

Madame Midas

By Fergus Hume

CHAPTER XIII.—(Continued.)

"Mercy!" cried the unfortunate woman, taken by surprise, and involuntarily tightening the reins, the horse stopped—"who are you?"

Villiers never said a word, but tightened his grasp on her throat and shortened his stick to give her a blow on the head. Fortunately, Madame Midas saw his intention, and managed to wrench herself free, so the blow aimed at her only slightly touched her, otherwise it would have killed her.

As it was, however, she fell forward, half stunned, and Villiers, hurriedly dropping his stick, bent down and seized her by the neck, bent down and seized the box which he felt under his feet and intuitively guessed contained the nugget.

With a cry of triumph he hurled it out on to the road, and sprang out after it; but the cry woke his wife from the semi-stupor into which she had fallen.

Her head felt dizzy and heavy from the blow, but still she had her senses about her, and the moon bursting out from behind a cloud rendered the night as clear as day.

Villiers had picked up the box, and was standing on the edge of the bank, just about to leave. The unhappy woman recognized her husband, and uttered a cry.

"You! you!" she shrieked, wildly, "cease! dastard! Give me back that nugget!" leaning out of the trap in her eagerness.

"We're quits now, my lady," retorted Villiers, and he turned to go.

Maddened with anger and disgust, his wife snatched up the stick he had dropped, and struck him on the head as he took a step forward. With a stifled cry he staggered and fell over the embankment, still clutching the box in his arms. Madame let the stick fall, and fell back fainting on the seat of the trap, while the horse, startled by the noise, tore down the road at a mad gallop.

Madame Midas lay in a dead faint for some time, and when she came to herself she was in the trap, and Hory was calmly trotting along the road home. At the foot of the hill, the horse, knowing every inch of the way, had settled down into his steady trot for the Pactolus, but when Madame grasped the situation, she marveled to herself how she had escaped being dashed to pieces in that mad gallop down the Black Hill.

Her head felt painful from the effects of the blow she had received, but her one thought was to get home to Archie and Selina, so gathering up the reins she sent Hory along as quickly as she could. When she drove up to the gate Archie and Selina were both out to receive her, and when the former went to lift her off the trap, he gave a cry of horror at seeing her disheveled appearance and the blood on her face.

"Heaven save us!" he cried, lifting her down; "what's come to ye, and where's the nugget?" seeing it was not in the trap.

"Lost!" she said, in a stupor, feeling her head swim; "but there's worse."

"Worse?" echoed Archie and Selina, who were both standing looking terrified at one another.

"Yes," said Mrs. Villiers, in a hollow whisper, leaning forward and grasping Archie's coat, "I've killed my husband," and without another word, she fell fainting to the ground.

At the same time Vandeloup and Pierre walked into the bar at the Wattle Tree Hotel. Pierre went to his bed, and Vandeloup, humming a gay song, turned on his heel and went to the theater.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Wopples family were true Bohemians, and had not yet lost their way to the pleasant city. They accepted good and bad fortune with wonderful equanimity, and if their pockets were empty one day, there was always a possibility of their being full the next. When this was the case they generally celebrated the event by a little supper, and as their present season in Ballarat bid fair to be a successful one, Mr. Theodore Wopples determined to have a convivial evening after the performance was over.

That the Wopples family were favorites with the Ballarat folk was amply seen by the crowded house which assembled to see "The Cruet Stand." The audience were very impatient for the curtain to rise, as they did not appreciate the overture, which consisted of airs adapted for the violin and piano by Mr. Handel Wopples, who was the musical genius of the family, and sat in the conductor's seat, playing the violin and conducting the orchestra of one, which, on this occasion, was Miss Jennina Wopples, who presided at the piano.

Then the orchestra played the "Wopples' Waltz," dedicated to Mr. Theodore Wopples by Mr. Handel Wopples, and during the performance of this Mr. Villiers walked into the theater. He was a little pale, as was only natural after such an adventure as he had been engaged in, but otherwise seemed all right. He walked up to the first row of the stalls, and took his seat beside a young man of about 25, who was evidently much amused at the performance.

"Hallo, Villiers!" said this young gen-

tleman, turning round to the new arrival. "What d'ye think of the play?"

"Only just got in," returned Mr. Villiers, sulkily. "Any good?"

"Well, not bad," returned the other; "I've seen it in Melbourne, you know—the original, I mean, this is a very second-hand affair."

Just as the orchestra were making their final plunge into the finale of the "Wopples' Waltz," M. Vandeloup, cool and calm as usual, strolled into the theater, and, seeing a vacant seat beside Villiers, walked over and took it.

"Good evening, my friend," he said, touching Villiers on the shoulder. "Enjoying the play, eh?"

Villiers angrily pushed away the Frenchman's hand and glared vindictively at him.

"Ah, you still bear malice for that little episode of the ditch," said Vandeloup, with a gay laugh. "Come, now, this is a mistake; let us be friends. Seen your wife lately?"

This apparently careless inquiry caused Mr. Villiers to jump suddenly out of his seat, much to the astonishment of his friend Barty.

Altogether "The Cruet Stand" was a success, and would have a steady run of three nights at least, so Mr. Wopples said. Villiers, Vandeloup and Barty went out, and as none of them felt inclined to go to bed, Villiers told them he knew Mr. Theodore Wopples, and proposed that they should go behind the scenes and see him. This was unanimously carried, and after some difficulty with the doorkeeper, they obtained access to the mysterious regions of the stage, and there found Master Sheridan Wopples practicing a breakdown while waiting for the rest of the family to get ready. He volunteered to guide them to his father's dressing room, and on knocking at the door Mr. Wopples' voice boomed out "Come in," in such an unexpected manner that it made them all jump.

Of course, they all expressed themselves delighted, and as the entire Wopples family had already gone to their hotel, Mr. Wopples with his three guests went out of the theater and wended their way towards the same place.

They soon arrived at the hotel, and having entered, Mr. Wopples pushed open the door of a room from whence the sound of laughter proceeded, and introduced the three strangers to his family. The whole ten, together with Mrs. Wopples, were present, and were seated around a large table plentifully laden with cold beef and pickles, salads and other things too numerous to mention. Mr. Wopples presented them first to his wife, a faded, washed-out looking lady, with a perpetual simper on her face, and clad in a lavender muslin gown with ribbons of the same description, she looked wonderfully light and airy.

"This," said Mr. Wopples in his deep voice, holding his wife's hand as if he were afraid she would float upward through the ceiling like a bubble, "this is my flutterer."

Why he called her his flutterer no one ever knew, unless it was because her ribbons were incessantly fluttering; but, had he called her his shadow, the name would have been more appropriate. Mrs. Wopples fluttered down to the ground in a bow, and then fluttered up again.

"Gentlemen," she said, in a thin, clear voice, "you are welcome. Did you enjoy the performance?"

"Madame," returned Vandeloup, with a smile, "need you ask that?"

A shadowy smile floated over Mrs. Wopples' indistinct features, and then her husband introduced the rest of the family in a hunch.

"Gentlemen," he said, waving his hand to the expectant ten, who stood in a line of five male and five female, "the celebrated Wopples family."

The ten all simultaneously bowed at this as if they were worked by machinery, and then every one sat down to supper, Mr. Theodore Wopples taking the head of the table. All the family seemed to admire him immensely, and kept their eyes fastened on his face with affectionate regard. When it was nearly twelve o'clock Vandeloup rose to take his leave.

"Oh, you're not going yet," said Mr. Wopples, upon which all the family echoed, "Surely, not yet," in a most hospitable manner.

"I must," said Vandeloup, with a smile, "I know Madame will excuse me," with a bow to Mrs. Wopples, who thereupon fluttered nervously; "but I have to be up very early in the morning."

"In that case," said Mr. Wopples, rising, "I will not detain you; early to bed and early to rise, you know; not that I believe in it much myself, but I understand it is practiced with good results by some people."

"Good night, Messrs. Villiers and Jarpier," said Vandeloup, going out of the door. "I will see you to-morrow."

"And we also, I hope," said Mr. Wopples, ungrammatically. "Come and see 'The Cruet Stand' again. I'll put your name on the free list."

M. Vandeloup thanked the actor warmly for this kind offer, and took himself off; as he passed along the street he heard a burst of laughter from the Wopples family, no doubt caused by some witticism of the head of the clan.

He walked slowly home to the hotel,

thinking deeply. When he arrived at the "Wattle Tree" he saw a light still burning in the bar, and, on knocking at the door, was admitted by Miss Tweedy, who had been making up accounts, and whose head was adorned with curl papers.

"My!" said this damsel, when she saw him, "you are a nice young man coming home at this hour—twelve o'clock. See," and, as a proof of her assertion, she pointed to the clock.

"Were you waiting for me, dear?" asked Vandeloup, audaciously.

"Not I," retorted Miss Tweedy, tossing her curl papers; "I've been attending to par's business."

CHAPTER XV.

Madame Midas, as may be easily guessed, did not pass a very pleasant night after the encounter with Villiers. Her head was very painful from the blow she had given her, and added to this she was certain she had killed him.

Though she hated the man who had ruined her life, and who had tried to rob her, still she did not care about becoming his murderer, and the thought was madness to her. Not that she was afraid of punishment, for she had acted only in self-defense, and Villiers, not she, was the aggressor.

Meanwhile she waited to hear if the body had been found, for ill news travels fast; and as everyone knew Villiers was her husband, she was satisfied that when the corpse was found she would be the first to be told about it. But the day wore on, and no news came, so she asked Archie to go into Ballarat and see if the discovery had been made.

"Deed, men," said Archie, in a consoling tone, "I'm thinkin' there's no word at all. Maybe ye only stopped his pranks for a wee bit, and he's all right."

"I gave him such a terrible blow," she said, mournfully, "and he fell like a stone over the embankment."

"He did not leave go the nugget, anyhow, ye know," said Archie, dryly; "so he couldn't have been very far gone, but I'll go to the town and see what I can hear."

There was no need for this, however, for just as McIntosh got to the door, Vandeloup, cool and complacent, sauntered in, but stopped short at the sight of Mrs. Villiers sitting in the arm chair looking so ill.

"My dear Madame," he cried in dismay, going over to her; "what is the matter with you?"

"Matter enough," growled McIntosh, with his hand on the door handle; "that husband of hers has robbed her of the nugget."

"Yes, and I killed him," said Madame, between her clenched teeth.

"The mischief you did," said Vandeloup, in surprise, taking a seat, "then he was the liveliest dead man I ever saw."

"What do you mean?" asked Madame, leaning forward, with both hands gripping the arms of her chair; "is—is he alive?"

"Of course he is," began Vandeloup; "I— but here he was stopped by a cry from Selina, for her mistress had fallen back in a dead faint."

Hastily waving the men to go away, she applied remedies and Madame soon revived. Mrs. Villiers felt intense disgust toward her husband as she sat with tightly clenched hands and dry eyes listening to Vandeloup's recital.

"Well," said Mr. McIntosh at length, rubbing his scanty hair, "this child of Belial is flourishing like a green bay tree by many waters; but we may cut it down an' lay an axe at the root thereof."

"And how do you propose to chop him down?" asked Vandeloup flippantly.

"Put him in jail for running away w' the nugget," retorted Mr. McIntosh, vindictively.

"A very sensible suggestion," said Gaston, approvingly.

"Now that he has obtained what he wanted, perhaps he'll leave me alone; I will do nothing," said Madame Midas.

"Do nothing!" echoed Archie, in great wrath. "Will ye let that friend of Beelzebub run away with a three hundred ounces of gold an' do nothing? Keep the nugget! Never!"

This was the first time that Archie had ever dared to cross Mrs. Villiers' wishes, and she stared in amazement at the unwonted spectacle. This time, however, McIntosh found an unexpected ally in Vandeloup, who urged that Villiers should be prosecuted.

"He is not only guilty of robbery, Madame," said the young Frenchman, "but also of an attempt to murder you, and while he is allowed to go free your life is not safe."

Selina also contributed her mite of wisdom in the form of a proverb: "A stitch in time saves nine," intimating thereby that Mr. Villiers should be locked up and never let out again, in case he tried the same game on with the next big nugget found.

Meanwhile there was another individual in Ballarat who was much interested in Villiers, and this kind-hearted gentleman was none other than Slivers. Villiers was accustomed to come and sit in his office every morning and talk to him about things in general, and the Pactolus claim in particular. On this morning, however, he did not arrive, and Slivers was much annoyed thereat. He determined to give Villiers a piece of his mind when he did see him. He went about his business at "The Corner," bought some shares, sold others, and swindled as many people as he was able, then came back to his office and waited in all the afternoon for his friend, who, however did not come.

(To be continued.)

His Sole Object.

"Really," exclaimed Mr. Cheilus, "I wonder if you realize what sort of an object you make, dangling around after Miss Milyuns in that way."

"Sure," replied Mr. Getthare, "object matrimony."—Philadelphia Press.

When a sick person is more than 70, people say: "His age is against him."

PRISON IS THEIR FATE

NO RELIEF FOR MOYER ET AL. IN THE SUPREME COURT

Justice Harlan Renders Majority Opinion to Which Justice McKenna Dissents—Other Rollings Made

WASHINGTON.—The supreme court of the United States decided the habeas corpus cases of Moyer, Haywood and Pettibone, the representatives of the western federation of miners, who are now held in prison in Idaho on the charge of complicity in the murder of Former Governor Steunenberg adversely to the men. The opinion was by Justice Harlan.

The effect of the decision will be to continue to hold the men in confinement for trial in Idaho.

Of the men involved Charles H. Moyer is president; W. D. Haywood, secretary-treasurer, and George A. Pettibone, a member of the western federation of miners. They are now in prison in Canon county, Idaho, under a charge of murdering Former Governor Steunenberg of that state, although it was not charged that they were present when the crime was committed. The cases came to this court on an appeal from a decision of the Idaho federal court refusing to grant writs of habeas corpus.

Want Facts About Troops

WASHINGTON.—The Fifty-ninth congress has begun its last session. It took the senate fifteen minutes to arrange its preliminaries and the house an hour. The senate received from President Roosevelt a long list of appointments for its confirmation and in an executive session of nineteen minutes decided that, as the nominations had been received before the body had been organized formally, to make no confirmations until the president's annual message had been received and the session fairly started.

Senators Penrose of Pennsylvania and Foraker of Ohio came forward with resolutions of inquiry regarding the discharge of the negro troops of the Twenty-fifth infantry. One was addressed to the president and the other to the secretary of war. After the ripple of surprise had passed and Vice President Fairbanks had suggested that it was unusual to transact any business until the president's message had been received, the resolutions went over with unanimous consent. Senator Dupont, of Delaware, took the oath of office.

Animated Throng in Galleries

The opening of the two houses was witnessed by an animated throng which filled the galleries to their capacity. Hundreds went away disappointed in not gaining admission to witness the session of either senate or house.

Not in years has a larger number of members-elect of the lower house of congress presented themselves at the speaker's desk to take the oath of office. Death has been unusually active among the membership during the closing days of the last session and the beginning of the present, and Chaplain Couden feelingly called the attention of the body to the work of the grim reaper during the months since adjournment.

Speaker Cannon appointed Representative James R. Mann, of Illinois as a member of the board of regents of the Smithsonian institution, vice Robert H. Hitt, of Illinois, deceased.

The galleries of the house were crowded at an early hour. The absence of flowers from the desk of the members was much commented on, but the order of the speaker prohibiting the flower display was generally commended for its good sense. A similar rule was made in the senate two years ago.

Alleged Murderer Caught

EL PASO, Tex.—After a desperate fight with officers during which he was shot several times and wounded several of his pursuers A. R. Sibley, the sheep buyer who is alleged to have murdered and robbed B. M. Cawthorne and J. W. Ealston and another rancher on three successive days in Valverde county, was captured in the mountains near Sanderson and is now in jail believed to be mortally wounded.

The circumstances attending the murders are said to have been almost identical. Sibley purchased large herds from his alleged victims. In each case the rancher delivered the stock at Del Rio, received a check which he promptly cashed and later was found murdered and robbed.

MANY MEN NEEDED

WEAK COAST DEFENSES MUST BE STRENGTHENED

STAND OF PRESIDENT

WILL URGE ON CONGRESS REMEDIAL LEGISLATION

Will Point Out Weaknesses and Recommend in His Message Reorganization of the Coast Artillery Service

WASHINGTON.—One of the subjects of which President Roosevelt will treat in his message to congress will be the deplorable condition of our coast defenses. Deploable, not so much through the lack of fortifications, guns or machinery, although much remains to be done on all three, but especially because of the lack of men necessary to keep the guns and machinery in order in time of peace, to say nothing of manipulating them should war break out. What the president will have to say on this subject will be short but to the point and he will take a firm stand in favor of legislation calculated to remedy existing conditions. He has already placed himself squarely on record, and only six months ago addressed a special letter to the senate in which he pointed out that the increasing importance and wealth of exports offered more inducement to an enemy. "The fact that we now have a navy does not in any wise diminish importance of coast defenses; on the contrary it emphasizes their value, and the necessity for their construction," he said recently. "It is an accepted naval maxim that a navy can be used to strategic advantage only when acting on the offensive, and it can be free to operate only after our coast defense is reasonably secure and so recognized by the country."

The president takes the ground that the security and protection of our interests require the completion of our coast defenses, and that the plans of the national coast defense board should receive the generous support of congress.

Fight on Train

REDWATER, Tex.—The express car attached to train No. 4 of the Cotton Belt route, which left this city, was robbed and Express Messenger W. A. Grissip hurled from the train after having been beaten and badly wounded by the robbers.

The robbery it is believed occurred about a mile from this place, but was not discovered until the train reached Eylan, the next stop. The express messenger, was found beside the track badly hurt and showed indications of a desperate fight. The robbers escaped.

That the robbery was a success is evident, so far as a hasty inspection of the car and its contents would indicate, but the amount stolen is not known.

Supt. F. M. Edfield, of Dallas, has started for the scene and a special train loaded with officers has been started out of Texarkana. A special tax also been sent from Redwater.

At Redwater the messenger had attended to his duties as usual and the train proceeded. There is no stop on the schedule between that point and Eylan. At Eylan Conductor Blair, who was in charge of the train, saw that the door of the express car has been forced and on entering found it splattered with blood, the messenger missing and the car bearing every appearance of having been looted. Trainmen were sent back on handcars and Grissip was found. While he is badly wounded it is not believed his hurts will prove fatal.

Many Deeds of Violence

EL PASO, Tex.—Following a campaign of extreme bitterness in which the alleged revolutionists of that place played a prominent part, three murders have occurred in Del Rio within the last three days, the latest being that of C. B. Cawthorne, a leading sheep man in that section, who was found dead in his buggy with a bullet through his heart. Intense feeling has existed along the border since the arrest of alleged revolutionists began and many murders and other deeds of violence are attributed to this. There is no abatement of the feeling aroused by the arrest of alleged revolutionists. On the contrary, it is growing in intensity and bitterness.