

The City of Purple Dreams

By EDWIN BAIRD



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CHAPTER X.—Continued.

The luxuriant-haired Pole was soaring toward his finale. In a few minutes they might be discovered. She spoke rapidly. "You can accomplish more wonders"—looking eagerly at him. "I even believe you can make father like you. Once you have shown him you can be a master of finance it is possible his feeling toward you will change. He thinks you a nobody now,



She Clapped Her Hands. Her Eyes Were Radiant. "We Will Announce Our Engagement the Day You Are Worth a Million Dollars!"

but if you—I have it!" She clapped her hands. Her eyes were radiant. "We will announce our engagement the day you are worth a million dollars!"

The violinist swept his bow across the strings in a triumph of Mozartian climax, and they drew apart and joined in the applause. And none in the room was more enthusiastic.

CHAPTER XI.

Thanks to the dexterity of his French chauffeur, Fitzhugh was attacking his morning mail at twenty minutes past ten. When running through the fourth letter of the heap his secretary had opened and laid out for him he paused suddenly, then sat violently back in his chair.

"Now, how in Hades," wondered he, "could I forget that?"

He meant the first million. While with Kathleen that morning the thought of it had occurred and re-occurred to him, but always at inopportune moments, and when finally the right time had arrived it slumbered in the meshes of his mind.

"I'll tell her on Wednesday," he concluded; and promptly was swallowed up in the rush of the day's business.

The boy handed him a scrap of paper on which was written with a lead pencil:

"I must see you at once.—Esther."
"Tell her I can't see her!" and he crunched the paper between his fingers and shot it angrily out an open window. Before the lad reached the door he checked him, less harshly, with: "Explain to her, Tommy, that I am extremely busy, and ask her to call again."

Dismissing the incident completely from his mind, he gathered up the sheaf of letters. An altercation arose in the outer office. The door was flung open. Esther entered.

Seeing the stenographer, she held the door open.

"I want to see you alone, Daniel," said Esther quietly.

Fitzhugh motioned to his employees to go, and closed the door after him.

"Well? What is it?" He remained standing near the door, the sheaf of letters clutched with an iron grip in his right hand. He was striving hard to control his mounting temper.

Unbidden, she sat down. He did not resume his seat. There was an awkward pause.

"This may be the last time," she began, choosing her words carefully, "that we shall see each other. I am going away tonight. I came all the way from Paterson. I thought I would tell you—good-by."

She stood up so that she faced him. She looked at him fixedly. "Night before last, Daniel, in Paterson, I walked my room for hours. I was trying to decide something, Daniel. Something very hard. A secret—a terrible secret—and I wanted to tell you. But I couldn't decide."

"Have you decided?"—Impatiently.

"Quite. I shouldn't tell you. I have reasoned it out again and again. You shouldn't know. But I want you to know! And, Daniel—reaching up suddenly, she rested her hands on his shoulders, and when her large, sad eyes lifted to his it struck him afresh how like a martyr she seemed—Daniel, I have been chosen to remove our ambassador."

He tensed, with a quick intake of breath. "You mean—what do you mean? You're not—can't you—"

"It is the most beautiful thing that has

His living is inimical to the Cause. He is false to Russia."

"And you intend doing it?"

"I will do it."

He seized her wrists, gripped them till she winced. His voice was as steel when he said: "You shall not. Understand that once for all. You shall not! It is madness. Nothing less."

"You can't understand. I hardly expected you to."

He strode violently to the door to still somebody's knocking, then came back to her.

"What price do you want? Name it!"

She shook her head. "There is no price."

"I say there is! Why else would you be here? Speak up! What do you want?"

She lowered her gaze, a little startled. "Yes, there is one for whom I would renounce even the Cause, turn traitor—"

She flung her arms out to him in a rush of abandon—"Oh, Daniel, you know, you know!"

He loosened her hands from his neck.

"That," said he, "is impossible. I am engaged to be married."

She recoiled as though he had struck her. Her foot struck a chair as she stepped back. She sat down very slowly. For a few moments she seemed stricken dumb. Then:

"To—to that—"

"To her you saw me with at the opera?"

"When?" she asked. "When?"

"We became engaged last March. The second of last March."

"The second of last March?" She repeated the words dully, pressing her hand to her forehead. "The second of last—why, D-Daniel, don't you remember? That is the day we first met each other. Don't you remember, Daniel?"—laughing shrilly—"the crowds, and how I was swept into your arms, and the speeches you made, first in the street, and then—"

"Esther! Esther! Do you realize where you are? Twelve or fifteen persons are waiting outside to see me, and their time and mine means money."

Her reminiscences trailed off into silence.

"Money!"

Then all at once a terrific change came over her. She sprang up tigerishly, swept the chair aside, rushed toward the door.

He was there first, however, and stood with his back against it, barring her way.

"You will not leave this office," he declared, "until—"

"Open that door!"

"—until you listen to reason."

"Open that door, open that door! I'll scream!"

"You may go when you've promised me—"

"Open that door!"

Out of all patience, angry and humiliated, he threw the door open, and saw her run the gaping guntlet in the outer office. He closed the door quietly and summoned a messenger. His nostrils were dilated, his face white, his lower front teeth were locked firmly over the upper ones. He sat at his desk, took a pad of telegraph forms from a drawer, and with a hand as steady as the mahogany on which it rested he wrote the following, addressing it "Secret Service": "A demoted woman who imagines she has been wronged by the Russian ambassador will arrive in Washington from Chicago. Watch all trains for her. She is slightly built, has dark hair and eyes and is dressed in black. H. D. F."

Some while after five o'clock Fitzhugh sat at the telephone on his locked desk, his hat on, an unlighted cigar between his teeth, delivering the customary order for violets. With a final admonition to the florist to send nothing except the best, he "hung up." As he lighted his cigar and swung out of his office he met a messenger, who handed him a square envelope. Embossed on the back was "One Thousand Lake Shore Drive," and it contained a very brief and formal request for an immediate call from him at that address.

The chauffeur was waiting with the car in Adams street. Fitzhugh settled back comfortably in the cushioned seat as the chauffeur picked his way through the mass of traffic, and all the cares and worries of that busy day slipped gratefully from him, leaving him serene with contentment.

He was received in the library of Mr. and Mrs. Otis. There was no sign of Kathleen; and a glance at her parents sufficed to apprise him he was in for a disagreeable time. They remained standing after he entered; nor was he asked to sit down. Mrs. Otis, haughtily stationed as far from him as the large room would permit, had appointed herself spokeswoman.

"Our daughter," said she, lifting a formidable lorgnette to her eyes and staring at him as though he were the garbage man, "has informed us of her unfortunate alliance with you."

He bowed respectfully.

"I need hardly say to you"—and her head raised higher, her hauteur waxed stiff—"that you must consider this engagement broken. Furthermore, you

will regard your underhanded ac-

quaintance with our daughter as though it had never been. All communication with her of whatever nature must cease instantly. That, I believe, is all."

If Mrs. Otis had expected to inflict a shock she triumphed amply. If she had hoped to witness its manifestation she was woefully disappointed. The crash struck its victim as a thunderbolt; but beyond a sudden tension that gripped every muscle of him, he betrayed never a sign of impact. Outwardly he was almost as not quite as self-possessed as when he entered the house.

"Miss Otis—does she know this?"

"What a question!" she gasped.

"Why, it is she who—"

"Don't!" He started forward impulsively, the blood mounting hotly to his face. But ere his composure departed irretrievably—"I beg your pardon. May I know the reason?"

"The reason," she said icily, wishing his discomfiture were more pronounced, "is disgraceful. Most disgraceful"—lunging with the superlative, "Today—this very afternoon, in fact—your—"

She floundered helplessly in a muddle of words. The starchy formality she had deemed sufficient to crush the presumption of any man willed before his steady gaze, his calm sternness. She turned appealingly to her husband, who, having held a very unwilling silence at her prior behest, came gladly to the rescue.

"I had best deal with this man alone, Elizabeth." He waited until she left the room; then he blazed at Fitzhugh: "Your wife, whom you deserted, was here today."

"The woman is not my wife."

"Not your legal wife, you mean."

"Nor any other kind."

Scarcely had Fitzhugh uttered the words, advancing with the knew not what rash design, then he stopped, turned back, and stood listening intently. Otis, thoroughly alarmed, rang frantically for a servant.

Fitzhugh crossed to the hall-door and listened.

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