

## CHAPTER XII

### *A YOUNG LADY'S LIMOUSINE*

**B**UT while Mary's romantic story was going on, Old Silver had not been without his own adventures.

Soon after the child's strange disappearance he was taking his usual afternoon walk, wondering not only about life in general but about Mary in particular.

As he descended in the lift, Pete eyed him as of old and took a Hamlet pose, since there happened to be no other passengers at the moment.

“‘To be, or not to be,’” the lad murmured under his breath, both hands released from the wheel, much to Old Silver's dismay. In fact, in Pete's conception of Hamlet during this speech, the arms should be folded on the chest, and he even swung about, so that Oliver could get a front view of him instead of a vicarious one through the mirror.

“‘—that is the question,’” he went on as



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the car descended, making his youthful voice as sepulchral as possible.

When Silver, who was used to these fantastic imitations and simulations of Shakespearean rôles, saw how oblivious Pete was of his duty, he gave a little gasp of horror.

“‘To be, or not to be’—that’s what I’ve been thinking, Pete. And it’s down to destruction for both of us unless you set your hand on the lever, my mad young Prince. Stop this nonsense when I’m your passenger—your precious freight, I might even say.” And he laughed, though there was no little seriousness behind his light remark.

“‘—must give us pause,’” Pete had rattled on, until he came to that phrase. And the car literally did pause at the main floor—safely, much to Old Silver’s relief.

“Reserve your soliloquies for yourself, when you’re alone,” the old actor cautioned the lad, with a smile, as he stepped from the lift. “That’s when they’re meant to be said.”

“Sure I will!” roared young Pete, back in his own natural manner. “Ma’s always scoldin’ me, too. I’ve been scolded by experts. I should worry!” And he had to close the door and ascend once more as there came a brisk ring.



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Oliver turned and bowed to all the clerks and acquaintances in the corridor. Erdleigh caught his eye.

"To think, sir," the cashier said in a whisper when the actor reached his cage, "that we've had all this excitement in the hotel, right under our noses, and I was never in on a bit of it! It's breaking my heart! Any news of little Mary yet?"

Though Oliver had a letter from her tucked in his pocket, he told Bob that there was nothing to report.

"The quiet old Splendide having such a mystery within its walls—well, it beats me. Shows you never can tell," went on Erdleigh. "You never—can—tell," and he bent over his ledger again, shaking his head. He was murmuring something about his never having suspected little Mary of being that kind of girl—didn't believe it yet—as Oliver moved away.

It was a glorious day. The city gleamed and shone, and at the door of the hotel, as ever, stood the tall, rather handsome but sad-looking man in uniform who always greeted No. 931 with a wistful smile. He was well set-up, like a soldier. He was always quick to find a taxi for any patron—he seemed to have a magical



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way of summoning elusive cars—and for that reason alone he would have endeared himself to the guests of the Splendide. He was like an umbrella on a rainy night, some one had said of him; a safe harbour in time of storm.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Silver,” he greeted the actor now. “Fine day, sir. Don’t see you as often as I’d like to.”

“Nor I you,” Silver answered.

He had heard of how this upstanding man, who was an Englishman, had been wounded at the first advance of the Somme—the same terrible advance in which his sister had lost her only son. For that reason there had always been a silent bond between them, though it was seldom that they got a chance to chat.

“I’d like to see you some time soon,” said Charles, “if it wouldn’t put you out too much, sir?”

“Wouldn’t now be a good time?” asked Silver, interested, as always, in the things these employees had to tell him.

“Can’t to-day, sir. Terrible rush. And what I want to tell you would take too much time.” Oliver noticed that he looked strangely haggard in the sunlight, in contrast to the gay-looking people who, because of the brilliance of the afternoon, were out in droves.



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“Suppose we meet, then, this evening, when you’ve gone off duty,” Silver suggested.

And they made a rendezvous. It would be at the Park entrance at eight-thirty, at Fifth Avenue and Sixty-sixth Street.

Then Silver trudged toward that green oasis which is set like a jewel on the grey, dim gown of the city. He had tucked away in his pocket, as always on such jaunts, a fresh roll which he would give to his favourite goat at the Zoo. How he loved the Zoo, where the children romped!

Lots of people smiled at him as he walked along, and policemen even nodded and smiled, recognizing his tall figure as it swung into the Avenue. For Silver was one of New York’s few quaint characters left over from the old, happier days.

He seemed a part of the sunlight as he walked along. Some took him for a Senator, some for a Bishop, and a few for a naval officer. Scarcely anyone thought of him as an actor—unless, by chance, he recognized him as a character he had seen on the stage some seasons back.

But Old 931 had one bad habit. He was so fond of studying people and bowing right and left to acquaintances who nodded to him that he often forgot the traffic regulations.



He would have been the first to deplore jay-walking in another, and yet he indulged in that most desperate of city games. And to-day his tendency brought him to grief.

He had reached the border of the Park, where there is a beautiful blending of sylvan solitude and city clamour, when a motor whizzed from a side street, giving him no time to escape its sudden fury. He remembered no more until he wakened in a lovely room. He was lying upon a couch, still fully dressed, and a young woman with an angel face was bending over him, saying, "Oh, please take this *sal volatilé*—it'll do you good. There was no policeman handy when my car knocked you over, so my chauffeur and I tucked you into it and brought you to my little place. And, thank God, you're going to be all right after all, bless you. A bit bruised, I'm afraid, and maybe shaken up a little; but that's all. My doctor will be here in a jiffy, and then he'll fix you up."

"Thank you a thousand times for your kindness," Old Silver said. "I guess it was my fault. I never look where I'm going, I'm afraid. Stupid old boy—that's what I am. Lucky I wasn't killed."

The pretty young woman bent over him. "I think *I'd* have died if we had killed you,"



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she said very quietly. "Now be still and take things easy, won't you, please? I've got to go out—there's the telephone now. But I'll come back and see you before you leave. Don't worry. I'm leaving you in my maïd's hands—Dollie will do everything for you."

She brushed back his long silver hair and pressed a tiny kiss upon his noble forehead. She *was* pretty—with just one defect—the smallest droop of the left eyelid. Yet was it a defect?

He watched her get into her chinchilla coat. Then he heard her cheery "Ta-ta!" as she gently closed the door and left him to the peace of the little room, which began to enfold him like a garment.

He *was* shaken up. At his age . . . But he wouldn't let himself brood over unpleasant possibilities. He must do as she bade him—he still and wait for the doctor, and ring for Dollie when he needed anything.

He must have dropped off to sleep, for the next he knew, a physician was bending over him and pronouncing him a marvel. And Dollie was smiling in the background.

"Stay here, sir, for three hours more, at least. Then they can take you home in the car. There's not a bone broken, thank heaven! You must have led a clean life—very few of



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your kind nowadays, sir! The younger generation—or, as we call 'em now, the younger *generation*—should take a lesson or two from you! Glad you're getting along so well. Good-bye. I don't even have to give you any medicine. Wish there were more of your kind in the world. Yet we doctors would starve in that case."

Dollie came in and out, like a nice, comfortable kitten. He was drowsy, and so at first he did not take much notice of her, except to be grateful for her solicitude. She had cheeks like roses, and eyes that sparkled as twilight came on, just like twin stars peeping at him.

"You must be an English girl," he finally said, when she had brought a fresh hot-water bag for him.

"That I am, sir. Kent. I knew you were part English, at least, the minute I laid eyes on you. And when you spoke . . . that was the give-away. Americans aren't so punctilious in their speech, are they, sir? Yet I love this country. And I love my little mistress—she's a dear. But *she's* English, too," the talkative Dollie hurried along.

It was nice to listen to her chatter. At first he paid little heed to what she said—he was simply content to lie still, as he had been bid-



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den; but presently her words amused him. He didn't know whether it was right for a maid thus to ramble on about her mistress; but he soon discovered that Dollie's gossip was of the most harmless kind. She seemed to like the sound of her own voice, and so did he. He heard her *non sequiturs*, and inwardly smiled.

"I'm not tiring you, am I, sir?" Dollie said.

"Oh, no; not at all. Go on. I'm quite strong now."

And he learned that Dollie had first been employed in Paris by the young mistress of whom she had learned to be so fond. "She was known as the Comtesse de la Paix over there," Dollie informed him, treating the name as though it were a titbit on her garrulous tongue. "She began as a dressmaker's assistant, and oh, how hard she worked, day in, day out."

Of course, one as pretty as Susie could not lead the life of a nun in that wildest, dearest city on earth. There were men, plenty of them, hanging around the little flat where she lived with Dollie in a kind of dream. But there was one in particular whom Dollie, with her strange instinct, never liked, and it was he,



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of course, for whom little Susie fell with a crash,

“Why is it always a rotter, as they say, who wins the loveliest girl?” Dollie wanted to know. “His name—I won’t tell you what it is; but he was French, and there was a long line of gentility behind him. He fascinated Susie—I always call her just that behind her back, sir—can’t help it. She’s been more like a sister to me than a mistress. He kept telling of his wealth—how his income had been cut off since the War, of course; but how it would all be restored to his family. Miss Susie—I must learn to speak of her that way—Miss Susie, she believed him. And she got engaged to him. There were times when I noticed how her left eyelid drooped a bit more at the end of a tired day, and I thought maybe it wasn’t just the work, but the emotional crisis she was ever going through, poor dear, which caused it.

“To make a long story short, sir, that wretch deserted her—came and told her one evening that he was weary of a girl who wouldn’t go the whole limit with him. He was French, and he couldn’t understand her English ways, her reserve, her decency. For Miss Susie is good—oh, so good. Why, she wouldn’t harm



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a fly; and when she ran you down to-day, she was almost a wreck. You should have seen her when she brought you in!"

Silver was touched by this story. But likewise he was suspicious, though he didn't like to admit this even to himself. How kind they were—these two young women! And yet . . . he put the thought from him; but it kept coming back, as indiscreet thoughts have an immemorial way of doing.

A sewing-girl in Paris . . . a vanished fiancé . . . a maid, when one is supposed to be poor, and a limousine and a chauffeur . . . there were elements of comedy in the situation! One doesn't live in New York, in a sweet little flat, cheerily furnished, on nothing a year. Yet one look at Susie—he didn't even inquire her last name—would tell anyone that she was what they call "straight" on Broadway.

He didn't ask Dollie to continue. No need to. She rattled on, and soon the whole story was explained to him as he lay there so still and obedient to the doctor's orders.

The sad little Susie had heard that in America there were all sorts of opportunities, if a girl had a pretty face, and charm, and any talent at all. So Susie dug up enough to leave the city of joy, which had really become the city



of sorrow for her. And the thrifty Dollie had surprised her by adding to their tiny pile—enough to bring them both over to a newer city, where they could begin life again. And here they had found themselves a year ago. No use going back to England—there was no one but an aunt in London, and the aunt didn't want a niece hanging like a millstone about her poor neck.

Susie had done dressmaking again in New York for a while; and then, one night at a party, she had run into a Revue man, who told her she was wasting her time in a sewing-room all day. So much pleasanter to make a living on the stage, he said to her. He had a show in one of the leading theatres and all she had to do was to call upon him. He'd make things easy for her. And the salary he offered! . . . it almost took her breath away. Girls like little Mary and Susie were for ever having offers like this, thought Old Silver, dozing gently as Dollie chattered on.

The money was forthcoming. Susie did make good. She was very gifted, Dollie said, and the latter was a theatrical maid, and loved the glamour of the theatre and the excitement behind the scenes every night. Oh, it was too wonderful, and life opened up for them,



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and still the Revue man never made any breaks—none at all, if you would believe it. All the hideous stories one heard about how evil an institution the theatre was were forgotten. It was too good to be true, Dollie said. And then one night Susie was asked to do something at which her little heart rebelled, and her conscience even more.

The Revue man said that her salary would be trebled if she would be a Jewel in the show.

“A Jewel!” Dollie cried. “Do you know what that meant, sir? It meant that our Susie was to wear almost nothing—almost nothing—think of that! Her figure, her face, her voice, tiny though it was, had charmed the management, and she was to be—a Jewel! I suppose they knew that she was not living in the best apartment in New York; that any girl of distinction and talent would like to step one rung higher on the ladder of fame—if fame you can call it, sir. And Susie gave in. I didn’t blame her. Why blame anybody for ambition? Oh, she stayed what she was—a good little girl. I know that, sir. Indeed I do. Susie is good; she can’t help it. But the Revue man, once he had got her to consent to be a Jewel—well, he didn’t remain quite so polite and gentle. He began annoy-



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ing her, and Susie found that three times the salary was hardly worth the trouble she was put to. But she'd made a roaring success. The hardest critics praised her, and the Revue man knew, when she spurned his advances, that he couldn't afford to lose her out of the show—indeed, he'd have to give her another increase, and maybe put her name in electric lights out in front of the theatre—she didn't use her own proper old English name, of course."

Silver learned that Susie won out. Hence the apartment, and the car, and the chauffeur, and everything so wonderful now. A year of it, and money in the bank, and rich men's sons trying to marry her, and gifts beyond price, and flowers every day, filling the flat, and Dollie sharing in the new glory . . . it was fabulous. And Susie keeping her head all the time, never losing it a bit.

But old Silver kept thinking of how the stage had deteriorated—his beloved profession gone to pot when girls were forced to do this sort of thing. Old-fashioned, was he? he said to himself as he lay there. No; just decent. Just wishing that the dear old days could remain for ever; just longing for an uplift, not a down-thrust, of the art he so loved. This is what they made pretty girls do—become



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Jewels in stupid revues. Prostitute their talents. Sink in the scale. For what? Money, money, money! Always that. And piling temptation upon temptation. No wonder there was no longer room for people like himself in the mimic world behind the footlights. Art? Bah! It was just greed and gold, and finally oblivion for the best of them.

He must see Susie again if she did not return before he was able to be taken back to the Splendide. He must talk to her like a Dutch uncle—like a grandfather, if necessary. She couldn't go on this way. It was the primrose path of dalliance she had taken, and she didn't know it. Neither did Dollie know it. Sooner or later, sooner or later, he kept thinking to himself, that Revue man would win out. Fancy-free was Susie? They all thought that. But the day would come when she could not withstand the Revue man, or others like him.

Dollie noticed how still he was. She grew frightened. Maybe, at his age, she had wearied him, and would be responsible if he fell back dead, right there in Susie's flat. Nice thing the headings would look like in the evening papers—"Noted Old Actor Succumbs in Susie Martin's Flat!"

She must rouse him. Maybe he hadn't heard



a word she had been saying. Maybe he had passed away even as she rattled on. She was dreadfully scared. Why didn't Susie return? What was keeping her all this time?

Finally, to her relief and joy, she saw Old Silver stir.

"Are you—better, sir?" she whispered.

"Oh, much," he answered, to her infinite peace of mind. "Think I can go now."

She helped him to rise from the couch. Darkness had crept in the window.

As she got up, she pushed the covering from his tall form. Out of the pocket of his long coat there fell a roll.

Silver smiled. But Dollie thought—"He's poor, he's old. He carried bread around with him—bread that he may have begged!"

"What's this?" she ventured to ask, picking up the roll.

"Oh, that—that's something for the goat!" Silver laughed.

But Dollie didn't. She thought he had gone quite mad. And what had she told to a crazy man?

She was frightened all over again. Why didn't Susie come home? Oh, what had she done, to tell these secrets to a stranger who turned out to be a simple old imbecile?



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But she saw him gently to the car and put him into it.

When she heard him say "To the Splendide," she smiled.

"He probably meant to the asylum," she thought.