



The DAY OF DAYS

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

Copyright, 1912, by the Frank A. Munsey Co.

April 30 Days
14

PROLOGUE.

"It breaks the speed limit to smithereens."

That's a candid opinion about this story. There may have been swifter tales, but not recently. It's an aeroplane of a yarn, moving so fast that you lose your breath while you follow it. But you don't need any breath, anyway, because you forget about respiration with your eyes on reading of this kind.

Every man has his day of days. Yours may have come and you may be swimming in the full tide of fortune. If so, read how P. Sybarite found his. If your own ship is still in the offing, you will enjoy learning how the little spunky red headed bookkeeper won a fortune and an heiress, foiled all his enemies and had some of the most amazing adventures ever penned—all in less time than it takes the hour hand to round the clock dial twice.

CHAPTER XV. Together.

THE chauffeur turned to his car, jumped into the driver's seat and advanced the spark. The purr of the motor deepened to a leonine growl.

"Hello," he exclaimed in surprise, real or feigned, to see P. Sybarite take the seat by his side. "Who's payin' you to be an ass?"

"Did you think I'd ask you to run a risk that frightened me?" Again the spiteful drumming of the automatic. P. Sybarite swung round in time to see one of the plain clothes men return the fire with several brisk shots, then abruptly drop his revolver, clip a hand to his bosom, wheel about face and fall prone.

"Tunin' up!" commented the chauffeur grimly. "Sounds like they was about ready to commence!"

The chauffeur's voice was muffled by another volley, on the echoes of which the little man saw the nose of a car poke diagonally out of the garage doors, pause, swerve a trifle to the right and pause once again.

"They're coming!" he cried wildly. "Stand by!"

The alarm was taken up and repeated by two-score throats, while those flitting the street and sidewalks near by broke in swift panic and began madly to scuttle to shelter within doorways and down basement steps.

Like an arrow from the string November's car broke cover at an angle. Ignoring the slanting way from the threshold to the gutter, it took the bump of the curb apparently at full tilt and skidded to the northern curb before it could be brought under control and its course shaped eastward.

With a shiver P. Sybarite recognized that car.

It was not the taxicab that he had been led to expect, but the same maroon limousine into which he had assisted Marian Blessington at the Bizarre.

On its front seats were two men—Red November himself at the driver's side, a revolver in either hand. Whom the body of the car might contain P. Sybarite could not say. There was one passenger at least if he might trust to the most swift of impressions gained in one hasty glance through the forward windows as the car bore down upon them—November's weapons spitting fire.

He could not say, but he could guess, and, guessing, he knew his automatic in his grasp to be useless. He dared not fire upon the gangster for fear of losing a wild bullet into the body of the car.

Now they were within fifty feet of one another. By contrast with the apparent slowness of the touring car to get in motion the maroon limousine seemed already to have attained locomotive speed.

A yell and a shot from one of November's revolvers (P. Sybarite saw the bullet score the asphalt not two feet from the forward wheel) warned them to clear the way as the gang leader's car swerved wide to pass. And on this the touring car seemed to get out of control, swinging across the street. Immediately the other, crowded to the gutter, attempted to take the curb; but the wheels meeting it at an angle not sufficiently acute, the maneuver failed. To a chorus of yells November's driver slant down the brakes not a thought too soon, not soon enough, indeed, to avoid a collision that crumpled a mud-guard as though it had been a thing of pasteboard.

Simultaneously P. Sybarite's chauffeur set the brakes and, with the agility of a bounded rabbit seeking its burrow, dived from his seat to the side of the car farthest from the gangsters.

In an instant he was underneath it. P. Sybarite, on the other hand, had leaped before the cars came together.

Staggering a pace or two—and all the time under fire—he at length found his feet not six feet from the limousine. It had stopped broadside on. In this position he commanded the front seats without great danger of sending a shot through the body.

His weapon rose mechanically, and quite deliberately he took aim, making assurance doubly sure throughout what seemed an age, made stiller by the singing past his head of the infuriated gangster's bullets.

But his finger never tightened upon the trigger. November had ceased firing and was plucking nervously at the slide of his automatic. His driver had jumped down and was scuttling madly up the street.

In a breath P. Sybarite realized what was the matter. November's automatic, hot from fast firing, had chocked on an empty shell.

With a sob of excitement the little man lowered his weapon and flung himself upon the gang leader.

November rose to meet him, reversing his pistol and aiming at P. Sybarite's head.

"The Plaza? You might be bothered there. We may be traced—we're sure to. This only saves us for the day. Tomorrow—reporters—all that—perhaps. Perhaps not! Don't you know somebody out of town to whom you could go for the day? Once across the city line we're safe for a little."

She nodded, breathed an address in Westchester county.

Some time later P. Sybarite became sensible of an amazing fact. A hand of his rested on the cushioned seat, and in it lay, now warm and wonderfully soft and light, Marian's hand.

The car swept on and on through the golden hush of that glorious Sunday morning.

Toward 10 of that same Sunday morning a touring car of majestic mien drew up in front of a boarding house in West Thirty-eighth street.

From this alighted a little man with a somewhat bedraggled appearance and a somewhat weatherbeaten but beautiful grin. He shook hands with the chauffeur and, speaking guardedly, confirmed some secret understanding with him.

Then the car rolled off, and P. Sybarite shuffled meekly through the gate, crossed the dooryard and met the outraged glare of George Bross with an apologetic smile and the request:

"If you've got a pack of cigarettes about you, George, I can use one in my business."

Without abating his manifestations of entire disapproval, George produced a box of cigarettes, permitted P. Sybarite to select one and helped himself.

"Sa-ay!" he exploded. "Looky here! Where've you been all night?"

"Ah-h!" P. Sybarite sighed provokingly. "That's a long and tiresome story, George."

With much the air of a transient he sat down by George's side.

"A very long and very weary story, George. I don't like to tell it to you, really. We'd be sure to quarrel."

"Why? George demanded.

"Because you wouldn't believe me. I don't quite believe it myself, now that all's over, barring a page or two. Your great trouble, George, is that you have no imagination."

"I ain't!"

"Perfectly right—you haven't. If you point with pride to that wild flight of fancy which identified 'Molly Lessing' with Marian Blessington, George, your position is (as you yourself would say) untenable. It wasn't imagination—it was fact."

"No!" George ejaculated. "Is that right? What'd I tell you? Say, what's been doin' with yourself all night, P. S.?"

"I've been day of days-ing myself, George."

"Ah, can the kiddin', P. S. Come through! Whadja do?"

"Call me Perceval," P. Sybarite suggested pleasantly.

"Wh-ah?"

"Let it be Perceval hereafter, George. Always. I give you free permission."

"But I thought you said—"

"So I did—a few hours ago. Now I—well, I rather like it. It makes all the difference who calls you that sort of a name first and what her voice is like."

"One of us," George protested with profound conviction. "Is plumb loony in the head!"

"It's me," said P. Sybarite humbly; "I admit it. And the worst of it is I like it! So would you if you'd been through a day of days?"

George let that pass. For the moment he was otherwise engaged in vain speculation as to the appearance of a phenomenon rather rare in the calendar of that West Thirty-eighth street boarding house.

A telegraph boy, weary with the weariness of not less than forty summers, was shuffling in at the gate.

"Sa-ay!" he called, with the asperity of ingrained ennui. "Either of youse guys know a guy named Perceval Sybarite 't lives here?"

Silently P. Sybarite held out his hand, took the greasy little book in its black oilskin binding, scrawled his signature in the proper blank and received the message in its sealed yellow envelope.

"Wait," he commanded calmly, eying the messenger with suspicion.

"What's eatin' you? Is they a nasser?"

"They ain't no answer," P. Sybarite admitted.

"Well, whatcha want? I got no time to stick round here kiddin'."

"One moment of your valuable time. I believe you delivered a message at the Mastry apartments in Forty-third street this morning."

"Well, an' what 'I did?"

"Only this."

P. Sybarite extracted an immense roll of bills from his pocket, transferred it to his other hand, delved deeper, and eventually he produced a single twenty dollar gold piece.

"Take this," he said, tossing it to the boy with princely nonchalance. "It's the last of a lot, but—it's yours."

"What for?" the messenger demanded in amazement.

"That you'll never know," said P. Sybarite. "Now run along before I come to."

In the shadow of this threat the messenger fled precipitately.

P. Sybarite rose, yawned and smiled benignantly upon George Bross.

"I'm off to bed—was only waiting for this message," he announced; "but before I go—tell me: how much money does Violet think you ought to be earning before you're eligible for the matrimonial stakes?"

"She said somethin' onet about fifty per," George remembered gloomily.

"It's yours—doubled," P. Sybarite told him. "Tomorrow you will resign from the employ of Whigham & Wimper and go to Blessington's to enter their shipping department at a hundred a week, and if you don't earn it may God have mercy on your wretched soul!"

George rose very suddenly.

"I'll go send for the doctor," he announced.

"One moment more," P. Sybarite dropped a detaining hand upon his arm. "You and Violet are invited to dinner tonight—at the Hotel Plaza. Don't be alarmed. You needn't dress; we'll dine privately in Marian's apartment."

"Marian?"

"Miss Blessington—Molly Lessing that was."

"Honest," said George sincerely. "I don't know whether to think you've gone bughouse or not. You've always been a bit queer and foolish in the head, but never since I've known you—"

"And after dinner," P. Sybarite pursued evenly, "you're going to attend a very quiet little wedding party."

"Whose, for God's sake?"

"Marian's and mine, and the only reason why you can't be best man is that the best man will be my cousin, Peter Kenny."

"Is that straight?"

"On the level."

George concluded that there was sanity in P. Sybarite's eyes.

"Well, I certainly got to slip you the congrats!" he protested. "And, say—you go in to bounce Whigham & Wimper too?"

"Yes."

"And whatcha goin' do then?"

"I? To tell you the truth, I'm considering joining the union and agitating for an eight hour day of days. This one of mine has been eighteen hours long, more or less—since I got those theater tickets, you know—and I'm too dog tired to keep my eyes open another minute. After I've had a nap I'll tell you all about everything."

But he wasn't too tired to read his telegram when he found himself again, and for the last time, in his hall bedroom.

It said simply: I love you. MARIAN.

From this P. Sybarite looked up to his reflection in the glass. And presently he smiled sheepishly and blinked.

"Perceval!" he said the little man fondly.

THE END.

Hoping, rather than counting on this assurance, he jumped out and offered his hand. She put hers into it (and it was cold as ice, stirred, rose stiffly, tottered to the door and fell into his arms.

A uniformed patrolman, breaking through the crowd about them, seized P. Sybarite and held him fast.

"What's this? Who's this?" he gabbled incoherently, brandishing a vaguely formidable fist.

"A lady, you fool!" P. Sybarite snapped. "Let go and catch that scoundrel over there—if you're worth your salt."

He waved his free hand in the direction taken by November's driver.

Abruptly and without protest the patrolman released him, butted his way through the crowd and disappeared.

An arm boldly about Marian's waist, P. Sybarite helped her to the step of the touring car—and blessed that prince among chauffeurs who was set and ready in his seat!

"Go!" P. Sybarite cried to the chauffeur.

The crowd gave way before the lunge of the car.

They were halfway to Fifth avenue before pursuit was thought of; had turned the corner before it was fairly started; in five minutes had thrown it off entirely and were running free at a moderate pace up Broadway just above Columbus Circle.

"Where to now, boss?" the chauffeur presently inquired.

P. Sybarite looked inquiringly at his charge. Since her rescue she had neither moved nor spoken—had rested motionless in her corner of the tonneau, eyes closed, body relaxed and listless. But now she roused.

"Wherever you think best," she told him gently.

"The Plaza? You might be bothered there. We may be traced—we're sure to. This only saves us for the day. Tomorrow—reporters—all that—perhaps. Perhaps not! Don't you know somebody out of town to whom you could go for the day? Once across the city line we're safe for a little."

She nodded, breathed an address in Westchester county.

Some time later P. Sybarite became sensible of an amazing fact. A hand of his rested on the cushioned seat, and in it lay, now warm and wonderfully soft and light, Marian's hand.

The car swept on and on through the golden hush of that glorious Sunday morning.

Toward 10 of that same Sunday morning a touring car of majestic mien drew up in front of a boarding house in West Thirty-eighth street.

From this alighted a little man with a somewhat bedraggled appearance and a somewhat weatherbeaten but beautiful grin. He shook hands with the chauffeur and, speaking guardedly, confirmed some secret understanding with him.

Then the car rolled off, and P. Sybarite shuffled meekly through the gate, crossed the dooryard and met the outraged glare of George Bross with an apologetic smile and the request:

"If you've got a pack of cigarettes about you, George, I can use one in my business."

Without abating his manifestations of entire disapproval, George produced a box of cigarettes, permitted P. Sybarite to select one and helped himself.

"Sa-ay!" he exploded. "Looky here! Where've you been all night?"

"Ah-h!" P. Sybarite sighed provokingly. "That's a long and tiresome story, George."

With much the air of a transient he sat down by George's side.

"A very long and very weary story, George. I don't like to tell it to you, really. We'd be sure to quarrel."

"Why? George demanded.

"Because you wouldn't believe me. I don't quite believe it myself, now that all's over, barring a page or two. Your great trouble, George, is that you have no imagination."

"I ain't!"

"Perfectly right—you haven't. If you point with pride to that wild flight of fancy which identified 'Molly Lessing' with Marian Blessington, George, your position is (as you yourself would say) untenable. It wasn't imagination—it was fact."

"No!" George ejaculated. "Is that right? What'd I tell you? Say, what's been doin' with yourself all night, P. S.?"

"I've been day of days-ing myself, George."

"Ah, can the kiddin', P. S. Come through! Whadja do?"

"Call me Perceval," P. Sybarite suggested pleasantly.

"Wh-ah?"

"Let it be Perceval hereafter, George. Always. I give you free permission."

"But I thought you said—"

"So I did—a few hours ago. Now I—well, I rather like it. It makes all the difference who calls you that sort of a name first and what her voice is like."

"One of us," George protested with profound conviction. "Is plumb loony in the head!"

"It's me," said P. Sybarite humbly; "I admit it. And the worst of it is I like it! So would you if you'd been through a day of days?"

George let that pass. For the moment he was otherwise engaged in vain speculation as to the appearance of a phenomenon rather rare in the calendar of that West Thirty-eighth street boarding house.

A telegraph boy, weary with the weariness of not less than forty summers, was shuffling in at the gate.

"Sa-ay!" he called, with the asperity of ingrained ennui. "Either of youse guys know a guy named Perceval Sybarite 't lives here?"

Silently P. Sybarite held out his hand, took the greasy little book in its black oilskin binding, scrawled his signature in the proper blank and received the message in its sealed yellow envelope.

"Wait," he commanded calmly, eying the messenger with suspicion.

"What's eatin' you? Is they a nasser?"

"They ain't no answer," P. Sybarite admitted.

"Well, whatcha want? I got no time to stick round here kiddin'."

"One moment of your valuable time. I believe you delivered a message at the Mastry apartments in Forty-third street this morning."

"Well, an' what 'I did?"

"Only this."

P. Sybarite extracted an immense roll of bills from his pocket, transferred it to his other hand, delved deeper, and eventually he produced a single twenty dollar gold piece.

"Take this," he said, tossing it to the boy with princely nonchalance. "It's the last of a lot, but—it's yours."

"What for?" the messenger demanded in amazement.

"That you'll never know," said P. Sybarite. "Now run along before I come to."

In the shadow of this threat the messenger fled precipitately.

P. Sybarite rose, yawned and smiled benignantly upon George Bross.

"I'm off to bed—was only waiting for this message," he announced; "but before I go—tell me: how much money does Violet think you ought to be earning before you're eligible for the matrimonial stakes?"

"She said somethin' onet about fifty per," George remembered gloomily.

"It's yours—doubled," P. Sybarite told him. "Tomorrow you will resign from the employ of Whigham & Wimper and go to Blessington's to enter their shipping department at a hundred a week, and if you don't earn it may God have mercy on your wretched soul!"

George rose very suddenly.

"I'll go send for the doctor," he announced.

"One moment more," P. Sybarite dropped a detaining hand upon his arm. "You and Violet are invited to dinner tonight—at the Hotel Plaza. Don't be alarmed. You needn't dress; we'll dine privately in Marian's apartment."

"Marian?"

"Miss Blessington—Molly Lessing that was."

"Honest," said George sincerely. "I don't know whether to think you've gone bughouse or not. You've always been a bit queer and foolish in the head, but never since I've known you—"

"And after dinner," P. Sybarite pursued evenly, "you're going to attend a very quiet little wedding party."

"Whose, for God's sake?"

"Marian's and mine, and the only reason why you can't be best man is that the best man will be my cousin, Peter Kenny."

"Is that straight?"

"On the level."

George concluded that there was sanity in P. Sybarite's eyes.

"Well, I certainly got to slip you the congrats!" he protested. "And, say—you go in to bounce Whigham & Wimper too?"

"Yes."

"And whatcha goin' do then?"

"I? To tell you the truth, I'm considering joining the union and agitating for an eight hour day of days. This one of mine has been eighteen hours long, more or less—since I got those theater tickets, you know—and I'm too dog tired to keep my eyes open another minute. After I've had a nap I'll tell you all about everything."

But he wasn't too tired to read his telegram when he found himself again, and for the last time, in his hall bedroom.

It said simply: I love you. MARIAN.

From this P. Sybarite looked up to his reflection in the glass. And presently he smiled sheepishly and blinked.

"Perceval!" he said the little man fondly.

THE END.

ed the message in its sealed yellow envelope.

"Wait," he commanded calmly, eying the messenger with suspicion.

"What's eatin' you? Is they a nasser?"

"They ain't no answer," P. Sybarite admitted.

"Well, whatcha want? I got no time to stick round here kiddin'."

"One moment of your valuable time. I believe you delivered a message at the Mastry apartments in Forty-third street this morning."

"Well, an' what 'I did?"

"Only this."

P. Sybarite extracted an immense roll of bills from his pocket, transferred it to his other hand, delved deeper, and eventually he produced a single twenty dollar gold piece.

"Take this," he said, tossing it to the boy with princely nonchalance. "It's the last of a lot, but—it's yours."

"What for?" the messenger demanded in amazement.

"That you'll never know," said P. Sybarite. "Now run along before I come to."

In the shadow of this threat the messenger fled precipitately.

P. Sybarite rose, yawned and smiled benignantly upon George Bross.

"I'm off to bed—was only waiting for this message," he announced; "but before I go—tell me: how much money does Violet think you ought to be earning before you're eligible for the matrimonial stakes?"

"She said somethin' onet about fifty per," George remembered gloomily.

"It's yours—doubled," P. Sybarite told him. "Tomorrow you will resign from the employ of Whigham & Wimper and go to Blessington's to enter their shipping department at a hundred a week, and if you don't earn it may God have mercy on your wretched soul!"

George rose very suddenly.

"I'll go send for the doctor," he announced.

"One moment more," P. Sybarite dropped a detaining hand upon his arm. "You and Violet are invited to dinner tonight—at the Hotel Plaza. Don't be alarmed. You needn't dress; we'll dine privately in Marian's apartment."

"Marian?"

"Miss Blessington—Molly Lessing that was."

"Honest," said George sincerely. "I don't know whether to think you've gone bughouse or not. You've always been a bit queer and foolish in the head, but never since I've known you—"