

## CHAPTER VIII

“**Y**OU was such a swell guy that I didn't think it could be you,” said the man.

“ Things are good for me,” said Buddy.  
“ But they seem to be pretty awful for you. What in hell are you doing here ? ”

“ Selling the monkeys ! ”

“ But, good God ! Why ? ”

The little, white-headed man held out a couple of raw, misshapen hands.

“ The rheumatic fever. How can I conjure with the cards ? And they never gets no better.”

“ You're not going to sell any more monkeys if I can help it,” said Buddy.

To dismiss the chance American acquaintance he had run across in the lounge of a London theatre had been a simple matter of prudence ; to deny himself to Antonio Gaffarelli was unthinkable. In the time of his worst adversity, some four years before Tonio had been more than a brother to him. He had nursed him through pneumonia, had lent him money, had cut out a week's engagement in order to watch over him. Tonio had attached him to himself as bosom friend, almost hero. There had been times even more recent when Buddy had been glad to drop into Tonio's comfortable little New York flat in Greenwich Village, for the sake of an hour's warmth and quiet and even of a meal. Tonio in those days was a clever conjurer and earned good money for

his turn in vaudeville and for general engagements. Buddy had not heard of him for a couple of years. Now this heart-rending encounter.

Clear as was the sky and dry the pavements, a bitter wind swept the Boulevard. Buddy, warmly clad, shivered, loitering. The little man, who had nothing but a thin jacket over a dirty white sweater to protect him, was blue with cold. The ends of his trousers were caked with recent mud and his shoes were piteous in their dilapidation.

"We must go indoors somewhere and talk," said Buddy, looking about him.

Tonio shook a red forefinger. "No, no, Buddy! We attract too much attention."

Which was true. Tonio, his bush of white hair crowned by his forlorn old hat, a size or two too small for him, was in himself a noticeable figure. The pair together, the elegantly dressed, unmistakable Englishman and the odd Italian outcast in obviously familiar conversation, were a target for the curious glances of all passers-by. Some began to linger by the box of monkeys. Buddy hailed a taxi.

"Jump in and we can talk in my hotel!"

But Tonio would have none of it. "No, no! You give me your address. I write to you."

Buddy thrust his hand into his trouser pocket where lay the change of a thousand-franc note which he had tendered in payment of his luncheon bill, and stuffed the lot into Tonio's hand.

"If appearances are what you're thinking about, go off at once and get some sort of outwardly presentable kit; and take a taxi and come to the Plaza Athénée. You'll come?"

The corners of the little man's lips drooped and the light in his eyes grew dim.

"Come! Does one spit on the Hand of God?"

Buddy took out his note-case. "Here's my card. Yes, that's my real name, old man. I've inherited money. You show that card at the desk and I'll do the rest. How long will you be?"

Tonio made a quick gesture with his crippled hands.

"One hour?"

"Good! Now, off—*avanti!*"

"But my monkeys?"

"I'll take your damned monkeys," said Buddy, bending down to the box on the pavement.

Tonio bent down also in protest. He at least would put them into the waiting taxi. Eight or a dozen people gathered round. A *sergent de ville* came up.

"Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?"

"As you see," said Buddy, in tolerable French. "I am buying the monkeys of my friend."

"And you, has he paid you?"

"Why, yes, Monsieur."

"Eh bien. Qu'est-ce que vous faites là? Foutez-moi le camp, et plus vite que ça."

Buddy jumped into the taxi with the monkeys while Tonio fled before Authority.

In Tonio's cardboard box were ten little mechanical monkeys. Buddy cleared the mantelpiece of ornaments which he deposited on the bath-room floor, and replaced them by the string of monkeys. They proclaimed far more significance of life than the meaningless imitation Sèvres rubbish. They all had little, beady, human eyes which regarded him with ironical benignity. They seemed, according to his fancy, to confess that they were a damned sight better off on a warm mantelpiece than on the wintry pavement of the Boulevard.

Anyway, they would strike a chord of welcome to Tonio when he entered the room.

He made up a great fire and waited for Tonio. He decided, after much cogitation, that this was the least comprehensible of all incomprehensible worlds. Here was one of the most guileless sons of God, endowed by God with a gift of deft fingers whereby he was privileged to give pleasure to thousands of his fellow-creatures. . . . His thoughts wandered into long parentheses. Pleasure? Surely it was far more than that. Tonio's conjuring played a tremendous fundamental part in the scheme of human things. For a quarter of an hour a day a thousand men and women lost, in a queer delight, all consciousness of their troubles, their anxieties, their sorrows. Multiply those thousand quarters of an hour by many thousands and yet by a thousand again, and how many millions of hours' surcease from care had this little man with his dexterous fingers given to the human race! Well—he continued his original thought—here was Tonio endowed by God, so favoured by God-arranged circumstance as to be able to lead a life of enjoyment, in all humility and religious gratitude for God's gracious rewards for well-doing, suddenly smitten by the only calamity, save death, that could render nugatory his one gentle contribution to the happiness of mankind.

There was no sense in it unless the *Bon Dieu* had pre-destined him to play the *Jongleur de Notre Dame* for all Eternity before the Angels in Heaven.

Buddy found relief from these soul-disturbing speculations in winding up the ten monkeys, one after the other, and setting them all alive and happy and grotesquely realistic.

After an hour or two Tonio appeared, summarily apparelled in outer decency. He had provided himself with a soft felt hat, a good overcoat, a silk muffler, a pair of trousers and boots. He was also freshly shaven. He beamed on his benefactor.

"At last after many months," said he, "I am 'Monsieur' again. When I have time I will buy myself a shirt. But like this," he withdrew his wrists into his coat-cuffs, "no one would know. You see, dear friend, I was hungry—I had to eat. I was dirty—I had to wash and shave. All that took up most of the hour I gave myself."

"You've really had a—a good lunch?" said Buddy, his hand hovering over the bell-push.

"*Si, si!* I never did know I could eat so much spaghetti!" The little man smiled and pressed his stomach eloquently. "And sausage too, and bread. You see when a man has joy and hope for *condimenta*—what you say?—to season his food, he eats, he eats." His lips twisted up wryly for the smile, and tears were not far from his eyes.

"At any rate," said Buddy, ringing the bell, "we can have a drink."

Tonio waved a hand to the mantelpiece.

"My monkeys!"

"No," said Buddy. "My monkeys. My Tonio. A family party. The only family I've got. Now sit down, old son, and tell me all about it."

There was much complexity of detail, but little in broad outline, in his simple story.

It all began in Omaha. He had finished his turn, emerged into the street. He must go to the hotel, near the railway station, collect his baggage, and catch his train to the next town. It was a night of bitter rain. The roadway glistened and flashed with yellow taxis, but not one of them was empty. He waited and waited. Time passed. He must walk to the hotel. He arrived there drenched to the skin. When he arrived in Chicago he had to take to his bed. They removed him to a hospital. Rheumatic fever! God knows how long he stayed there. When they dis-

missed him as cured, his hands were like the knotted twigs of a tree in winter. He went out into a wintry world. And there was cold death in his heart.

"Ah! My Buddy, you don't know what that is."

"I've had a slight touch of it now and then in my life," replied Buddy.

"Yes, I remember. You gotta bad time, but you had not your means of living gone. A painter who is blind—what good is he? A conjurer who cannot conjure—what use is he? And all my money gone."

The little man made a wide, forlorn gesture.

"I always thought you were a rich man—putting money away every week in banks and things."

"I did put it away," said Tonio mournfully, "but not in banks. All I had in the world was locked in a safe in my flat—Twenty-Second Street."

"But," said Buddy, with knotted brow, "there was Julietta to look after it."

"She did look after it," said Tonio. "And when I came out of the hospital, I find I have to look after Julietta. I look after her for four months and I never find her."

"Good God!" exclaimed Buddy in amazed indignation. He reached the anti-climax of the commonplace, and bent over Tonio, gripping his shoulders. "Julietta let you down like that?"

"Just like that," said Tonio, meeting his angry glance with mournful dog's eyes.

"Who was the man?"

Tonio lifted his shoulders. He had never heard of any man. Julietta was not any man's woman. If there had been any known man, Dio! he would have Buddy to understand that, in spite of ineffectual fingers, there would have been a murder so bloody and ghastly that every tall building in New York would have shivered and shaken in horror. But no! Nothing

of the kind. Julietta had written the most loving of letters during his illness. She had arranged to meet him at the New York Central Station. He arrived there. No Julietta. He drove to the flat in Greenwich Village, opened the door with his key, and found emptiness, emptiness—bare walls, bare floors, bare rooms. His only possession that remained was a glass bowl which he had used in his gold-fish trick. The bowl was cracked and even the gold-fish had gone.

The safe had been broken open and all his elastic-banded packets of thousand-dollar bills and his Bearer Bonds had gone with the furniture and the gold-fish.

Julietta. Buddy had known her intimately—as intimately as a Buddy Drake, with his English traditions behind him, could know the pretty, immigrant Italian drab and shrew who was his friend's mistress. Why not wife? he had asked many times in past years. The answer was: Why? There had been a husband in the far dim distance. Why worry about dismal divorce and marriage when things as they were made life so blissfully simple? It was none of Buddy's business. They were, as far as he could see, a devoted and perfectly respectable couple. To the world at large she was Mrs. Gaffarelli. Yet Buddy had never liked her—a pinched and wizened Neapolitan shrew. In fact, he detested her. But if Tonio was happy, who was he to express unpleasant opinions?

And now the all-but-foreseen had happened. She had cleared out of America, bag and baggage, chock-full of money. She was now, probably, in Naples, engaged in profitable and most unmeritorious commerce.

“And that woman, Buddy, whom I adored—the

star of my life, the sun and the moon of my soul—  
Ah!”

Tonio strode about the room, clutching at his hair.

“And then, old chap?” Buddy asked, after a decent interval for anathema.

Well, there came very quickly the fall of Tonio, Master of the Mystery of his Craft, though powerless to practise it. He managed to obtain the position of assistant to one of his pupils, a brilliant prestidigitator, professionally known as Frosco. He toured with him for awhile; then accompanied him to Paris. All went well until one day when Frosco, crossing the Place de l'Opéra was unable to prestidigitate himself out of the way of a taxicab and an omnibus each going in a different direction. Frosco was killed. Tonio's occupation was gone. He knew no conjurers in Paris who needed an assistant with maimed hands. Nobody in the great city had any use for him. He slunk about in the poverty-stricken, non-criminal underworld. Then he learned the trade secrets of the vendors of toys on the Boulevard. He invested his poor savings—some three months ago—in the line of scratching monkeys. He was earning, when Buddy met him, about ten francs a day.

Ten francs; twenty pence; one-and-eightpence; eleven shillings and eightpence a week.

“My God?” cried Buddy. “In another month you'd have starved to death.”

Four years ago Tonio Gaffarelli had not a care in the world—not even Julietta, who in some queer way was his joy and inspiration. He dressed in fine linen and the modern equivalent of purple. He lived, in the comfort of warm rooms, good food served at a pleasantly set table, soft beds, bath-room, schemes of decorative furnishings, which, abominations of ghastly



horror though they might be to Buddy's English eyes, represented, to the Italian peasant, the consummation of his æsthetic dreams. His apartment was his ingenuous pride. He drove about New York—more often it was Julietta who drove about—in a six-cylinder, fifty-horse-power, orange-coloured chariot. He was the happiest man in the world.

And now ?

He sat opposite Buddy, by the fireside. A little man, with a firm, keen, mobile face illuminated by mild, dark-brown eyes—dog's eyes—the faithful eyes of a cocker spaniel. Above it all, the absurd, premature, Paderewski bush of white hair. Buddy had failed to induce him to take off the white silk muffler and blue overcoat.

His crippled hands, painfully holding glass and cigarette, made Buddy wince with pain and pity. What could he do for Tonio ? What kind of occupation could he find for him ? In what kind of business could he set him up ? He had spent his life conjuring. He could do nothing else besides conjuring. He wasn't even an illusionist with mechanical secrets of magic. His only gift had been the lightning fingers of the prestidigitator ; he could do wonders with cards, coins, eggs, flags, ribbons, rabbits, pigeons, gold-fish. The only trick of his own invention had been the seizing of a dagger from the empty air, thrusting it down his throat, and, after a second's agony of suffocation, coughing up a revolver. This trick, which had done so much to make his modest fortune, had been a matter of pure sleight of hand.

Buddy, after a spell of reflection, said in answer to the self-imposed problem :

“ Look here, old chap—I give it up. It's up to you to tell me what you would like me to do. I'm rich. I've inherited. I have a title—I'm what you Italians

calls *nobile*—I told you. Yes, I, Buddy Drake. Funny, isn't it, old man? But that's so."

"I did always feel—somewhere in myself"—said Tonio, "that you were not just a bum actor. You were something quite different. That's why I——"

"That's why you loved me," laughed Buddy. "But I want you to love me more. At any rate, I owe you a debt of gratitude that money can't pay. And yet money help seems the only way possible."

"A rich man can so easily throw money to a beggar," said Tonio, his eyes on Buddy, "and of course the beggar is glad to have the money. But he is not grateful to the rich man. He does not love the rich man. He hates him. And for why? It costs the rich man nothing. But if the rich man gives him something of his heart"—he tapped his own—"it is all so different."

"My dear Tonio," said Buddy, "that's the whole point of it. Once I was naked and you took me in, and so on. A vague quotation from the Bible. You can draw on my heart and my banking account for what you want."

Tonio looked down on his maimed hands, and wiggled his fingers.

"I can do ordinary things, but not more than ordinary things."

He paused. There was a span of silence during which Tonio was lost in thought. By way of relieving a nervous strain Buddy wound up the monkeys on the mantelpiece. One after the other they went through their weird, life-like performances. The, horrible blinking of eyelids was, in itself, a fascination to the onlooker. Already, however, two of them didn't blink. The inner threads of the mechanism had failed. But what could one expect for five francs? One

monkey stopped pessimistically in the act of conveying to its mouth the harvest of its skin.

Buddy, no deep philosopher, became impressed with the truth of the futility of human and simian endeavour.

Again he put his hand on Tonio's shoulder.

"Well, what about it, old son?"

"If I could stay with you always," said Tonio, "I should be quite happy"—and meeting a look of humorous puzzlement on Buddy's face, he continued hastily: "Oh, I don't mean doing nothing. I want a work. You have a valet—no?"

"Valet?" cried Buddy. "But you're a brother artist!"

Tonio waved a hand before his face. "My father and mother, when they come in New York, they have a peanut stand. Then they had a little joint on the East side—hot dogs and hamburgers and tamales. I washed up plates. Then I went to wash up plates at a small restaurant. When I grew up I was waiter for many years. Then I found I had the gift and practised, practised—until I found I need be a waiter no longer. That is the history of my life, why should I be too proud to be a valet?"

"Doesn't seem right at the moment," said Buddy. "Can you work a typewriter?"

Tonio's face lit up. Of course. In his business he always typed his letters. He used to put initials on them to impress his correspondents with the belief that he employed a stenographer. To send a business letter, in America, in hand-writing would be to confess that you had so little business that you could afford the time to write. Oh, yes. He could still type. He used to type for Frosco when his hands were much stiffer. The exercise would do his fingers good.

"Then you can be my private secretary," said Buddy.

Tonio regarded him somewhat askance, striving to attune his mind to the idea of Buddy Drake needing a private secretary. He had his pride. All his life he had worked for his living. Though ready to accept a gift from a friend to relieve his immediate necessities, he shrank from the conception of himself as a parasite dependent on a rich man's bounty. His office must be no sinecure.

"What shall I have to do?"

Buddy dragged a small suit-case from under the blue satin-covered couch, opened it, lifted a mass of papers in both hands and let it fall back in the case. Jestingly he said:

"You can answer all those, to begin with."

It was then that Buddy was struck by a brilliant idea, one of those imbecile inspirations untempered by reflection that had led him to many a shipwreck.

"Tonio," said he, "you were sent by the *Bon Dieu*. I'm going to England to-night. You stay here in this suite. Get a typewriter. Answer all these letters and any others that may come. Say: 'Dear Sir or Dear Madam, or Dear Sirs or Dear Madams'—or whatever you like—with reference to your letter of the second ult., I have to say that Sir Atherton Drake's precarious health has compelled him to winter in Greenland, and he has left me strict instructions that no correspondence should be forwarded. On his return I will hand him your letter. I am, Dear Sir or Dear Madam, or Dear Sirs or Dear Madams, yours faithfully, Antonio Gaffarelli, Private Secretary.'"

Tonio, throwing his memory back to his careless, down-at-heel and curiously beloved friend, now apparently a "swell guy" of an Englishman, with a title and much money, but still, in all essence, the selfsame man, said shrewdly:

"You are playing some game, Buddy!"

Buddy stared at him for a few moments, and the mercurial gaiety faded from his face. The Fear gripped him. He sat down and lit a cigarette before replying.

"You're right. A hell of a game. In some ways it's a game of life or death. One of these days I may tell you about it; but not now. There's no time. But if you stick to me I'll stick to you. All you've got to do is to obey orders—see, Tonio? Most important orders. Vital! First, no one must ever know that you've seen me before. No one on earth must know I've ever been in America."

"I see," said Tonio, meeting his eyes which had grown somewhat haggard, "but who must I be?"

Buddy, recovering, rose to his feet with a laugh.

"Anyone you like. Stop! I know. You've been recommended to me by Mussolini—or the Commendatore Professore Cavaloselli, of the University of Padova. I remember you said once you came from Padova. Good! You know nothing about me. *Capisce?* Nothing. And you've never been to America. Wouldn't have known there was such a place, hadn't you learned your English from a young fellow you were coaching in Syfiac at the University of Padova."

Tonio put his hands up to his white hair and gazed at him open-mouthed.

"I see, but at the same time I don't understand, Buddy."

"If I help you, old son, which I want to do with all my heart, you've damn well got to help me," he repeated. "And the only way is to do as I tell you."

There was a rap at the door. Buddy crossed the room and opened it. There stood Diana. She marched in. Seeing Tonio, she said, with a little indrawn breath:

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"Not a bit, my dear"—Buddy was debonair—"may I present Signore Antonio Gaffarelli?"

She nodded brightly. "How do you do?"

Tonio bowed respectfully.

"I've only come in for a moment on my way down," said Diana.

Tonio picked up his hat. "I will go now and come back later, if you will allow me."

"I couldn't dream of putting you to that trouble, Signor Gaffarelli. Would you mind waiting a short time in my bedroom? It's quite warm and comfortable."

He opened the door politely for Tonio, closed it upon him, and turned to face a questioning Diana.

"Who's that comic little object?"

"I'm thinking of engaging him as confidential secretary," said Buddy, with as much stiffness as he could assume. "He comes highly recommended by a friend in Italy."

"Why doesn't he wear a shirt?"

"I can't tell you, my dear. I wasn't aware of it. Possibly he lost it—put it on a racehorse. I don't know."

She began to laugh; then checked herself as her eye caught the monkeys on the mantelpiece. She stared at them.

"Good Lord, Atherton! What on earth are those?"

He cursed his folly in setting out the idiot array. He might have foreseen her casual entrance. He glanced coldly at the row.

"Monkeys!" he said.

"But why? Are you going mad?"

"No. I'm going to London. Won't you sit down?"

She sat down mechanically on the indicated chair.

"London? But what have those ridiculous things got to do with London?"

"Nothing," said Buddy, standing with his back against the fireplace, "as it happens, though there might be some coincidence. If you want to know, I bought them from a great gaunt fellow on the Boulevard. An Englishman—a cockney. He told me, and I've no reason to disbelieve it, that he had served in the Guards, the Grenadiers, during the War. As you know, I don't practise indiscriminate charity; I thought the best way to help him was to buy up the whole of his stock—at his own price. He was very grateful."

Diana shivered. "An Englishman, an ex-guardsmen, selling toys in the Paris streets? What's the British Consul doing?"

"Keeping unemployable Englishmen out of England," replied Buddy severely. "This fellow, a great gaunt skeleton of a man, obviously a hopeless case—drink, drugs, everything you can think of—I helped him in the only legitimate way."

"You didn't offer to do anything else for him?"

"Certainly not."

Diana sprang to her feet, and her eyes flashed angrily.

"You're as hard as nails; I always said so. God help Muriel."

"I don't see what Muriel has to do with an outcast and perfectly unworthy Grenadier."

"You never see anything," said Diana.

"I only see," said Buddy, "that in that blue kit of yours, with its touches of russet and red which tone with your colouring, you look peculiarly charming."

"And you," she retorted, throwing back her head, "are peculiarly detestable."

"I'm sorry," he said.

"And you've not even asked why I took the trouble to come here to see you."

Buddy replied courteously:

"You've scarcely afforded me an opportunity, my dear Diana."

"I came to tell you they've found out what has given her this temperature. A damn piece of carelessness. Guibault fixed it this afternoon. You can go and see her to-morrow if you like."

"I'm glad; I'm relieved—immensely relieved," said Buddy, with hands extended towards her, "but, at the same time, I'm dreadfully sorry I'm off to London."

"Yes," her brow puckered. "You said some nonsense about London."

"I have to go to-night—via Havre—on most important business. No one crosses from Havre to Southampton in the depth of winter unless he's obliged to."

"Muriel will be disappointed, though I don't quite see why she should be," said Diana.

"You must give her my love and plead necessity."

"Oh, you make me tired," said Diana.

"You've said that once or twice before," said Buddy.

"It's a pity. From you I always expect the original."

She moved angrily to the door. He accompanied her. She stood on the threshold.

"When are you coming back?"

"In a few days."

She went out and marched down the corridor, with her young, springing step. Something within him clamoured and shrieked. He overtook her, in a few strides.

"Diana, I'm not really the icy brute, the cold-blooded fish, you think me."

She turned. "Then stay in Paris, be good to



Muriel, and help the poor devil that sold you the monkeys."

She marched on. Buddy went slowly back to his room. He released Tonio.

"My friend," he said, "I've had a beast of an interview. The only good that came out of it was that I convinced the lady that you were a British Grenadier."

