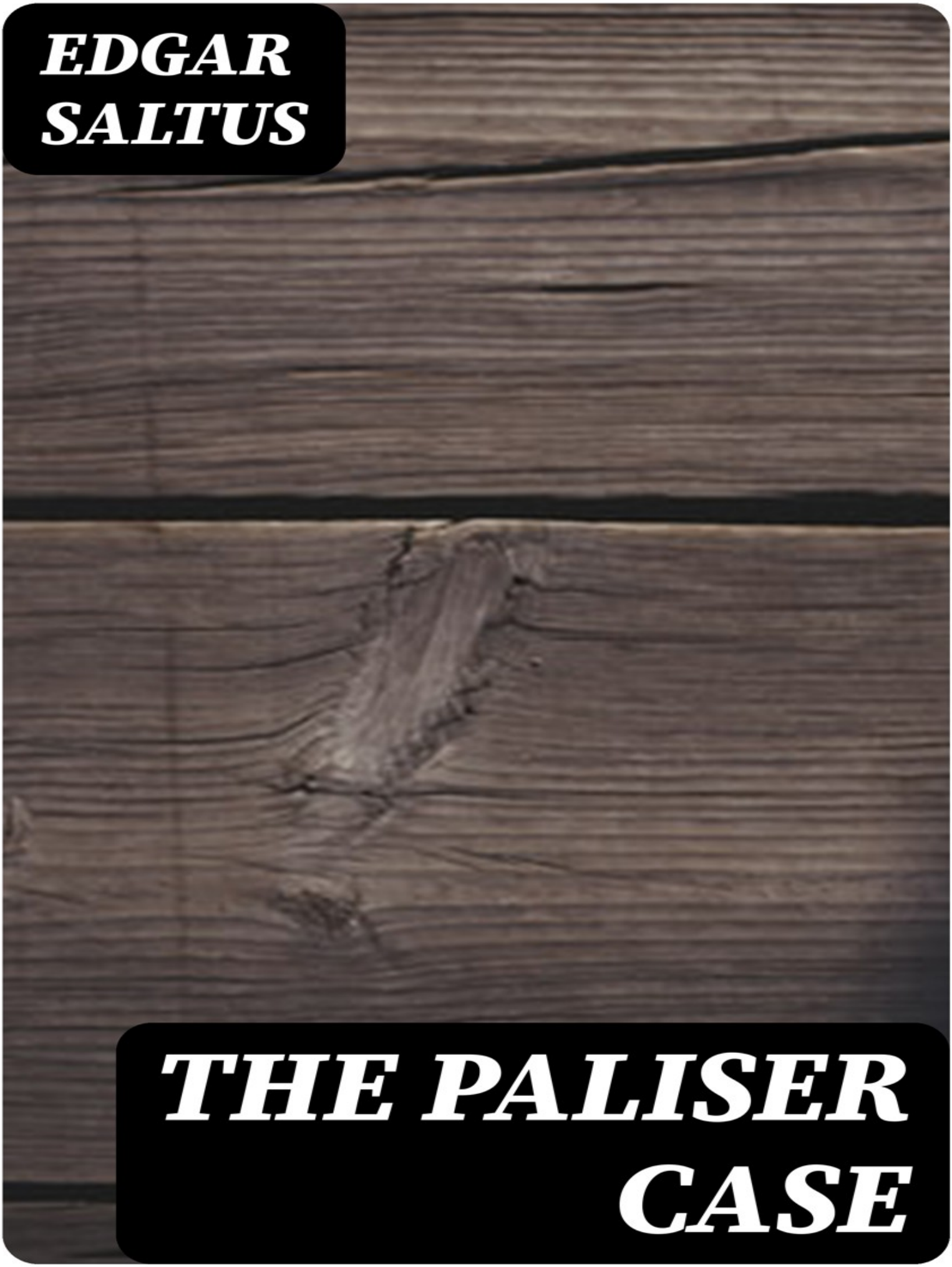
EDGAR
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THE PALISER
CASE

Edgar Saltus

The Paliser case

EAN 8596547225089

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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The murder of Monty Paliser, headlined that morning in the papers, shook the metropolis at breakfast, buttered the toast, improved the taste of the coffee.

Murdered! It seemed too bad to be false. Moreover, there was his picture, the portrait of a young man obviously high-bred and insolently good-looking. In addition to war news and the financial page, what more could you decently ask for a penny? Nothing, perhaps, except the address of the murderer. But that detail, which the morning papers omitted, extras shortly supplied. Meanwhile in the minds of imaginative New Yorkers, visions of the infernal feminine surged. The murdered man's name was evocative.

His father, Montagu Paliser, generally known as M. P., had lived in that extensive manner in which New York formerly took an indignant delight. Behind him, extending back to the remotest past when Bowling Green was the centre of fashion, always there had been a Paliser, precisely as there has always been a Livingston. These people and a dozen others formed the landed gentry—a gentry otherwise landed since. But not the Paliser clan. The original Paliser was very wealthy. All told he had a thousand dollars. Montagu Paliser, the murdered man's father, had stated casually, as though offering unimportant information, that, by Gad, sir, you can't live like a gentleman on less than a thousand dollars a day. That was years and years ago. Afterward he doubled his estimate. Subsequently, he quadrupled it. It made no hole in him either. In spite of his yacht, his racing stable, his town

house, his country residences and formerly in the great days, or rather in the great nights, his ladies of the ballet, in spite of these incidentals his wealth increased. No end to it, is about the way in which he was currently quoted.

All New Yorkers knew him, at any rate by repute, precisely as the least among us knows Mr. Carnegie, though perhaps more intimately. The tales of his orgies, of his ladies, of that divorce case and of the yacht scandal which burst like a starball, tales Victorian and now legendary, have, in their mere recital, made many an old reprobate's mouth champagne. But latterly, during the present generation that is, the ineffable Paliser—M. P. for short—who, with claret liveries and a yard of brass behind him had tooled his four-in-hand, or else, in his superb white yacht, gave you something to talk about, well, from living very extensively he had renounced the romps and banalities of this life.

Old reprobates could chuckle all they liked over the uproar he had raised in the small and early family party that social New York used to be. But in club windows there were no new tales of him to tell. Like a potentate outwearied with the circumstance of State, he had chucked it, definitely for himself, and recently in favour of his son, Monty, who, in the month of March, 1917, arrived from Havana at the family residence, which in successive migrations had moved, as the heart of Manhattan has moved, from the neighbourhood of the Battery to that of the Plaza.

In these migrations the Palisers had not derogated from their high estate. Originally, one of the first families here, the centuries, few but plural, had increased what is happily

known as their prestige. Monty Paliser was conscious of that, but not unwholesomely. The enamellings that his father had added gave him no concern whatever. On the contrary. He knew that trade would sack the Plaza, as long since it had razed the former citadels of fashion, and he foresaw the day when the family residence, ousted from upper Fifth Avenue, would be perched on a peak of Washington Heights, where the Palisers would still be among the first people in New York—to those coming in town that way.

That result it was for him to insure. Apart from second cousins, to whom he had never said a word and never proposed to address, apart from them, apart too from his father and himself, there was only his sister, Sally Balaguine, who, one night, had gone to bed in Petersburg and, on the morrow, had awakened in Petrograd. Though, in addition to this much surprised lady, before whose eyes Petrograd subsequently dissolved into Retrograd and afterward into delirium, there was her son, a boy of three. Mme. Balaguine's prince did not count, or rather had ceased to. As lieutenant of the guards he had gone to the front where a portion of him had been buried, the rest having been minutely dispersed.

To perpetuate the clan in its elder branch, there was therefore but this young man, a circumstance which, on his return from Havana, his father advanced.

They were then at luncheon. For the father there was biscuit and milk. For the son there was an egg cooked in a potato. Yet, in the kitchen, or, if not there, somewhere about, were three chefs. Moreover on the walls were

Beauvais. The ceiling was the spoil of a Venetian palace. The luncheon however simple was not therefore disagreeable.

With an uplift of the chin, the elder man flicked a crumb and sat back. The action was a signal. Three servants filed out.

Formerly his manner had been cited and imitated. To many a woman it had been myrrh and cassia. It had been deadly nightshade as well. After a fashion of long ago, he wore a cavalry moustache which, once black, now was white. He was tall, bald, very thin. But that air of his, the air of one accustomed to immediate obedience, yet which could be very urbane and equally insolent, that air endured.

In sitting back he looked at his son for whom he had no affection. For no human being had he ever had any affection, except for himself, and latterly even that unique love had waned.

The chefs, originally retained on shifts of eight hours each, in order that this man might breakfast or sup whenever he so desired, that he might breakfast, as a gentleman may, at four in the afternoon, or sup at seven in the morning, these chefs were useless. His wife, who had died, not as one might suppose of a broken heart but of fatty degeneration, had succumbed to their delicately toxic surprises with groans but also with thanksgiving.

That is ancient history. At present her widower supped on powdered charcoal and breakfasted on bismuth. The cooks he still retained, not to prepare these triumphs, but for the benefit of his heir, for whom he had no affection but whom he respected as the next incumbent and treated accordingly, that is to say, as one gentleman treats another.

On this high noon, when the servants had gone, the father sat back and looked at his son, who, it then occurred to him, astonishingly resembled his mother. He had the same eyes, too big, too blue; the same lashes, too long, too dark; the same ears, too small and a trifle too far forward. In addition he had the same full upper-lip, the same cleft in the chin, the same features refined almost to the point of degeneracy. But the ensemble was charming—too charming, as was his voice, which he had acquired at Oxford where, at the House, he had studied, though what, except voice culture, one may surmise and never know. Men generally disliked him and accounted the way he spoke, or the way he looked, the reason. But what repelled them was probably his aura of which, though unaware, they were not perhaps unconscious.

His father motioned: "Thank God, you are here. At any moment now we may be in it and you will have to go. You are not a divinity student and you cannot be a slacker."

The old man paused and added: "Meanwhile you will have to marry. If anything should happen to you, there would be but Sally and the Balaguine brat and I shouldn't like that. God knows why I care, but I do. There has always been a Paliser here and it is your turn now—which reminds me. I have made over some property to you. You would have had it any way, but the transfer will put you on your feet, besides saving the inheritance tax."

"Thank you. What is it?"

"The Place, the Wall Street and lower Broadway property, that damned hotel and the opera-box. Jeroloman wrote you about it. Didn't you get his letter?"

"I may have. I don't know that I read it."

"When you have a moment look in on him. He will tell you where you are."

"And where is that?"

The old man summarised it. Even with the increased cost of matrimony, it was enough for a Mormon, for a tribe of them. But the young man omitted to say so. He said nothing.

His father nodded at him. "You think marriage a nuisance. So it is. So is everything. By Gad, sir, I wish I were well out of it. I go nowhere—not even to church. I have grown thin through the sheer nuisance of things. But if nothing happens over there and you don't make a mess of it, the next twenty years of your life ought not to be profoundly disagreeable. Now I dislike to be a nuisance myself, but in view of the war, it is necessary that there should be another Paliser, if not here, at least en route."

"I will think it over," said this charming young man, who had no intention of doing anything of the kind.

"The quicker the better then, and while you are at it select a girl with good health and no brains. They wear best. I did think of Margaret Austen for you, but she has become engaged. Lennox his name is. Her mother told me. Told me too she hated it. Said you must come to dinner and she'd have a girl or two for you to look at. Oblige me by going. Plenty of others though. Girls here are getting healthier and stupider and uglier every year. By Gad, sir, I remember——"

The old man rambled on. He was back in the days when social New York foamed with beauty, when it held more loveliness to the square inch than any other spot on earth.

He was back in the days when Fifth Avenue was an avenue and not a ghetto.

With an air of interest the young man listened. The air was not feigned. Yet what interested him was not the outworn tale but the pathological fact that the reminiscences of the aged are symptomatic of hardening of the arteries.

Mentally he weighed his father, gave him a year, eighteen months, and that, not because he was anxious for his shoes, but out of sheer dilettantism.

The idea that his father would survive him, that it was he who was doomed, that already behind the curtains of life destiny was staging his death—and what a death!—he could no more foresee than he foresaw the Paliser Case, which, to the parties subsequently involved, was then unimaginable, yet which, at that very hour, a court of last resort was deciding.

He looked over at his father. "Palmerston asked everybody, particularly when he didn't know them from Adam, 'How's the old complaint?' How is yours?"

With that air that had won so many hearts, and broken them too, the old man smiled.

"When I don't eat anything and sit perfectly still, it is extraordinary how well I feel."

How he felt otherwise, he omitted to state. A gentleman never talks of disagreeable matters.

II

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In the shouted extras that succeeded the initial news of the murder, Margaret Austen was mentioned, not as the criminal, no one less criminal than the girl could be imagined, but as being associated with the parties involved.

That was her misfortune and a very grievous misfortune, though, however grievous, it was as nothing to other circumstances for which she subsequently blamed herself, after having previously attributed them to fate, or rather, as fate is more modernly known, to karma.

Any belief may console. A belief in karma not only consoles, it explains. As such it is not suited to those who accept things on faith, which is a very good way to accept to them. It may be credulous to believe that Jehovah dictated the ten commandments. But the commandments are sound. Moreover it is perhaps better to be wrong in one's belief's than not to have any.

Margaret Austen believed in karma and in many related and wonderful things. Her face showed it. It showed other things; appreciation, sympathy, unworldliness, good-breeding and that minor charm that beauty is. It showed a girl good to look at, good through and through; a girl tall, very fair, who smiled readily, rarely laughed and never complained.

It is true that at the time this drama begins it would have been captious of her to have complained of anything were it not that life is so ordered that it has sorrow for shadow. The shadow on this human rose was her mother.

Mrs. Austen had seen worse days and never proposed to see them again. Among the chief assets of her dear departed was a block of New Haven. The stock, before

collapsing, shook. Then it tripped, fell and kept at it. Through what financial clairvoyance the dear departed's trustee got her out, just in time, and, quite illegally but profitably, landed her in Standard Oil is not a part of this drama. But meanwhile she had shuddered. Like many another widow, to whom New Haven was as good as Governments, she might have been in the street. Pointing at her had been that spectre—Want!

It was just that which she never proposed to see again. The spectre in pointing had put a mark on this woman who was arrogant, ambitious and horribly shrewd.

A tall woman with a quick tongue, a false front, an air of great affability and, when on parade, admirably sent out, she ruled her daughter, or thought she did, which is not quite the same thing.

Margaret Austen was ruled by her conscience and her beautiful beliefs. These were her masters. This human rose was their lovely slave. But latterly a god had enthralled her. It was with wonder and thanksgiving that she recognised the overlordship of that brat of a divinity, whom poets call Eros, and thinkers the Genius of the Species.

Mrs. Austen, who had danced many a time before his shrine, had no objection whatever to the godlet, except only when he neglected to appear Olympianly, as divinity should, with a nimbus of rentrolls and gold.

In view of the fact that he had come to Margaret in déshabille, that is to say without any discernible nimbus, he affronted Mrs. Austen's ambitious eyes.

Of that she said nothing to Margaret. But at dinner one evening she summarised it to Peter Verelst who sat at her

right.

The room, which was furnished with tolerable taste, gave on Park Avenue where she resided. At her left was Monty Paliser. Farther down were Margaret, Lennox and Kate Schermerhorn. Coffee had been served. Paliser was talking to Miss Schermerhorn; Lennox to Margaret.

"I don't like it," Mrs. Austen said evenly to Peter Verelst. "But what can I do?"

Peter Verelst was an old New Yorker and an old beau. Mrs. Austen had known him when she was in shorter frocks than those then in vogue. Even as a child she had been ahead of the fashion.

"Do?" Verelst repeated. "Do nothing."

"I am a snob," she resumed, expecting him to contradict her. "I did hope that Margaret, with her looks, would marry brilliantly."

Peter Verelst bent over his coffee. "The young man next door?"

Out of the corner of an eye Mrs. Austen glanced at Paliser and then back at Verelst. "Well, something of the kind."

Verelst raised his cup. He had known Lennox' father. He knew and liked the son. For Margaret he had an affection that was almost—and which might have been—paternal. But, noting the barometer, he steered into the open.

"Have Lennox here morning, noon and night. See to it that Margaret has every opportunity to get sick to death of him. Whereas if you interfere——"

Mrs. Austen, as though invoking the saints, lifted her eyes. "Ah, I know! If I had not been interfered with I would not have taken Austen. Much good it did me!"

Verelst, his hand on the tiller, nodded. "There you are! That locksmith business is very sound. Love revels in it. But give him his head and good-bye. Sooner or later he is bound to take to his heels, but, the more he is welcomed, the sooner he goes. The history of love is a history of farewells."

Paliser, who had caught the last phrase, felt like laughing and consequently looked very serious. The spectacle of two antiques discussing love seemed to him as hilarious as two paupers discussing wealth. He patted his tie.

"Very interesting topic, Mrs. Austen."

The woman smiled at him. "Love? Yes. How would you define it?"

Paliser returned her smile. "A mutual misunderstanding."

Mrs. Austen's smile deepened. "Would you like to have one?"

"With your daughter, yes."

Et moi donc! thought this lady, who, like others of our aristocracy, occasionally lapsed into French. But she said: "Why not enter the lists?"

"I thought they were closed."

"Are they ever?"

But now Verelst addressed the too charming young man. "How is your father?"

"In his usual poor health, thank you."

"What does he say about the war?"

"Nothing very original—that the Kaiser ought to be sent to Devil's Island. But that I told him would be an insult to Dreyfus, who was insulted enough. The proper place for the beast is the zoo. At the same time, the fellow is only a pawn. The blame rests on Rome—rests on her seven hills."

Verelst drew back. In the great days, or more exactly in the great nights, he had been a pal of M. P. That palship he had no intention of extending to M. P.'s son, and it was indifferently that he asked: "In what way?"

Kate Schermerhorn, who had been talking to Margaret and to Lennox, turned. Lennox also had turned. Paliser had the floor, or rather the table. He made short work of it.

"It was Cæsar's policy to create a solitude and call it peace. That policy Rome abandoned. Otherwise, that is if she had continued to turn the barbarians into so many dead flies, their legs in the air, there would be no barbarian now on the throne of Prussia. There would be no Prussia, no throne, no war."

You ought to write for the comic papers, thought Verelst, who said: "Well, there is one comfort. It can't last forever."

With feigned sympathy Mrs. Austen took it up. "Ah, yes, but meanwhile there is that poor Belgium!"

"By the way," Paliser threw in. "I have a box or two for the Relief Fund at the Splendor to-night. Would anybody care to go?"

Kate Schermerhorn, who looked like a wayward angel, exclaimed at it: "Oh, do let's. There's to be a duck of a medium and I am just dying to have my fortune told."

Verelst showed his handsome false teeth. "No need of a medium for that, my dear. Your path is one of destruction. You will bowl men over as you go."

Kate laughed at him. "You seem very upright."

Mrs. Austen turned to Margaret. "If you care to go, we might get our wraps."

A moment later, when the women had left the room and the men were reseated, Verelst stretched a hand to Lennox. "Again I congratulate you and with all my heart."

Keith Lennox grasped that hand, shook it, smiled. The smile illuminated a face which, sombre in repose, then was radiant. Tall and straight, hard as nails, he had the romantic figure. In a costume other than evening clothes, he might have walked out of a tapestry.

With ambiguous amiability, Paliser smiled also. Already Margaret's beauty had stirred him. Already it had occurred to him that Lennox was very invitingly in the way.

III

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The ballrooms of the Splendor, peopled, as Mrs. Austen indulgently noted, with Goodness knows who from Heaven knows where, received her and her guests.

Not all of them, however. At the entrance, Verelst, pretexting a pretext, sagely dropped out. Within, a young man with ginger hair and laughing eyes, sprang from nowhere, pounced at Kate, floated her away.

Mrs. Austen, Margaret, Lennox and Paliser moved on.

In one room there was dancing; in another, a stage. It was in the first room that Kate was abducted. On the stage in the room beyond, a fat woman, dressed in green and gauze, was singing faded idiocies. Beyond, at the other end of the room was a booth above which was a sign—The Veiled Lady of Yucatan. Beneath the sign was a notice: All ye that enter here leave five dollars at the door.

The booth, hung with black velvet, was additionally supplied with hierograms in burnished steel. What they meant was not for the profane, or even for the initiate. Champollion could not have deciphered them. Fronting the door stood a young woman with a dark skin, a solemn look and a costume which, at a pinch, might have been Maya.

In those accents which the Plaza shares with Mayfair, she hailed Margaret. "Hello, dear! Your turn next."

For a moment, the dark skin, the solemn look, the costume puzzled Margaret. Then at once she exclaimed: "Why, Poppet!" She paused and added: "This is Mr. Paliser—Miss Bleecker. You know Mr. Lennox."

But now, from the booth, a large woman with high colour, grey hair and a jewelled lorgnette rushed out and fastened herself on the sultry girl.

"Gimme back my money. Your veiled lady is a horror! Said I'd marry again!"

She raised her glasses. "Mary Austen, as I'm a sinner! Go in and have your misfortunes told. How do do Margaret? Marry again indeed! Oughtn't I to have my money back?"

"Poppet ought to make you pay twice," Mrs. Austen heartlessly retorted at this woman, the relict of Nicholas Amsterdam, concerning whom a story had come out and who had died, his friends said, of exposure.

Mrs. Amsterdam turned on Paliser whom she had never seen before. "What do you say?"

"I am appalled," he answered.

She turned again. "There, Poppet, you hear that? Gimme back my money."

But Miss Bleecker occupied herself with Lennox, who was paying for Margaret.

Margaret entered the booth where a little old woman, very plainly dressed, sat at a small deal table. From above hung a light. Beside her was a vacant chair.

"Sit there, please," the medium, in a low voice, told the girl. "And now, if you please, your hand."

Margaret, seating herself, removed a glove. The hand in which she then put hers was soft and warm and she feared that it might perspire. She looked at the woman who looked at her, sighed, closed her eyes and appeared to go to sleep. Then, presently, her lips parted and in a voice totally different from that in which she had just spoken, a voice that was thin and shrill, words came leapingly.

"You are engaged to be married. Your engagement will be broken. You will be very unhappy. Later, you will be thankful. Later you will realise that sorrow is sent to make us nobler than we were."

With an intake of the breath, the medium started, straightened, opened her eyes.

At the shock of it Margaret had started also. "But——"

The medium, in her former voice, low and gentle, interrupted.

"I can tell you nothing else. I do not know what was said. But I am sorry if you have had bad news."

Margaret stood up, replacing her glove. She knew, as we all know, that certain gifted organisms hear combinations of sound to which the rest of us are deaf. She knew, as many of us also know, that there are other organisms that can foresee events to which the rest of us are blind. But she

knew too that in the same measure that the auditions of composers are not always notable, the visions of clairvoyants are not always exact. The knowledge steadied and partially comforted, but partially only.

At the entrance, Lennox stood with Miss Bleecker. A little beyond were Paliser and her mother. Mrs. Amsterdam, minus her money, must have rushed away.

Poppet Bleecker laughed and questioned: "No horrors?"

Lennox questioned also, but with his eyes.

Margaret hesitated. Then she got it. Taking the girl's hand she patted it and to Lennox said, and lightly enough: "Do go in. I want to see if what the medium says to you conforms with what she said to me."

Yet, however lightly she spoke, behind her girdle was that sensation which only the tormented know.

Beyond on the stage, the fat woman, now at the piano, was accompanying a girl who was singing a brindisi. The girl was young, good-looking, unembarrassed, very much at home. Her dress, a black chiffon, became her.

Then, in a moment, as Lennox entered the booth, Margaret joined her mother and looked at the girl.

"What is she singing?"

Paliser covered her with his eyes. "Verdi's *Segreto per esser felice*—the secret of happiness. Such a simple secret too."

"Yes?" Margaret absently returned. She was looking now at the booth. Quite as vaguely she added: "In what does it consist?"

"In getting what we do not deserve."

There was nothing in that to offend. But the man's eyes, of which already she had been conscious, did offend. They seemed to disrobe her. Annoyedly she turned.

Paliser turned with her. "Verdi's bric-à-brac is very banal. Perhaps you prefer Strauss. His dissonances are more harmonic than they sound."

Now though there was applause. With a roulade the brindisi had ceased and the singer as though pleased, not with herself but with the audience, bowed. The fat woman twisting on her bench, was also smiling. She looked cheerful and evil.

"I do believe that's the Tamburini," Mrs. Austen remarked. "I heard her at the Academy, ages ago." The usual touch followed. "How she has gone off!"

The fat woman stood up, and, preceded by the girl, descended into the audience.

Margaret looked again at the booth. Lennox was coming out. He said a word to Miss Bleecker and glanced about the room.

Margaret motioned. He did not notice. The girl who had been singing was bearing down on him, a hand outstretched and, in her face, an expression which Margaret could not interpret. But she saw Lennox smile, take her hand and say —what? Margaret could not tell, but it was something to which the girl was volubly replying.

"Who's his little friend?" Mrs. Austen in her even voice inquired. "Mr. Paliser," she added. "Would you mind telling—er—my daughter's young man that we are waiting."

Margaret winced. She had turned from Paliser and she turned then from her mother.

Paliser, whom the phrase "my daughter's young man" amused, sauntered away. He strolled on to where Lennox stood with the girl. The fat woman joined them.

Lennox must have introduced Paliser, for Margaret could see them all talking at once. Then Lennox again looked about, saw Margaret and her mother, and came over.

"Who's your friend?" Mrs. Austen asked.

Lennox' eyes caressed Margaret. Then he turned to her mother. "She is a Miss Cara. Cassy Cara her name is. I know her father. He is a violinist."

And my daughter is second fiddle, thought Mrs. Austen, who said: "How interesting!"

With his sombre air, Lennox summarised it. "She is studying for the opera. The woman with her, Madame Tamburini, is her coach. You may have heard of her."

"A fallen star," Mrs. Austen very pleasantly remarked. Quite as pleasantly she added: "The proper companion for a soiled dove."

The charm of that was lost. Margaret, who had not previously seen this girl but who had heard of her from Lennox, was speaking to him.

"It was her father, was it?" Then, dismissing it, she asked anxiously: "But do tell me, Keith, what did the medium say?"

"That I would be up for murder."

Margaret's eyes widened. But, judging it ridiculous, she exclaimed: "Was that all?"

"All!" Lennox grimly repeated. "What more would you have?" Abruptly he laughed. "I don't wonder Mrs. Amsterdam wanted her money back."

On the stage, from jungles of underwear, legs were tossing. The orchestra had become frankly canaille. Moreover the crowd of Goodness knows who had increased. A person had the temerity to elbow Mrs. Austen and the audacity to smile at her. It was the finishing touch.

She poked at Margaret. "Come."

As they moved on, a man smiled at Lennox, who, without stopping, gave him a hand.

He was an inkbeast. But there was nothing commercial in his appearance. Ordinarily, he looked like a somnambulist. When he was talking, he resembled a comedian. In greeting Lennox he seemed to be in a pleasant dream. The crowd swallowed him.

"Who was that?" Mrs. Austen enquired.

"Ten Eyck Jones."

"The writer?" asked this lady, who liked novels, but who preferred to live them.

Meanwhile Paliser was talking to Cassy Cara and the Tamburini. The latter listened idly, with her evil smile. Yet Paliser's name was very evocative. The syllables had fallen richly on her ears.

Cassy Cara had not heard them and they would have conveyed nothing to her if she had. She was a slim girl, with a lot of auburn hair which was docked. The careless-minded thought her pretty. She was what is far rarer; she was handsome. Her features had the surety of an intaglio. Therewith was an air and a look that were not worldly or even superior, but which, when necessary as she sometimes found it, could reduce a man, and for that matter a woman, to proportions really imperceptible.

A little beauty and a little devil, thought Paliser, who was an expert. But leisurely, in his Oxford voice, he outlined for her a picture less defined. "You remind me of something."

With entire brevity and equal insolence, she returned it. "I dare say."

"Yes. Of supper."

"An ogre, are you?"

Paliser, ruminating the possibilities of her slim beauty served Régence, smiled at this girl who did not smile back. "Not Nebuchadnezzar at any rate. Vegetarianism is not my forte. Won't you and Madame Tamburini take potluck with me? There must be a restaurant somewhere."

The fallen star moistened her painted lips. "Yes, why not?"

Born in California, of foreign parents, she had neither morals or accent and spoke in a deep voice. She spoke American and English. She spoke the easy French of the boulevards, the easier Italian of the operatic stage. She never spoke of Tamburini. She left him to be imagined, which perhaps he had been.

From the room they went on into a wide, crowded hall, beyond which was another room, enclosed in glass, where there were tables and palms.

As they entered, a captain approached. There was a smell of pineapple, the odour of fruit and flowers. From a gallery came the tinkle of mandolins. Mainly the tables were occupied. But the captain, waving the way, piloted them to a corner, got them seated and stood, pad in hand.

Paliser looked at Cassy Cara. She was hungry as a wolf, but she said indifferently: "A swallow of anything."

"One swallow does not make a supper," Paliser retorted and looked at the Tamburini who appeared less indifferent.

"Ham and eggs."

Without a quiver, the captain booked it.

"Also," Paliser told him, "caviare, woodcock, Ruinart." From the man he turned to the girl. "It was very decent of Lennox to introduce me to you."

Cassy put her elbows on the table. "He could not be anything else than decent. Don't you know him well?"

Paliser shrugged. "Our intimacy is not oppressive."

"He saved her father's life," the Tamburini put in. "Her father is a musician—and authentically marquis," she added, as though that explained everything.

"We are Portuguese," said Cassy, "or at least my father is. He used to play at the Metro. But he threw it up and one night, when he was coming home from a private house where he had been giving a concert, he was attacked. There were two of them. They knocked him down——"

"Before he had time to draw his sword-cane," the fat woman interrupted.

"Yes," Cassy resumed, "and just then Mr. Lennox came along and knocked them down and saved his violin which was what they were after."

"It's a Cremona," said the Tamburini who liked details.

"But that is not all of it," the girl continued. "My father's arm was broken. He has not been able to play since. Mr. Lennox brought him home and sent for his own physician. He's a dear."

"Who is?" Paliser asked. "The physician?"

But now a waiter was upon them with a bottle which he produced with a pop! Dishes followed to which Cassy permitted the man to help her. Her swallow of anything became large spoonfuls of rich blackness and the tenderness of savorous flesh. She was not carnal, but she was hungry and at her home latterly the food had been vile.

The Tamburini, with enigmatic ideas in the back of her head, ate her horrible dish very delicately, her little finger crooked. But she drank nobly.

Paliser too had ideas which, however, were not enigmatic in the least and not in the back of his head either. They concerned two young women, one of whom was patently engaged to Lennox and the other probably in love with him. The situation appealed to this too charming young man to whom easy conquests were negligible.

He had been looking at Cassy. On the table was a vase in which there were flowers. He took two of them and looked again at the girl.

"Sunday is always hateful. Couldn't you both dine with me here?"

The former prima donna wiped her loose mouth. She could, she would, and she said so.

Paliser put the flowers before Cassy.

"Le parlate d'amor," the ex-diva began and, slightly for a moment, her deep voice mounted.

Cassy turned on her. "You're an imbecile."

With an uplift of the chin—a family habit—Paliser summoned the waiter. While he was paying him, Cassy protested. She had nothing to wear.

She had other objections which she kept to herself. If it had been Lennox she would have had none at all. But it was not Lennox. It was a man whom she had never seen before and who was entirely too free with his eyes.

"Come as you are," said the Tamburini, who massively stood up.

Paliser also was rising. "Let me put you in a cab and on Sunday——"

Cassy gave him a little unsugared look. "You take a great deal for granted."

Behind the girl's back the Tamburini gave him another look. Cheerful and evil and plainer than words it said: "Leave it to me."

Cassy, her perfect nose in the air, announced that she must get her things.

Through the emptying restaurant Paliser saw them to the entrance. There, as he waited, the captain hurried to him.

"Everything satisfactory, sir?"

"I want a private dining-room on Sunday."

"Yes, sir. For how many?"

"Two."

"Sorry, sir. It's against the rules."

Paliser surveyed him. "Whom does this hotel belong to? You?"

The captain smiled and caressed his chin. "No, sir, the hotel does not belong to me. It is owned by Mr. Paliser."

"Thank you. So I thought. I am Mr. Paliser. A private dining-room on Sunday for two."

But now Cassy and the Tamburini, hatted and cloaked, were returning. The chastened waiter moved aside. Through

the still crowded halls, Paliser accompanied them to the street where, a doorkeeper assiduously assisting, he got them into a taxi, asked the addresses, paid the mechanician, saw them off.

Manfully, as the cab veered, the Tamburini swore.

"You damn fool, that man is rich as all outdoors."

IV

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The house in which Cassy lived was what is agreeably known as a walk-up. There was no lift, merely the stairs, flight after flight, which constituted the walk-up, one that ascended to the roof, where you had a fine view of your neighbours' laundry. Such things are not for everybody. Cassy hated them.

On this night when the taxi, after reaching Harlem, landed her there and, the walk-up achieved, she let herself into a flat on the fifth floor, a "You're late!" filtered out at her.

It was her father, who, other things being equal, you might have mistaken for Zuloaga's "Uncle." The lank hair, the sad eyes, the wan face, the dressing-gown, there he sat. Only the palette was absent. Instead was an arm in a sling. There was another difference. Beyond, in lieu of capricious manolas, was a piano and, above it, a portrait with which Zuloaga had nothing to do. The portrait represented a man who looked very fierce and who displayed a costume rich and unusual. Beneath the portrait was a violin. Beside the

piano was a sword-cane. Otherwise, barring a rose-wood table, the room contained nothing to boast of.

"You're late," he repeated.

His name was Angelo Cara. When too young to remember it, he had come to New York from Lisbon. With him had come the swashbuckler in oil. He grew up in New York, developed artistic tastes, lost the oil man, acquired a wife, lost her also, but not until she had given him a daughter who was named Bianca, a name which, after elongating into Casabianca, shortened itself into Cassy.

Meanwhile, on Madison Avenue, then unpolluted, there was a brown-stone front, a landau, other accessories, the flower of circumstances not opulent but easy, the rents and increments of the swashbuckler's estate, which by no means had come from Lisbon but which, the rich and unusual costume boxed in camphor, had been acquired in the import and sale of wine.

The fortune that the swashbuckler made descended to his son, who went to Wall Street with it. There the usual cropper wiped him out, affected his health, drove him, and not in a landau either, from Madison Avenue, left him the portrait, the violin, the table and nothing else.

But that is an exaggeration. To have debts is to have something. They stir you. They stirred him. Besides there was Cassy. To provide for both was the violin which in his hands played itself. For years it sufficed. Then, with extreme good sense, he fought with the Union, fought with Toscanini, disassociated himself from both. Now, latterly, with his arm in a sling, the wolf was not merely at the door, it was in the living-room of this Harlem flat which Cassy had just entered.

It was then that he repeated it. "You're late!"

For the past hour he had sat staring at things which the room did not contain—a great, glowing house; an orchestra demoniacally led by a conductor whom he strangely resembled; a stage on which, gracile in the violet and silver of doublet and hose, the last of the Caras bowed to the vivas.

Then abruptly the curtain had fallen, the lights had gone out, the vision faded, banished by the quick click of her key.

But not entirely. More or less the dream was always with him. When to-day is colourless, where can one live except in the future? To-day is packed with commonplaces which, could we see them correctly, are probably false for in the future only beautiful things are true. It is stupid not to live among them, particularly if you have the ability, and what artist lacks it? In the future, there is fame for the painter, there is posterity for the poet and much good may it do them. But for the musician, particularly for the song-bird, there is the vertigo of instant applause. In days like these, days that witness the fall of empires, the future holds for the donna, for the prima donna, for the prima donna assoluta, the grandest of earthly careers.

That career, Angelo Cara foresaw for his daughter, foresaw it at least in the hypnogogic visions which the artist always has within beck and call. In the falsifying commonplaces of broad daylight he was not so sure. Her upper register had in it a parterre of flowers, but elsewhere it lacked volume, lacked line, lacked colour, and occasionally he wondered whether her voice would not prove to be a voix de salon and not the royal organ that fills a house. Yet in the