

The Social Buccaneer

By
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PROLOGUE

Chatfield Bruce, twenty-six, has secured an enviable position in New York society by large contributions to charity. Although reputed to have great wealth, he lives entirely on his salary as head of a department at Nathan Goldberg's mercantile establishment. The safe deposit box of Samuel Page has been robbed of valuable bonds. Mr. Bolger, a detective, takes up the hunt for the thief. A party at Goldberg's country mansion gathers together many society notables among whom is Sir Archibald, an Englishman. Goldberg's daughter wears her famous string of pearls which she exhibits to those present. A burning lantern ignites the dress of Marjorie Wood. Bruce extinguishes the blaze, suffering a burned hand. On an invitation from Marjorie's father, Bruce elects to stay at the Wood home overnight. After others are in bed, Bruce reconnoiters about the Goldberg home. He is a short distance away when he sees a thief run from the house, frightened by a woman's cry. In the chase that follows, Bruce is pursued as the thief

Bruce and the Thief

UNFORTUNATELY it would be out of the question now to say that he whom they had wished for longed to capture, had gone there and stupidly pointed to the trees. They would take him, Bruce, instead and, if they did not find the pearls in one of his pockets, would conclude he had thrown them away.

No, he had let a chance slip foolishly, thoughtlessly. It was gone beyond recall. His own glance swept toward the fence. He too sprang over.

Into Mr. Samuel Page's place? He realized where he was almost at once. Running beneath the trees, he made his way toward the dim outline of the rundown untenanted structure. He was cognizant of treading the young apples beneath his heel, of suddenly slipping and catching himself, then striking hard as he lurched forward a low branch he had not seen. At the shock he seemed suddenly to become dizzy. A throb of pain gripped his side. He could hardly stand. With an effort he steadied himself against a tree trunk, but he realized he could not long remain thus, an instant and he went on. To pause meant the others would soon come up to him. Luckily they were not running by.

A bend in the way hid for the instant concealed him from them when he had vaulted the palings of the Page estate. They would before long, how ever, understand where he had gone. When they reached the nearby straight prospect of highway and failed to see him they would at once return. At best a brief interval only would be lost by them. Bruce had to make the most of it.

He staggered toward the house. A dark form had preceded him, but he did not see it now. He was mindful only of himself. At the rear of the deserted dwelling he looked out over a private road that stretched back across a broad meadow. The narrow way held, wooded derivisely his glance, but ere he could traverse that open space he knew he would again in all likelihood be caught sight of, and he felt no longer able at the moment to continue the hard, racking pace. The blow he had struck his side must have injured the muscles. His heart, leaping fast, protested against the sharp, shooting twinges.

He moved to the half rotting door of the kitchen, pushed, and the door yielded. It might have been nailed to keep it closed earlier in the season, but now it balked no one desirous of going in. The young man stood in the darkness. Feeling a hard projection, he half fell upon it—a sink. Resting thus, he strove to suppress his panting, to regain his strength. The moments passed; the pain in his side grew less; he felt relieved and began to think now what he should next do. He listened. No sound of his pursuers.

He made a movement, suddenly stood stock still. Some one else was in the house not far from him, standing or crouching in the darkness. He had caught the sound and knew he could not be mistaken. A faint creaking as of a heavy body starting, he could not tell where, drew his attention. He could fancy he caught a low, guttural whisper. Bruce's pulse

le stepped swiftly aside, at the same time calling out:

"Do you want to bring the others here?" he said in a sharp but soft tone. "They're apt to come back soon enough anyway."

The silence grew. Noiseless as a shadow Bruce again moved. A possible leaden answer would not find him in the place whence he had spoken.

"Who are you?" The voice was hoarse, vibrated harshly. In the bare room the echoes seemed to distort the sound. There could be divined how even in the hollow unfamiliar accents an abject pusillanimity. He who had dared to enter the Goldberg house and rifle the safe had lost his cool pluck.

Bruce whistled softly. His foot came in contact with a bit of wood on the floor. He stooped for it and uttered, "Never mind."

"But I do!" in shriller accents "Quick or—"

"Hush, fool or they will be here! And put down your revolver!"

Again came the ominous preliminary click. Bruce knew the finger acting in conjunction with the palm was about to apply the necessary second pressure. Likely he shifted once more. The hammer did fall but the cartridge only snapped.

"Lucky for you!" exclaimed the young man and caped forward. His own hand swung here, there. Then the billet of wood struck something hard. The revolver clattered to the floor. "Let it be!" A suppressed sound answered. The fellow seemed to shrink back to occupy a small space in a corner. "If you got your deserts, I'd leave you senseless beside it with the pearls in your pocket for them to find."

"Don't give me up! Don't!" the man cried out in a sudden agony of fear. "I was mad. I did not know what I did. It was the first time. Those cursed pearls, they bewitched me. I am not myself now. For the love of heaven," broke from him, "tell me, is it real? No terrible dream?"

"I'm afraid it's real enough," observed Bruce softly, "although, no doubt, it would be very agreeable if it were not." If both of us could just wake up and find ourselves in our own comfortable bedroom, turn over and go to sleep again! That would be jolly, wouldn't it? You've got a bad attack of afraid you're going to be



The Billet Struck Something Hard. The Revolver Clattered to the Floor.

found out. Cheer up! No doubt you'll take a rosier view of the situation in the morning—that is," he added, "if you act at once."

"You mean"—uncertainly—"you're going to let me go?"

"If you can get away—from them," he supplemented.

"But why should you do that? Why are you here? Were you, too, running away from some one?" vehemently.

Bruce moved toward the door. "I was standing near the Goldberg house. They took me for you," wavered. "It would have been inconvenient for me to have stopped just then."

"Did the other, even in the voice, do anything to you?"

see? You, too, were after the pearls, pard?"

The last word seemed added, after an instant's hesitation, as if the fellow made a belated attempt to veil his position, a possibly respectable standing in the community.

"Will you share?" Bruce spoke swiftly. "Since you honor me by calling me 'pard'?"

"I—I"—cupidity struggled with alarm in the man's voice—"didn't get them. They raised the alarm before I cribbed the swag."

"That's unfortunate," coolly. No lie was ever more apparent. Something else, too, had become apparent to Bruce—the fellow's voice. He had heard it before. Where? He could not remember at that moment.

Bruce opened the door, which he had closed on entering. "Time to be off," he spoke curtly. His head throbbled, but he strove to hold himself with alertness, with every fiber on the qui vive.

"You mean together?" the other asked in obvious trepidation.

Bruce answered quickly in the negative. He had no more desire that night for the fellow's company than the latter had for his.

Now it but remained for him to point out that there were two ways by which they could separate and, incidentally, escape one a private road over the meadow, the other a side course. The former led up the hill reaching the top some distance beyond the rear of Mr. Goldberg's place, the latter would take him who elected that choice of direction to the fence of some one's he didn't know whose estate adjoining.

"I'll take my chance from the side," said the fellow eagerly.

Bruce stepped yet further from the door to allow him, unidentified to pass. "Colonel Manyans' house is the fourth or fifth. He lives there the year around," significantly. After you? He waited, he thought he had seen the fellow stoop to pick up his revolver.

The man moved to the threshold, but instead of stepping out he, with an exclamation of sharp terror, bounded back. A number of persons who had either just entered the grounds or had been concealed in the bushes now sprang heroically toward the house.

The fellow wheeled, stayed not on the order of his going, but ran from the kitchen back through the dwelling toward the front. Apparently he knew the place well.

Bruce also did not pause. He stepped quickly behind the door and done too soon.

Those in the yard rushing forward with loud cries, now swept in and went stumbling on after the retreating footsteps. The young man listened to the pursuers' eager, more or less blundering movements. A few moments later he heard the front door slam. Bruce slipped out at the back at the same time the fellow emerged from the front.

All concern now focused on the latter. He had not yet been captured. A number of those who tried to stop him he evaded. He struck one or two down, leaping past them into the shadows. Bruce heard the din of hoarse exclamations, anathemas, then the confused coterie of people seemed moving farther aside, away from the house.

Unperceived, he ran out. He saw no one, only heard them, the voices becoming more distant. He accepted the hazard boldly. Every fiber of his being responded as he dashed from the house and set out at a breakneck speed along the private road, up and across the broad meadow.

Out of the Forest.

MARJORIE WOOD awoke early. She had not slept well that night. Perhaps the excitement of the evening after the dance with Sir Archibald followed in her dreams and made them troubled. It was still dark without when she slipped from her bed and looked at her watch.

Not yet 3 o'clock, she saw by the tiny light left burning in her room, it would be some time before the others in the house would be stirring. A moment she stood uncertainly, then moved to the window and, drawing the curtains, looked out.

How still it was! Not a leaf seemed to move. She listened, watched. Then her gaze became more intent. It fastened on a particular spot. From the black fringe of forest that reached like a triangle toward her room she thought she discerned in the gloom something moving toward the shrubs on the lawn—an object, a figure? No—a shadow! That now was gone. Strive as she might, she could not again locate it. She had no desire to be awake longer. Perhaps if she read?

She stepped to the chair, over the back of which hung her dressing gown, and slipped two shapely young arms, with their lacy covering, into the garment. Her slippers were near. She thrust her feet into them and went to the door.

The house was but dimly lighted. The old boards of the hall floor, though covered with heavy rugs, creaked slightly beneath her soft footfall. At the head of the stairway she paused. From the opposite end of the hall a brighter streak of light came from beneath the door of a room—Sir Archibald's. A slightly questioning look shone an instant from her eyes. Then she went on. He had probably overlooked turning off the electric current before retiring. Slowly she descended and passed on to the library.

The girl reached up and turned on one of the side lights. The answering glow, as she stepped on, revealed a scene that she had never seen before. The room was deserted. The French windows were open, and the moonlight shone in upon the floor. The French windows were open, and the moonlight shone in upon the floor. The French windows were open, and the moonlight shone in upon the floor.

opened on a volume at random. "The Eye of St. Agnes," when at that moment her attention was abruptly arrested, held by a sound, distinct, unmistakable.

Some one had approached very lightly across the gravel walk to the house, stepped on to the lower balcony and stood now without. The look fell from her hand. She stepped quickly behind one of the heavy, long curtains, shielded by its folds from being seen, her eyes tried to penetrate the darkness.

She saw nothing, however, except again the glimmer of the night, the sky, hardly so full of stars. Then, with senses alert, she caught once more the footfall and made out a figure, at first dark, uncertain; afterward plainer. He stood on the veranda somewhat aside, looking toward one of the library windows. That bit of white against his side, on his arm or around it. She discerned now what it was a bandage! That was strange. Why, then the intruder was, must be

In the surprise of the moment she suddenly stepped back and in so doing parted the curtains. A glow of light from the room gleamed abruptly upon the porch. It lay like a bright sword amid the darkness at the intruder's feet.

As in a dream she swung open the long French windows. A moment still he lingered without his gaze, very bright on her, the crown of dark hair that seemed to catch up and hold the light behind her, the deep eyes too deep in the wondrous shadow, to be blue.

"You are surprised?" he murmured. "I'm afraid I startled you."

"I just a little." She saw now with a new responsive thrill how worn and drawn was his face.

His eyes, however, yet strove to mask an expression of pain acute, at most overpowering.

But why she began. Why did you—and stopped. She seemed suddenly to understand.

"The burns?" They had been severe. Had she not herself seen? He with all his fortitude had been unable to sleep to endure the confinement of his room.

"Ah!" she breathed impulsively. Her eyes were like stars. The face at her throat stirred quickly. He came in.

"Why, why did you not call some one?" she faltered.

"Call some one," he repeated as if not understanding. His gaze burned her lashes half lowered.

The bandages, they are disarranged. Shall I not call some one now?"

What? Wake the household? It is unnecessary quite. He spoke lightly though very low with a forced amittiness in his accents.

But even as he replied his figure swayed slightly. She noted the quick grayed pallor of his face. He leaned hard with his hand on the table sought yet to stand erect, then seemed to sink through no column of his own, to a large chair.

"All no one," he repeated. "It is nothing. I'm a bit done up that is all. Quite myself now, he added with an effort."

"But you are not," she said. "Let me."

She bent over. Before he had time to expostulate had he thought of so doing, she began to rearrange the bandages of his hand. He felt too absurdly weak at the moment to resist. As through a haze, he saw the beautiful, down bent head, her fingers light, sedulous.

"You are too good," he breathed. "I?" She half knelt on the cushion, absorbed forgetful of all save what she was doing. He said no more though the smile, slightly deservatory at his own momentary helplessness, still lingered on his lips.

Through half closed lids he watched the dim light playing on the dark hair that rippled over her shoulders. Beneath the loose folds of the heavy shimmering gown he imagined she breathed once or twice quickly, a divine movement more eloquent than words.

The stillness continued for a few seconds, then was suddenly broken by the unmistakable sound of something above, a door opening softly. His hand involuntarily lifted, his figure straightened. The girl, too, heard and rose. The task she had set herself, however, was done. She looked hurriedly toward the stairs, then back at him. But he seemed not to see her now. His fingers rested on something in an inside pocket at his breast, something hard, slightly projecting. The girl did not notice his gesture. Over her face a flush had slowly spread; her eyes, which had swept first upward and then swiftly aside at Bruce, suddenly lowered.

The glass door of one of the library sections lined a pale reflection of herself, the long, flowing gown, the flash of a white bare arm, the untrammelled hair and an abrupt realization of much that was unconventional in her appearance came over her. Her next words were constrained. He, however, seemed hardly to hear, replied vaguely he would stay there in the library a little while longer.

She was glad his eyes were turned from her as he spoke. He, too, had risen, was standing now, deferentially waiting, his features slightly down bent. A word or two further, and she moved across the threshold and up the stairway, with cheeks still brightly tinted, but head proudly erect, gazed her own door and went in. Bruce heard it close quietly.

A few moments he continued to stand motionless. Through the partly opened door leading out on to the lower balcony the earliest that of dawn could be seen on the eastern horizon. The lawn was deserted. The French windows were open, and the moonlight shone in upon the floor. The French windows were open, and the moonlight shone in upon the floor.

For an instant that last impression of the unknown he had encountered so strangely in the Page house recurred to Bruce—the din occasioned by this person's mad, desperate dash. Had the fellow escaped with his booty? If he had been taken? A certain new contingency in that event insinuated itself in Bruce's brain. It brought an odd look to his face. The morn—what tidings would it bring?

Bruce listened again for sounds from above, but heard nothing. The big, rambling house was wrapped in silence. An ominous, deceptive stillness? About to step toward the stairway, an object on the floor caught his glance; caused him to pause yet a moment.

A book! He stooped for it, gazed at the volume, then, holding it carelessly, he walked out into the hall and ascended the broad stairs. With light, elastic step he moved noiselessly toward the corridor leading to his own room.

To reach it he was obliged to pass Sir Archibald's apartments. Approaching them, he seemed to hold himself



"But why"—she began. "Why did you?"

with figure very alert, as if waiting expecting something to happen but nothing occurred. The chambers before him continued as hushed as the grave.

A slightly puzzled expression crossed Bruce's features as he paused at his own threshold. Then a sudden light broke upon the young man. The secretary might not yet have returned to the Wood mansion. Was the theory tenable? Had the Portuguese been more injured than he Bruce had expected? Had night else happened to detain him? What would the next few hours show?

His fingers rested on a single key in one of his pockets. Mechanically he drew it forth. Lifting the door, he stepped in. No one had been in there of course not. He had hardly expected it.

He turned again the key in his door, then felt one more in his pocket for the key to the other door, the one opening on the upper balcony. He could not find it. He hastily turned everything out of his pockets on to a table it was gone. Where? Again shadows seemed surrounding him, deeper, darker than before. He shook his shoulders as if to shake a gathering of ominous forces from him.

A key? It was a little thing, deservingly he told himself, hardly to be seen, let alone to be noticed, even if any one should chance upon finding it somewhere without, which was most unlikely.

Bruce began to address. His clothes were decidedly the worse for wear. Fortunately Mr. Wood had instructed the chauffeur to bring up from the inn his new guest's hand bag.

"Coffee for two in my own sitting room," said Sir Archibald tersely to his valet early that morning.

"Very good, Sir Archibald." And the man, a thin, deferential appearing fellow, who had been in the other's service many years, bowed out of the room.

As the door closed and the valet disappeared Sir Archibald permitted, privately, an expression of considerable feeling to sweep his usually stolid countenance. He walked once or twice back and forth across the thick carpet, hands in pockets, his tread aggressive, heavy. At that moment his eyes, full, old looking—for a man not yet much past thirty—expressed indubitable signs of annoyance, if not anger.

Although he had ordered coffee for two, he drank it alone. He appeared not at all sedulous about his secretary's share of the beverage getting lukewarm or cold. Having partaken, he rose, regarded his watch, then closed the door leading into his secretary's room. As he did so his brow darkened, and he stepped out upon his veranda.

The French windows opening from Bruce's room to command a felicitous prospect, mellow in the soft morning glow, were fastened, and Bramford's glance, swerving, passed to the fringe of forest, where it lingered. A big unscarred fist closed. He brought it down softly upon his open palm. Captain continued absence told his secretary's hands, and Sir Archibald longed to use them.

Had anything? He stood, impotent in the dark. Had not his patience, however, been sorely tried? When he had heard whispered voices in the library some time before and had wished to play, not a listening, but an acting part? A cruel glare shone from his cold gaze; then his set jaw relaxed, and, returning to his room, he in methodical fashion completed his toilet. He had a premonition the hours to come would be exciting ones.

Passing out into the hall, he paused long enough to tell one of the housemaids that Senor Cagjoni, after breakfasting, had retired to his own room. The secretary was not feeling well, a bad headache, and so she or any of the other servants whose duty it was to care for his room, could defer that task until later in the day. Saying which, Sir Archibald walked quickly down the stairs and out.

The sound of the bees in the honeysuckle vines attracted him. One of the latter appeared a little disarranged; a streamer of green, torn from its fastenings, floated erratically in the fresh, early breeze. Bramford's large, thick lips murmured something softly to himself as he walked on out of the front door and into the garden.

There his glance sought again the wing of the rambling mansion. He even moved to one side to be afforded a better view of it; the trellis work; the ground beneath, beginning at certain footprints on the ground and ending at a closed room overhead.

He did not at first hear a motorcar approaching the house along the public highway in front. It had stopped ere he raised his head to look around.

The chauffeur leaned at first from his car, as if to answer some one who had spoken to him, then, shutting off the noise of the machine, respectfully got out. At the same moment Sir Archibald walked forward. He saw now who the "some one" was—Miss Marjorie, in a rose colored linen gown.

"Oh, Sir Archibald!" she exclaimed. "James here tells me the wonderful Goldberg pearls have been stolen! A thief or thieves entered the house last night. Is there any clew, James? Not even when they were taken, James, and

I didn't stop to try to learn further details. Miss Wood," returned the man, as I had to come back at once with this nodding toward a suit case in the car. There was a detective from New York at the inn a Mr. Bolger or Bolger. They had evidently sent post haste for him. But he wasn't saying anything. I did hear some one say the burglar might have been a gentleman one of the guests."

"What an impossible conclusion!" exclaimed the girl.

Sir Archibald looked at her more sharply. There were shadows beneath her eyes eloquent of what? Sleeplessness? The proud face might have seemed paler than its wont, save for the rose colored gown, which imparted to it a subtle reflection of its warmth.

"I hardly agree with you," he said, "about its being impossible, don't you know. For my part," he added, "I find it at least conceivable."

"Do you?" Her face was a little colder. The chauffeur returned to his car and waited yet a moment in case they might wish to speak further with him.

The voice of another broke in upon them. It was the gardener who had been working in one of the beds near at hand. "I beg your pardon, Miss Wood," he said, with a broad accent, "but I could nae help overhearing what you were saying about the burglars at the Goldberg house, and," he added, pressing his thin lips tight, "it's my opinion those same gentry were around here last night. Look at this and at that!" The gardener pointed indignantly to one or two broken flower stems and footprints on the edge of the soft earthy beds.

"Let us see," said Sir Archibald as he bent low. "A shapely, aristocratic foot," he laughed, "too shapely for your vulgar housebreakers, unless"—he added. But he did not utter that which he had been on the point of saying.

"It's making a great deal out of nothing," exclaimed the girl. "The explanation is, no doubt, very simple." Impetuously.

"Yes?" Sir Archibald observed quietly, looking up at her.

She did not answer. Why? Did something covert in his gaze hold her silent? Last night the sound they had heard above. Sir Archibald—he had, then? She pressed a crimson lip over her teeth and held herself more erect, annoyed, irritated. Bramford abruptly straightened.

"Your father," he observed, looking toward the house. Mr. Wood on the front steps was speaking now to the chauffeur.

She turned quickly, perhaps at the instant was glad of the pretext to do so, for, murmuring something in a low tone, she moved away. Sir Archibald followed with slow footsteps. Mr. Wood had heard the story by the time they drew near and, having listened to the meager details, proposed at once that they set out immediately for the Goldberg mansion to learn what had taken place. Sir Archibald hesitated. The chauffeur removed the suit case from the car.

The Englishman's eyes rested on it absently. Suddenly his manner became desirous, and, signaling his intention of being ready in a moment to accompany them, he turned and entered the house.

Chatfield Bruce from one of his windows in the second story of the wing had seen the car turn into the grounds of the Wood estate, and now not long after he observed it go out once more and noted the occupants. As the sound of the motor ceased down the road he took the bell sharply. The