

A DIAMOND BOID.

By ST. GEORGE RATHBONE,
Author of "Little Miss Widdow," "The Spies of
New York," "The Millionaire," "My Captive," etc.

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CHAPTER XV.

A BATTLE OF WITS.

Some of the most frantic hovered at the windows, as though they would plunge through space if the worst came.

They were crazed for the time being and could not be reasoned with.

Many a precious life went out that fatal day, that might have been saved by the exercise of the wisest judgment and coolness; for all attributes which mortal man inherits or acquires these prove the richest legacy in such a time of actual peril.

Having taken his bearings, and discovered which way the numbers ran, Charlie started upon what he believed was the last leg of his course.

Now he must steadily realize the worst; if he came upon Arline's room and found them empty, he must know that she was somewhere about the intricate passages, lost and facing death, as when she first fled.

He was a prey to a hundred thoughts, each seeking to find out a thing would be.

Tragedies were being enacted within those walls that had many times echoed with the sounds of gaiety, and now rang with shrieks, already the greedy fire fiend had cut off many feet between the two worlds, to compass their destruction.

Some doors were closed, but the majority stood gaping, and the light streamed through the terrible openings, which fled just as they were.

In passing one of these Charlie had a glimpse of a man, who, with a slight bending over an open trunk, evidently seeking to lay hold of his precious jewel boxes or any other valuables.

Maybe they cost her what all the jewels from Cleopatra's day on this could not replace.

Once a woman had seized upon him—crazed by fear, she clutched him as a drowning man might a straw.

Charlie could not have his mission jeopardized by such a trifling incident, he was compelled to break away, shouting at the same time for her to go to the stairs and descend, and that no chance remained, God only knew how long this golden opportunity might be held out to them, for the greedy flames were making hideous headway and presently the entire building would be a charnal house.

All obstacles had that day been overcome by his iron will, determined to reach and save Arline, he had swept them aside as the March wind whisks the dust out of its path.

But the end was not.

One barrier remained.

Charlie suspected it not until the thing burst upon him, and he was unprepared for the lighting from the clear sky overhead.

Again a dazzling band.

This time it brought his forward movement to a complete stop, and he saw that there was something more serious in the detonation than the poor groveling chambermaid had clutched his knees.

There was a man, through the haze he had seen his presence without paying the least attention to him, and saw the fellow, probably as terrified as the women, frantically clinging to him.

"To the stairs or the fire escape!"—let go! shouted Charlie, and the other laughed with devilish glee in his ear. Stuart turned his head to see close to his own the face of the bogus Capt. Brand, and with a passion into the countenance of a fiend.

It was an accident or deep design that brought Macaulay to this floor of the hotel at such a tragical moment.

When Charlie felt that grip on his arm and looked into the madman's eyes, he seemed to realize that a great crisis in his life had arrived.

The stake was Arline's love.

This man might be innocent or guilty of murderous design, but appearances were mightily against him.

His manner indicated that he was not to be trifled with.

"This far shall you come and no farther," warned Charlie to prepare for the worst, to throw himself into a position that was aggressive even while defensive.

It was a wily precaution, for the other, even while he continued to glare maliciously into his face, suddenly threw himself upon Stuart.

As he expected, Charlie found Macaulay a man gifted with tremendous muscular power. Like trained athletes, the two men went round, each seeking the downfall of the other.

To Charlie each second meant a closer approach of doom, and to the other the passage of time brought savage satisfaction, as his base plans grew nearer realization.

Charlie retreated a step, missing every atom of power in his muscular frame for the storm which he meant to spring upon the already glowing enemy.

Macaulay was drunk with the success that had seemed to be already within his grasp.

He thus could be taken off his guard, and once in retreat, complete rout must follow.

So sudden was the attack, so overwhelming in its resistless energy, that the other fell back in confusion, hardly knowing just how to meet or strange a rally.

And Stuart followed it up—he knew full well that was worth doing at all as was worth doing at all.

He was bent on ending the struggle then and there—in order to do so most effectively he let one of his other kink, and surprised his enemy with a succession of tricks that completely stupefied the other.

It was the work of a glancing Charlie, having stung the other with a multiplicity of short snuff blows, hurried him in shortening breath, and found himself once more free to go forward.

counter took place, and already their anger reacted into love at the further end of the corridor.

Charlie was panting like a hunted stag, hardly able to catch his breath, but that smokescreen was not to be, yet, so sooner had he hurried his course to the floor, and found the enemy clear, than he started along the hallway.

The numbers on the doors now stood out plainly enough, thanks to the flames, and he knew he was close to where Arline might be found.

He saw the door was ajar. It gave him a moment's hesitation, but he did not escape with the first—he must still be within her room.

He advanced upon the knob and turned it.

Horror! There was no response to the door utterly refused to give way, being locked within.

Charlie pounded with his fist upon the panel.

"Open the door, Arline! Open for God's sake! The hotel is on fire!" Apparently he shouted loud enough to arouse the dead, yet no answer came from the door.

Stuart knew of but one recourse—left it was a desperate case, and he pulled at the door with all his might.

He raised his fist.

One mighty blow shattered the lock, as completely as though a battering ram had been brought to bear against it.

The door flew open.

Nothing barred his progress now, and turning into another corridor which led in the desired quarter, he pushed on Arline clinging to his arm with all her might, and uttering the horror of her soul, but, thank Heaven! as yet her steps did not falter, nor did she give any signs of being weary.

He remembered the lay of the land—surely there must be a better chance of escape in the rear.

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corridors calling for the help that could never be given.

Such a scene of horror must haunt one while life lasts, so fraught with human suffering and the utter inability to do anything to relieve it.

He had not calculated wrongly; while the smoke remained more dense than ever, the flames were eating their way not so great, although he saw it pushing toward them from three separate and distinct quarters, as though it were a living being.

An open window at the end of the hall was Charlie's objective point.

He saw the door was ajar. It gave him a moment's hesitation, but he did not escape with the first—he must still be within her room.

He advanced upon the knob and turned it.

Horror! There was no response to the door utterly refused to give way, being locked within.

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WORLD OF SCIENCE

INVENTIONS AND DISCOVERIES OF RECENT DATE.

Device for Fastening Horses, That Saves Any and All the Hitting Part—Floor-Scrubbing Machine a Valuable Labor Saver.

Improved Adjusting Device.

In the accompanying illustration is shown a novel idea for adjusting striking bags, the object being to afford a means of adjusting the position of the bag relative to the contact ring beneath which the bag depends, without causing the bag to overreach the edge of the ring when swung in any position.

Ordinarily the cord which supports the bag has to be adjusted at the desired height by varying the length of the cord; the time the knots are tightened the bag is seldom in the right place, and it is considerably more trouble to change the position of the bag to fit persons of different heights.

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