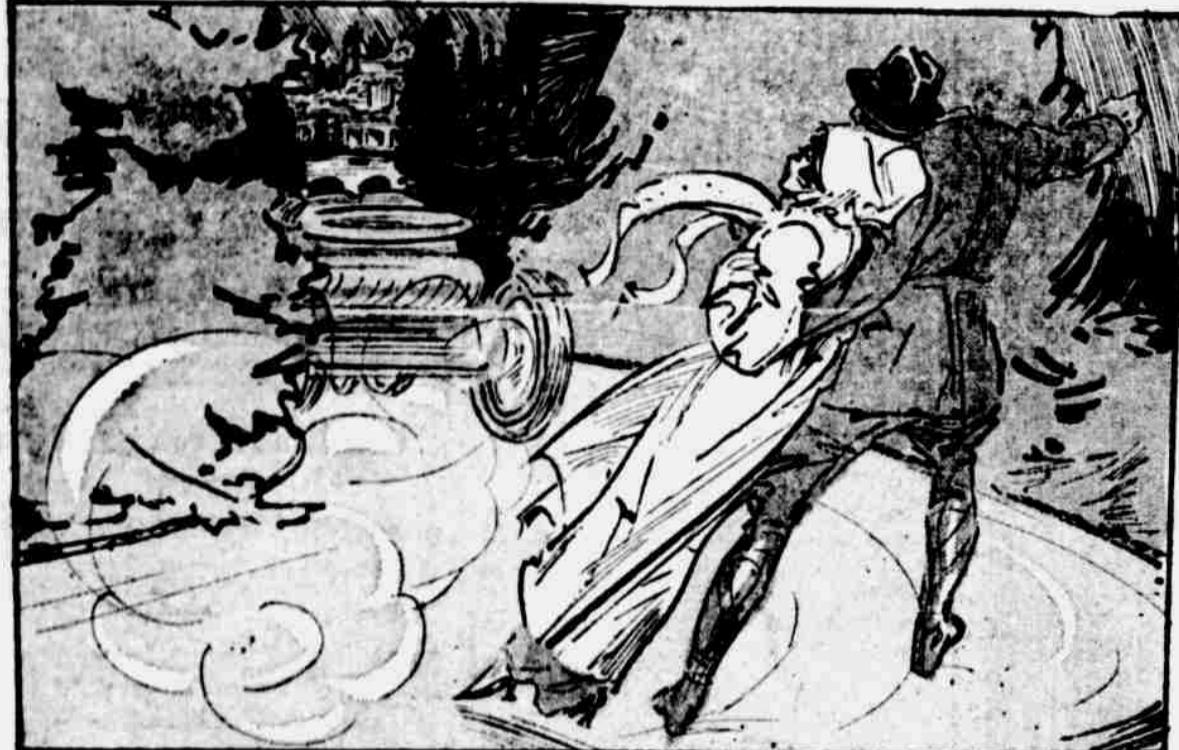


THE MOTOR BURGLARS---By Jacobs Upjohn

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"MARGARET! You can't mean it!" exclaimed the astonished man.

"I do mean it," was the flashing reply. "Taking that Brent person motoring before we had been engaged a week was an insult to me. And when she passed us in her car she ogled you. And you ogled back!"



"Just in Time He Seized the Girl Out of Peril.

"She asked me to take her home from the Country Club. I've been her guest sometimes and had to be decent to her," he expostulated. "As for what you call ogling, that's the way she smiles. And I didn't ogle back!" he added hotly.

"Now that our engagement is at an end your relations with her are no affair of mine," was her icy rejoinder.

"It's abominable, the way you are treating me," he protested. "Margaret, dearest, let me explain. Can't I make you see that?"

"I desire to be taken home at once," she interrupted. The powerful car had been moving at a moderate pace. The outraged man, scorning to retort, with a vicious jerk threw in the high speed, and, leaping forward, they sped humming through the night. Raymond Chester, crouched low over the steering wheel, kept his goggled eyes moodily on the ribbon of road which, in the glare of the lamps, slipped swiftly under them.

"It's absurd for her to make a row about Mrs. Brent," he said to himself. "Everybody knows there isn't any harm in her. Girls are always down on a lively widow. And I suppose Margaret is cross, too, because we're so late getting back. As if I were to blame for that blowout!"

A rumble of thunder caused Chester to glance skyward. A vast cloud, the flicker of lightning in its heart, was mounting majestically toward the zenith. With a startled exclamation he accelerated to racing speed. There was a sharp explosion; the car swerved violently, ploughed through the roadside turf and, with a grinding shriek of the emergency brakes, stopped so abruptly as to almost fling its occupants against a wall a yard in front of the hood. The chauffeur sprang from the rumble, struck a match, and, by its light, examined the torn and collapsed tire.

"Look at that, now!" he exclaimed distastefully. "Tis the second blowout inside of twenty mile. Tires is no good inn'y more. It'll take the best half of an hour to fix, and you in such hurry. Mr. Raymond, yo should git Miss Margaret under shelter before that brute of a growling cloud hits loose or she'll be fair of that blowout."

"Terry is right, Miss Vinton," assented Chester, stiffly. "The storm is risin' fast."

Ignoring his hand held out to help her the girl stepped lightfoot. Halting in the radiance of the lamps, she removed her veil and put back the errant wisps of hair which had strayed across her face of rose and ivory.

"Very well," she said. "I am ready." As she spoke white teeth, strong and even, gleamed behind the scarlet of her lips. Chester, a great longing in his heart, moved impulsively toward her. Her impulsive gaze ignored the existence of the eager man, who, drawing in his breath sharply, led the way toward the gate.

From under his tangled thatch of red hair Terence, on his knees and hard at work, leered whimsically at them.

"Fin' there was a quarrellin'," he chuckled, "now they baint spakin'; nix they're likely to be kissin'!" "We'll wait for you at the house, Terry," called Chester. "The devil!" he muttered, as his astonished eyes rested on the familiar gateway. He hesitated, then, shrugging his shoulders, accompanied Margaret between the massive posts.

They found themselves walking through the velvet darkness of a shadowed lane, into whose seclusion penetrated no sounds save the far-off grumbling of the thunder and the faint rustlings and scurries of small wild creatures in the bordering growth. But he had ears only for the soft swish of Margaret's garments as she moved swiftly forward.

"She is keeping on the other side of the road," he said to himself bitterly; "as far away from me as she can get. And here we are, footin' it to Rosina Brent's house, and I darnt say a word. If I told her where I are bound she would use me to take shelter there. Well, at any rate, we won't meet the woman she detests. Rosina moved, bag and baggage to her city house to-day and we met her car on the way."

Chester's uncomfortable ruminations were broken in upon by the hum behind them of a rapidly approaching automobile.

"Terry has been wonderfully quick," he said. Even as he spoke a roaring black bulk, lightless, leaped out of the murk and tore past them. Just in time he



"With a Grateful Look Chester Drew Her Closer."

seized the girl and drew her out of peril. For a moment she clung to him trembling. Then, remembering, she moved away.

"Outrageous carelessness, running dark," protested the crestfallen man, much cast down by her withdrawal. "When we get to the house I shall give them a piece of my mind." She made no answer.

They were pursuing their way in silence when out of the black pall overhead leaped a zigzag bolt and stabbed the earth. By its intense glare they saw, across a stretch of lawn, a spacious country house.

"We must hurry!" urged Chester, as the crashing of the thunder ceased. Side by side they sped along the drive, dodged around an automobile blocking the way, and halted, breathless, on the broad piazza.

"We're just in time," said Chester Raymond. "The house seems closed, but there is the car of those careless people who nearly ran us down. They must be inside. Hello! The door is open." He peered into the dark hall. From the dining room (more than one jolly hour had he passed there) came gleams of light and the sound of voices.

"I'll ring," he added, and was fumbling for the button when Margaret clutched his arm.

"You mustn't," she whispered. "Those are horrid men inside. Hear what they are saying!"

Holding his breath he listened.

"Aw! Yeh wouldn't be in it without me," a nasal voice was droning. "How about me coakin' that fool caretaker into Sweeney's saloon? Cursed sight better 'dopin' is 'bein' n' black jackin' 'm like you was goin' to. What a snap! All the silver packed in 'ampers ready to go-morrer mornin'. But it's goin' to-night, elgh, Lumpy. Your gal Mame's a 'ummer puttin' us on

ter the best lay we've struck sense we took to night hauymobilin'."

There was a hoarse chuckle in reply.

"An' all the booze throwed in. 'Ave some more, Slim."

"We ougheht let booze alone 'till we git to New York," protested Slim. "We aint none too much time."

"The shanty's ours till daylight," was the surly response. "I'm goin' to 'ave more, and lots of it. Go to 'ell!" Then the crash and tinkle of glass came to their ears as a bottle was decapitated.

"Let us go!" gasped Margaret, and turned to flee. A blinding flash lit up the interior of the house. It was followed by a reverberating peal of thunder and the multitudinous voices of a furious wind which drove the rain in level sheets against the house.

"No!" whispered Chester, holding her fast. "You mustn't go out into that. We can hide on the upper floors until the storm passes. It won't be long. Then we can slip away and give an alarm. The brutes will be drinking for an hour yet."

With a shudder she yielded and, together, they tip-toed across the hall and up the stair. At its head, by the glare of the lightning, they made out an open space, with chairs, a sofa and a cabinet loaded with bric-a-brac.

"Sit here while I look about," he said. Hurriedly he tried door after door, including one which shut off the upper floor. All locked! With a groan he called to mind the revolver in his car. Weaponless, he stood by Margaret and waited.

The storm lulled and, with the dying down of its clamor, once more the voices in the dining room reached them.

"Let that stuff be, curse yeh!" snarled the fatate Slim. "Not 'nother drop till the hauyt's loaded! We gotten git busy."

There were inarticulate bickerings and protests. Then two men slouched into the hall carrying electric torches. Chester noted that one was a lank, shifty scoundrel, the other a black-bearded, sawed-off giant who moved about with uncertain footing, picking up ornaments that struck his fancy and dropping them into cavernous pockets.

"What's the use wasin' time on chicken feed?" he demanded irritably. "Mame said they was good stuff in the store rooms." Flashing his torch up the stairs by chance its light fell upon the white face of Margaret, who, cowering behind the railing, was looking downward in wide-eyed terror.

"A go!" bawled Lumpy. "Come on, Slim!"

Preceded by his swifter footed pal he lurched up the stairs. They were half way to the top when Chester, who had grabbed a statuette from the cabinet, rose and threw it with a college pitcher's accuracy. It struck Slim full in the chest. He grunted, coughed, doubled up and rolled to the foot. Then, his face distorted with rage, he drew a revolver and opened fire as he rushed up the stairs.

A Dresden china vase checked him in midcareer, while the oncoming Lumpy, roaring like a bull, collided with a pot-bellied Chinese deity which sent him downward.

"Keep back, Margaret!" called Chester, "though they can't see us in the dark and have too much fizz about to hit anything." "I'll be a son of a gun," he added, as his exploring fingers, rummaging in the cabinet, came in contact with a crystal ball. "This feels natural." With a professional twirl he shot it at Slim. It caught him on the elbow and, with a yell, he dropped his pistol, lost his balance and fell backward.

High and clear Margaret's voice rang out "Central!" while the bell jangled again and again.

"Central! There are burglars in this house. Call up the police station! Hurry! Hurry! Have you got it? Captain! Burglars have broken in. We are fighting them from the second floor—they are trying to kill us! Have you an automobile? That's good. Here in five minutes? You will be in time."

"That's great," called Chester, who was piling chairs in an entanglement at the stairhead. He watched Slim jerk the dazed Lumpy to his feet.

"Give up, yeh fool!" shrieked the demoralized man, "the gals run up the cops. If we don't mosey out of this we'll be nabbed. We'll take the silver what's picked up and git." There were grumblings and thumpings. From the citadel of chairs Chester saw the hampers carried forth. He heard the sound of cranking up and a rapidly diminishing hum as the pirate car fled away.

Pressing a button Chester flooded the hall with light, revealing Margaret, hand on heart, lips parted, listening intently.

"Great work!" he cried exultantly. "Your telephone did the trick. The police may head them off in the lane."

"No," she said, shaking her head. "The telephone is disconnected. I didn't get any answer. I made it up about the police."

"You wonderful girl!" he exclaimed, trying to take her in his arms.

"You mustn't," she said reproachfully. "I cannot permit it. We are no longer engaged."

The light of battle and of victory died out of Chester's eyes.

"After all we've been through together are you going to treat me this way?" he demanded. Silent, she nodded stubbornly. He pondered the unthinkable situation, then, staggering to the railing he clutched it.

"I didn't know I was hit," he muttered feebly and sank to the floor.

"Chester! Chester! My darling!" she cried despairingly, throwing herself down beside him.

Soaked to the skin, but humming a rollicking air, Terence O'Day, Chester Raymond's chauffeur, was guiding a runabout along the lane toward "Brentledge" when he heard the whine of an approaching motor, and around the curve into the shine of his lamps raced a big, black automobile. Crouching on the front seat were two men. They drove the car straight at him.

Honking frantic warnings, Terry tried to get out of their way by forcing his own machine into the shrubbery at the side of the roadway. He saw a flash, heard a report, and felt the sting as a bullet scored

"What did yeh expect?" was the sullen response. "Aint yeh a cop?"

"I'll cop ye!" retorted the truculent Terry. With scant consideration for Slim's yelping protests he twisted a length of wire around his legs and arms. Then he smashed the comatose Lumpy. His job completed, Terry looked down derisively upon his trussed up prisoner.

"You fellers is riddid money to me," he jeered, "an' I'm goin' to cash ye in at the police officia."

He inspected their car, to find it little the worse for its acrobatics. Bringing the machines in tandem, he fastened them together with wire and unceremoniously deposited the burglars in their own. Then he carefully gathered up the scattered silver, after which, with jubilant honks, he guided his dual charge toward the mansion, announcing his arrival by a prolonged series of toots.

"If itaint Mrs. Brent's!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "I was too busy to be noticin'." He sprang up the steps and entered the open door. All was in darkness save for a light streaming down a stairway littered with fragments of china and battered ornaments. Up there some one was sobbing pitifully.

"If they's done thim dirt," he muttered, shaking a vengeance fist in the direction of the black car, "they'll wish the foul fiend had thim instid of Terence O'Day."

In three bounds he reached the stairhead and displaced the barricade of chairs. Before his horrified eyes, prone on the floor, his head in Margaret's lap, his master lay. She was kissing him again and again.

"An' is he kilt, Miss Margaret?" cried Terence. She looked at him with streaming eyes.

"Oh! Terry, Terry!" she moaned, "those dreadful men have murdered my darling boy."



"The oncoming Lumpy, roaring like a bull, collided with a pot-bellied Chinese deity, which sent him downward."

His cheek. The oncoming car swerved to pass him, skidded on the wet roadway and sidewiped a tree. Halted by the collision, it kicked up behind and tossed passengers and freight through rainbow trajectories. The occupants thudded heavily on the macadam and lay still; the hampers, bursting like exploding rockets as they fell, radiated showers of silver plate.

Rid of its load, the aggressive mechanism settled back on its four wheels and charged headlong into a wall, where gears entwined by the shock, it continued to chug-chug viciously.

The astounded Terry huddled maneuvered his car until its lamps lit up the scene. One of the summarily ejected was bellowing with pain as he tried to straighten a twisted leg. The other made no sign. Scattered broadcast around the precious couple, like a silver constellation, gleamed Mrs. Brent's spoons and salvers, teapots and tureens.

"Motor burglars, or I'm a Dutchman!" cried Terry. "I've heard they was around. An' there's a big reward for them devils an'." he chuckled, "Terence O'Day is the byo to be scoopin' it. If I had a bit of a rope now. A piece of that fence we'll do." With nippers from his tool box he cut several lengths. As he approached the recumbent figures Slim greeted him with a paroxysm of helpless profanity.

"Yeh hoodlum!" shouted Terry. "Whot for did ye shoot at an honest man?"

Chester, opening his eyes, smiled beatifically up at her.

"Not quite," he murmured, "I've been feeling all right for some time, but couldn't find it in my heart to interrupt."

Hastily shoving his head from her lap she scrambled to her feet and looked down on him in scartlet indignation.

"There isn't any blood," she said. "Aren't you wounded?" was her stern question.

"No," he answered with a sheepish look. She stamped her foot.

"I was so wretched—and you were making believe! And Terry saw me kissin' you!" Her eyes were blazing.

"I was looking the other way, Miss," Terry said.

Chester got up, but did not dare to meet her accusatory gaze.

"Glad you're here, Terry," he said. "If you had come a little sooner you could have had a hand in a mighty pretty scrimmage. We found burglars here and had a fight with them. Did you meet a couple of fellows in a car without lights?"

"I did that," was the grim answer. "They're at the dure. Don't be a worryin'," he added, noting alarm in his employer's countenance.

Then, in glowing language, he told the story of his battle. Pointing to the wound in his cheek, he described how, at the risk of his life, with the assistance of the black car, he had possessed himself of two burglars and Mrs. Brent's silver plate.

The story told and commented on, Chester, holding her close, was conducting Margaret toward the stairs when she halted to examine a portrait on the wall.

Out of its flamboyant frame, smiling roundly at them that alluring lady Rosina Brent. Margaret fixed searching eyes on her embarrassed lover.

"I say," he stammered, "I didn't dare tell you whose house it is—afraid you'd stay out in the storm. I'll swear never to!"

A white hand closed his mouth.

"It was silly of me to be jealous of her," was her languid comment. "How she simpers!" With a grateful look Chester drew her closer, while from the shelter of his encircling embrace she continued to examine the picture.

"It is well painted," she murmured thoughtfully.

"but not as well as she is."



"It Kicked Up Behind and Tossed Passengers and Freight Through Rainbow Trajectories."

