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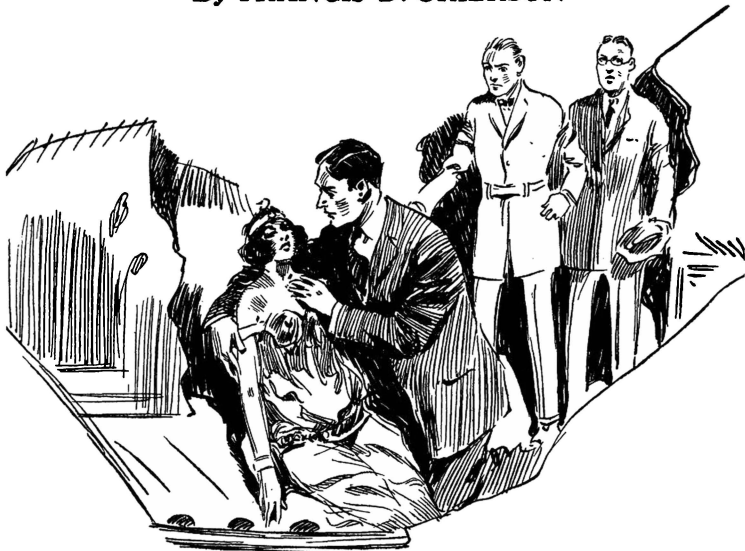
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# The Case of the Golden Lily

By FRANCIS D. GRIERSON



**P**AUL," said Lord Oakby deliberately, "I really believe I am the happiest fellow alive!"

Paul Fry smiled.

"That is a very comfortable frame of mind," he answered, in his quiet way.

"Confound you!" cried Oakby, laughing. "You're a jolly old cynic at forty—is it forty, by the way? I never know whether you're thirty or fifty, Paul. I don't believe you've ever been in love."

Cracking a walnut as he spoke, he did not observe the sudden cloud that darkened the pleasant face opposite him. It vanished as quickly as it had come, and Paul spoke cheerfully:

"Well, well," he said, "I am not too cynical to enjoy your happiness, my dear fellow; and I do not wonder at it. You are young, fit and engaged to be married to a very charming girl. Here's to her!"

He sipped his port, and his friend drained his glass.

"By Jove, that's a stunning port!" cried Oakby. "It's—it's worthy of her," he added.

"It has been paid many compliments," Paul answered, "but that is the greatest of them all. But come," he added, "it's time we were going. The rest of the show is nothing to you, but I confess I rather like the Nadia's dancing—though of course she's not to be compared to Carol."

"Of course not," replied Lord Oakby naively, and again Paul chuckled as he rang for the car.

As they drove to the theater Mr. Paul Fry, that singular mixture of cynicism and good nature, reflected with satisfaction on the part he had played in Oakby's romance. Millionaire and amateur criminologist, Paul was a mystery; even the name by which he was so well known

in half a dozen countries was an obvious pseudonym.

As Oakby's father, the Earl of Glenash, once said of him: "He goes everywhere and knows everybody, but nobody knows him"; nevertheless, the noble Earl was quite content to accept this state of affairs, for—like many others—he had his private reasons for entertaining for Paul a regard which was not free from gratitude.

When young Lord Oakby, the Earl's heir, cast his title at the pretty feet of Miss Carol Spring, the dancer who was filling the Quality Theater night after night, the old nobleman was at first furious, but Paul, like a god out of the car, appeared in his unexpected way and applied balm to the Earl's wound. Carol Spring, it appeared, was in no way unworthy of the coronet proposed for her. Her father, a gallant officer who had served with distinction in the Great War,

had at last succumbed to the after-effects of a severe wound, leaving his motherless daughter barely enough means to live on. Paul, who had known Major Spring in earlier days, had heard of his condition only a few days before his death, but he had been in time to relieve the dying man's mind of anxiety regarding his daughter.

Carol at nineteen was the incarnate fragrance of a rose in June. Since her father died, two years before, she had lived in the care of the elderly lady who acted as Paul's housekeeper in London. Believing that the best cure for the girl's terrible loneliness was occupation, Paul sought to give her an interest in life.

She had always, he found, loved music, and her voice, though not powerful, was pleasing. At her request, Paul enabled her to enter school where would-be actresses learned the elements of their art, and there the directress, a shrewd woman, discovered where Carol's real talent lay.

"Miss Spring," she wrote to Paul, "might make a passable actress. She has a certain charm, a nice voice and a good figure. But I feel bound, against my own interests, to tell you that she is wasting her time here. Take her to a good professor of dancing; don't let him—if I may advise—try to turn her into a posture-maker; she is not a ballet-dancer, and never will be. But let him teach her just enough technique to frame the picture of her genius. She dances because to dance expresses the sunshine of her soul. You will think me a sentimental old fool to write like this. . ."

But Paul did not think so; nor did the gray-haired Italian to whom he took Carol.

Under her master's skillful guidance, Carol was spared the long hours of painful posturing which make the great ballerina, but she retained and developed her natural poetry of movement, and one day the Signor came to Paul and told him that his pupil was ready to be shown to the world.

Vivian Dale, the owner and manager of the Quality Theater, was a friend of Paul. Skeptically—for he had so frequently heard young prodigies hurled at his head, and had so often found them, as he said, to possess feet, not of clay, but apparently of lead—he came to the great bare room where the Signor, the girl and Paul awaited him.

Without preamble, the old maestro took up his violin and played a simple, haunting air, and Carol began to dance—nervously at first, but as the rhythm gripped her she forgot everything but the music, and danced, as she always did,

"from the soul of her," in the Signor's phrase.

Vivian Dale watched her in silence until the last note had died away. Then he rose and took both the girl's hands in his.

"Miss Spring," he said, "it is not my way to pay compliments. I believe you have a great future before you. If you like, I will put you on at my theater at once."

Amazed and half frightened at this sudden realization of her ambitions, Carol blushed and murmured some confused words.

"This is very kind, Dale," said Paul, coming to her aid, but the other interrupted him.

"By no means," he said. "For your sake, my dear Paul, I was willing to come and see Miss Spring dance, but even for your sake I could not imperil the reputation that I think I may say I have built up for the Quality Theater. But, if I am any judge, Miss Spring is going to justify my faith in her. If you will both come round to my office tomorrow, I will have a contract prepared, and we can discuss the details of an idea that I think should be effective."

THE Quality Theater had justly won its place in the public estimation as a theater that put quality before quantity, and Vivian Dale had a remarkable power of combining the highest artistry with popularity. His great spectacles were mounted magnificently, and his present play, "Love o' the Ages," had been running for over a year. In it there appeared Mademoiselle Nadia Raszkolnikovna, a beautiful Russian, whose "Storm" dance had set London talking. Dale, with characteristic audacity, decided to introduce a striking contrast; Carol, he resolved, should appear immediately after the passionate Russian in a "Sunshine" dance in which he believed that her fresh sweetness and artless gaiety would, in theatrical phrase, bring down the house.

The great posters bearing in huge letters the single word

#### NADIA

were alternated with others on which were printed

#### CAROL

and artistic half-hints to the Press piqued public curiosity.

The stage effects were cleverly planned. In a charming woodland scene Carol appeared, clad in a simple white robe, and danced in a flood of warmly-tinged light. At the end of her dance she took from an attendant concealed at the wings a great golden lily, in the cen-

ter of which was fixed an electric globe of delicate rose-pink shade. Flitting to the front of the stage, she slowly raised the lily to her face, pressed a spring, and the warm glow suffused her cheeks and neck with the effect of a charming blush.

On the night of Carol's first appearance Paul Pry sat in his box, concealing under his habitual sun froid a nervousness almost as great as that of his young ward in her dressing-room behind the scenes. Dale looked in for a minute and clapped him on the shoulder.

"She'll be great. Paul; you'll see," was all he said, and Paul heaved a sigh of relief, for Dale was rarely enthusiastic.

Young Oakby, whom Paul had brought along with him, for he liked the boy's hearty cheeriness, laughed.

"Buck up, Paul," he said. "I'm sure Miss Spring will be top-hole. I'm quite anxious to see her, you know, and I'm prepared to shout myself hoarse to help the applause."

Paul smiled, and turned to watch the Nadia as she began her dance. Tall, with rounded limbs and the magnificent bosom of a fully matured woman, she moved with the assurance of perfect training. She was wrapped in a red cloak, but as the music grew louder and louder, and great crashes of simulated thunder were heard, she cast the garment from her, and stood forth in a bronze sheathing which accentuated the beauties of her splendid body.

The dance ended in a gesture of passionate abandon, and she was recalled again and again to bow her acknowledgments of tremendous applause.

The curtain descended, to rise again in a few moments on the woodland glade into which wandered, after a pause, a slim figure in white. For a moment she stood, a hand at her breast, and looked vaguely into the great darkened auditorium in which she could distinguish nothing. Something in her wistful look set a woman sobbing, and in a moment an encouraging round of applause broke out. Dimly understanding that they were bidding her take courage, she smiled, and then the music recalled her to herself and she began to dance—slowly at first, but presently with the joyous spontaneity of youth.

Young Oakby, who had started when the first appeared, locked his hands together and followed her with his eyes as she flitted about the great stage with the graceful movements of a fawn. When, taking the golden lily, she lifted it to her lips and stood motionless before her judges, he sprang to his feet and cheered with an utter forgetfulness that would have been conspicuous had it not been shared by everybody in the theater.

Dale had been right.

Carol received such an ovation as comes to few, and next morning she awoke to find herself famous.

When the curtain fell for the last time Lord Oakby turned to Paul and said simply:

"Paul, I want to meet that girl."

Paul looked thoughtfully at him, noting with approval the steady eyes and firm mouth.

"You shall," he said.

In three months they were engaged to be married, for the Earl, finding that the "dancing girl" was the daughter of a gentleman and the ward of a man for whom he had a profound respect, consented to see her. After the interview, the old man became, as Paul said, almost as eager for the marriage as his son.

REMEMBERING these things, Paul smiled happily to himself as he and Oakby drove to the theater to see Carol give her last performance. On the morrow she bade adieu to the stage, to become the Viscountess Oakby.

The theater was crowded to its utmost capacity when they entered their box, and Lord Oakby sat back to endure the boredom of waiting until Carol should appear. But Paul leaned forward to watch the beautiful Russian as she swayed voluptuously in time to the music of her dance. He knew the type—imperious, passionate, quick to love and to hate. A dozen times he had seen such women playing sinister parts in dramas of love and crime. He watched her with the same mixture of admiration and repulsion as he would have felt at the sight of a magnificent tigress.

At last the curtain fell, and Oakby's eyes sparkled as the conductor signaled to his orchestra. The great curtain rose again, and a storm of plaudits greeted Carol's appearance.

Never had she danced so well; she was a butterfly, fluttering from blossom to blossom, a fairy, treading a magic measure on the enchanted square.

At last the dance drew to its close. Snatching the golden lily from the attendant's hands, she advanced to the footlights. A hundred times before she had raised the lily to her lips with the same gesture, but tonight, turning toward the box in which, as the great audience knew, there sat the man she loved, she held the lily to him with outstretched hands, in a shy yet proud admission of her surrender.

In instant sympathy with the girl's movement, a burst of cheering broke out—only to be strangled at its birth. For as she pressed the spring which illuminated the lily, a blinding flash leaped

from it, and the globe was shattered into a thousand fragments.

For a moment Carol stood holding the stem of the golden lily; then, with a little cry, she fell, a crumpled, pitiful wisp of white on the green carpet.

Quickly as Lord Oakby sprang to the door of the box, Paul was before him, and the two men raced up the corridor, through the entrance to the wings and on to the stage, where Vivian Dale, Crawdell, the stage manager, Nadia and a dozen others were gathered about the prostrate girl.

Pushing quickly through the group, Lord Oakby raised Carol in his strong arms, and carried her to her dressing-room, followed by Paul and Dale. In a moment they were joined by Doctor Saunders, the doctor retained by the management, who had fortunately been one of those who had come to see Carol's final stage triumph.

The others stood in silent suspense as the medical man made his examination. At last he turned to them.

"Ye'll not need to be alarmed," he said, in his dry, Scotch manner. "Tis a shock the girl's suffering from, chiefly. 'Tis a mercy yu thing wasna nearer to her face . . ."

It might have been an accident that his eyes rested on Paul as he spoke. The latter, whispering a few words to Dale, left the room hurriedly, and the others watched the doctor as he applied restoratives.

In a few minutes Carol stirred and opened her eyes. Dr. Saunders, smiling quizzically, motioned to Oakby, who sprang forward and knelt beside the couch, pillowing the girl's head on his arm.

"Arthur!" she murmured, happily, and the doctor and Vivian Dale found important business to discuss in another corner of the room.

Barely a quarter of an hour had passed when Paul returned, to find his ward almost herself again, and coloring with pleasure at hearing that the great audience had refused to leave the theater until they had heard from Dale's lips that their idol had suffered no serious injury.

"I think," said Paul, significantly, "that Doctor Saunders will forgive my posching on his preserves if I suggest that Carol would be none the worse for a rest. Meanwhile, Dale and I have a little matter to attend to. Perhaps you will be good enough to join us in Dale's office, Doctor!"

Leaving Carol, still too shaken to pay much attention to what was going on, though little the worse for her experience, in the charge of her dresser and

her fiance, Paul led the way to the comfortable room in which Dale transacted the business of the theater.Awaiting them they found Mademoiselle Nadia and Gilbert Crawdell. The actress and the stage manager were chatting easily together, but the shrewd Scottish doctor fancied that he perceived a certain anxiety beneath their light manner:

Paul, entering last, very composedly locked the door and handed the key to Vivian Dale, who took it and placed it on the writing table at which he seated himself.

"You weesh to see me, M'siu Dale!" asked Nadia, haughtily, who had watched these proceedings with scornful eyes.

"I did," replied Dale briefly. "Be good enough to sit down. Now, Mr. Pry . . ."

He paused expectantly.

Paul, whose pleasant face had grown very stern, nodded.

"I am obliged to you," he said, "for acting so promptly on my hint. I find that I was justified in my suspicions, and I think you will be surprised at what I have to tell you."

"*Je suis fatiguée*," protested Nadia, yawning. "If Mr. Pry like to tell a story I beg to be excused—"

"Sit down!" said Paul sharply.

He did not raise his voice, but there was something in his cold, stern tone that silenced the woman, who paled beneath her rouge as she sank into her chair.

CRAWDELL, who had not spoken nor moved, took out his handkerchief and wiped his damp hands.

"It is not often," Paul resumed, "that one is able so quickly to solve what is undoubtedly an unusual problem; I have, however, been fortunate, and I hope that my explanation need occupy little more time than my investigations.

"I should first explain that I was not unaware that Mademoiselle Nadia was jealous of Carol. That, perhaps, was to be expected. Women like Mademoiselle do not lightly see their own fame eclipsed by that of another—however innocently. But I confess that I was not prepared for the ingenuity with which she attempted to revenge herself. With true feminine subtlety, she waited for the evening of her rival's final triumph, and hoped to deal her a worse blow than death.

"A tool was ready to her hand. Crawdell, as I had already observed, was passionately in love with her—so passionately that when she offered herself to him as the price of his help, he forgot his manhood, his honor, and helped her in one of the cruellest schemes I have ever heard of.

(Continued on page 90)

## THE CASE OF THE GOLDEN LILY

(Continued from page 62)

"Crawdell, as you, Dale, know, is an excellent stage manager. He believes in seeing to every detail himself, consequently the stage hands were not at all surprised when he insisted on supervising the arrangements for lighting the golden lily which was so effectively used by Carol at the conclusion of her dance. You may remember that some weeks ago the light in the lily nearly failed to act.

"Some defect was discovered just in time by Crawdell himself, and after that he got the electrician to teach him enough to allow him to look after the thing himself in future. Whether he himself contrived the original defect, or whether it suggested the eventual plot to Mademoiselle Nadia is immaterial. They evolved a plan as novel as it was fiendish. As you know, the current supplying the globe in the lily was conveyed by means of thin wires, invisible to the audience, from an electrical supply behind the scenes. For convenience, the ends of the wires terminated in a small plug which was fitted to a wire taken to a point not far from the stage.

"It was an obscure corner, where there was just light enough when the lights were down for a person to move without falling. Crawdell, as I have discovered, came to the theater early this morning, and busied himself with the golden lily and the arrangements for lighting it. This occasioned no surprise, as he would naturally be anxious that nothing should go wrong on this night of all nights, and the staff were accustomed to what they described as his fussy ways.

"As a matter of fact, Crawdell, who had learned more about electricity than his teacher supposed, had fitted a wire to the main cable which conveys the enormously powerful current used for the great lights of the auditorium. You do not need to be electricians to understand that when this powerful current was passed into the globe in the lily, the globe could not stand it, and was instantly shattered. Nadia and Crawdell had observed that Carol always raised the lily to her face, and they naturally expected that the explosion would blind her—blind her at the moment of her triumph and on the eve of her wedding—"

Dale's fist crashing down on his table cut him short.

"What a hellish plot!" he cried.

Nadia and Crawdell had sprung to their feet, but Paul's hand came quickly from his pocket, holding an automatic pistol.

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## THE CASE OF THE GOLDEN LILY

*(Continued from page 90)*

"Stay where you are," he commanded, "or I will shoot you with as little compunction as I would a pair of snakes! Dale," he went on, coolly, "the telephone is by your hand; if you will be good enough to ring up Scotland Yard and mention my name to Colonel Fairbody, the Assistant Commissioner, I have no doubt that he will send somebody round to take charge of these people."

Only Mademoiselle Nadia's quick breathing broke the silence until Dale's voice, speaking into the instrument, rang out sharply:

"Get me Scotland Yard, please—quickly."

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*In the November WEIRD TALES you will find another story by Francis D. Grierson, called "The Iron Room"—an unusual story.*