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The Architect-Burglar,

By the HON. MRS. ARTHUR HENNIKER.

(Author of "In Scarlet and Grey," "Outlines," "Sowing the Seed," Etc.).

No one who had happened to observe the figure of Mr Bromley Brown wandering round his garden on a certain mild April morning would have imagined him to be suffering from an acute sense of regret for wasted opportunities.

From the top of his bald head to the toes of his shiny boots he might have stood for a model of middle-class prosperity. His grey suit, if it accentuated the round proportions of his figure, was of fashionable cut, and he held a panama hat of finest straw in the square band on which a diamond glittered in the spring sunshine. Behind the terrace, over which figures of impossible animals in stone kept watch at each corner, stood his new and elaborately furnished Bungalow, aggressive and much decorated. Mr Bromley Brown's room in the Tower overlooked a stretch of pine woods—a small lake which shone with steely brightness under a fringe of larches, and a far-away range of rising ground. He did not often glance at the view, but it pleased him to know that it was undeniably finer than even that commanded from the windows of his neighbour, General Compton, whose family had owned acres of surrounding heather and firs for generations past.

Mr Brown took one last stroll on the lawn, and as he slowly ascended the steps on to the terrace, the parlourmaid laid the newspapers on a table outside a bow window. A girl's figure leaned out, and a young voice called to him.

"Why do you look so solemn, papa dear? What a perfect day it is! Warm and sunny enough for June!"

The lines on Mr Bromley Brown's face relaxed.

"I was thinking," he said, impressively, "of how very little material comfort signifies, and how few of us are satisfied!"

"I don't in the least agree with you there, dear," said Valentine, who was eminently practical.

"I have built this bungalow," continued Mr Bromley Brown, "as a place to rest in after a life spent in the dulllest of all occupations—money-making. But I am aware that thousands of men would both have enjoyed the occupation and welcomed the peace of this healthy spot. I do neither. I was destined by nature for something widely different."

"You say that because you have done nothing lately but read those foolish novels—" here she pointed a small, scornful finger at a book lying open on the table—"since you had influenza, papa dear."

"I beg your pardon, Valentine,—I know I may not look it, but since my earliest days, as I have often told you, I have had a curious, wild craving for adventure, for some excitement outside the deadly routine of a business life. It is hard," and Mr Bromley Brown raised his voice in querulous expostulation, "that here am I, a man who has made a considerable fortune in a special cough lozenge, but who all through his boyhood has vainly wished to be a pirate, and who now—he waved his hand in the direction of the bungalow, then towards the smooth-shaven lawn, "would most gladly give up all this luxury to be a successful detective."

Valentine laughed, and leaned still further out of the window. She, for her part, was absolutely satisfied with the fair face worn by the world around her. She watched a fat blackbird as he shuffled along by the golden border of daffodils—she rejoiced to know that the air was musical with the voices of larks, to see that the sun glittered on the pool below General Compton's house and turned its casements into twinkling dia-

monds. A man went slowly down the green drive by the pool, his arm swaying to and fro as he sowed grass seeds. The earth seemed to sing a song of renewal and hope, of love and sunshine. How good it was only to breathe and to live! Other people might have thought that life would be none the less pleasant to Valentine, because her eyes were large and grey, and her cheeks rosy like the bloom on the boughs of a cherry tree. But she did not take much account of these advantages, nor of the fact that she was the only child of the prosperous house of Bromley Brown.

Her father took off his gold-rimmed glasses—and laid down his newspaper.

"Ha! this is most curious!" said he. "What a splendid chance if one could only light upon him—the plausible scoundrel! The shrewd young villain!"

Valentine turned her grey eyes on his shining crimson face.

"Listen to me—Val," he cried; "you remember the General told us last week that the Mummys and the Jellicoes had both had their pantry windows forced open?"

"Did he? I don't think I was listening."

"The Mummys lost a lot of plated things—I know that he keeps his silver in the bank, and lets his friends use those horrible thick spoons, and poor old Jellicoe had that hideous centre-piece, given him by the Cricket Club, taken. Now it transpires that in all probability the burglar, or the moving spirit of the gang, is a young man who has been sketching houses in the neighbourhood. He professes to be making architectural drawings, and by so doing finds out all manner of details."

"That is certainly very original."

"Original, I should think so! Infernally sharp—I call it!" Mr Bromley Brown here proceeded to read aloud an extract from the newspaper.

"The 'Architect Burglar,' for by this sobriquet this accomplished criminal is now known, has been seen, it is believed, not long ago in this neighbourhood, although probably he is now many miles away from the scene of his late exploits. He is described as a young man of gentlemanlike and military appearance, with fair hair and moustache, and wearing clothes of fashionable make."

Mr Bromley Brown was soon absorbed in meditation. He pictured himself, resolute, terrible, cunning, hounding down this distinguished criminal, bringing him to justice—afterwards in court, replying with telling sarcasm to the cross-examination of the prisoner's counsel, and, lastly, complimented by the judge on the lucid, admirable way in which he had given his evidence. Life was no longer sordid and prosaic, it was palpitating with romance. He fell asleep to the accompaniment of the lark's song, and dreamed that he was the Chief of Police in Russia. Waking up with a start, he heard the clock strike twelve.

"Gracious me!" he cried aloud. With his waking eyes he still seemed to see the female Nihilist of his vision, pointing a revolver at his head. He stretched himself and walked sadly across the lawn towards the hedge that bounded his garden. Below him was the riband of white road, pine-bordered. Mr Bromley Brown started, but much more violently this time. Then he rubbed his face and eyes with his handkerchief, and uttered a low exclamation.

A few yards away in the road he saw the figure of a young man, tall, fair, yes, and of unmistakably soldierly appearance. And he was sketching. A thrill ran down Mr Brown's spine. He might not be the Chief of the Russian Police, but was he not on the eve of a discovery, an adventure, the possible player in a

great and dramatic case? He coughed and unlocked the gate leading to the road. In one moment his mind had been made up. He would invite this young man, obviously no other than the Architect Burglar, with friendly greeting, into his house. A hurried word to the coachman would send him, on swift feet, for two of the local police. Another messenger would hasten to General Compton, the sternest of County Magistrates, and he would arrive in time to be a witness of the discomfiture of a notorious criminal, and of the ingenuity and promptitude of his old friend Brown. Meanwhile the young man had looked up smilingly. In answer to the remarks of the old gentleman by the hedge, he said that he had come a considerable distance—that—and this with a very pleasant laugh—well, yes, he was thirsty, and that there would be plenty of time to finish his sketch after luncheon, and that he thought it a most kind suggestion of his questioner to invite him to have some.

Mr Bromley Brown, whose cheek had now lost much of its usual ruddiness, walked with set lips, and a curious enigmatic expression on his face, up the stone steps on to the terrace, and the young man, smiling and unconcerned, followed him into the drawing-room. For one instant Mr Brown glanced nervously at a silver box and caudlesticks on Valentine's writing-table. Then, murmuring an excuse, he ran, panting, to the stables; in a choking voice despatched the astonished coachman for the police, and a helper, with an impressive message scribbled on a card, to General Compton. On his return he found the Architect Burglar laughing over a favourite book of Valentine's, the "Diary of a Nobody"—and they two talked, Mr Brown for his part with a curious absent-mindedness, of books and different forms of humour. The parlour maid interrupted them to say that some cold meat was ready, and the two men adjourned to the dining-room. The guest seemed duly grateful for a whisky and soda.

"That's a beautiful old cup," he remarked, pointing to a piece of silver of Queen Anne date in the middle of the table.

Mr Bromley Brown's expression of mingled triumph and sarcasm passed unnoticed by the cheerful young visitor, who talked for some time with intelligence and knowledge on the subject of old plate. Mr Brown was becoming so

agitated that he began to walk up and down the room.

"And these are lovely spoons," observed the Architect Burglar, with appalling coolness. The clock struck one—and he rose quickly to his feet.

"Thank you a thousand times for your hospitality," he said pleasantly. "I am afraid I must be off. You see, I am sketching for duty, not pleasure."

Mr Brown gazed at him aghast, but not without admiration. He felt that this must indeed be one of the most remarkable criminals now at large.

"Don't hurry—pray," said he, nervously. "Have a glass of Green Chartreuse."

"You are too kind," said his guest.

There was a sound of steps at the door, and a voice outside, which sounded like a word of command, said:

"Where is the man?"

The door was flung open, and a tall, soldierly figure stepped quickly into the dining-room.

"Well, Brown, what's all this about?"

General Compton, young and alert for his years, stared at his friend with a pair of very keen eyes under white eyebrows. "You told me it was some very urgent business," continued the General. Then his eyes fell on the young man by the further window.

"Bless my soul, Esteourt, I didn't see it was you in the corner!"

"Yes, and how are you, General?" said the young man, advancing with a cordial smile.

Mr Bromley Brown felt a sudden cold perspiration on his forehead. He was entirely unable to utter a word.

"Mr.—Mr.," said the young man—"was so kind as to ask me to have a whisky and sofa. It is so wonderfully hot for April, and I've been out doing this blessed topography for the last four hours."

"Ah! then you don't know each other?" said the General. "Brown, this is Lord Esteourt, son of my old friend whom I've often talked about, you know. He is working like a nigger at the College," and the speaker pointed towards a distant view of a large white building miles away beyond the grove of pines. "Esteourt, this is Mr. Bromley Brown, one of my best neighbours."

Mr. Brown felt as if someone had

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Mr. H. Feder, of Prospect, South Australia, sends us his photograph and says:

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