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WHO Played

The audience rose en masse to cheer him—but not one among them guessed the staggering truth!



Standing's features were drawn and ugly, his eyes burning with malignant hate

ALL that remains of the old Theater Royal, which veteran playgoers will recall was located just east of Madison Square, is about to pass out of existence. At the time it was erected, nearly two generations ago, it was the most beautiful playhouse in America and for a few years enjoyed exceptional financial success, being patronized principally by the socially prominent in New York. However, when the business center of the city moved northward from the Square, the Royal lost its vogue and, after a period of severe reverses, was converted into a warehouse. Recently, the antiquated structure was sold to a syndicate which will tear it down and erect an office building on the site.

AS I read the foregoing in my morning paper, I was plunged into a long period of reflection upon the past of this ancient theater—with which, in its heyday, I was prominently identified—and upon one incident in particular which has always kept the old Royal fresh in my memory.

And as a result of my reflections I have decided finally to break a silence of forty years and tell the story of this happening, the most amazing which ever took place within the walls of that world-famous playhouse.

In beginning, I must turn back the pages of time forty five years. The *Theater Royal* was then nearing completion; its owners had decided to devote it to the revival of the older and more familiar plays—particularly those of Shakespeare—and through their London attorneys they had closed a long-term contract with Wilbert Lawrence, the foremost English producer. He was to have complete charge of all productions and was to have a free hand in selecting his company.

At the time Lawrence agreed to go to America, he had just completed a series of

The FOURTH ACT?



By
GEORGE
MALCOLM

As told to
Edwin A. Goewey

*Rodney bowed,
seeming unaware
of us, while the
applause swelled
to a roar*

Shakespearian revivals in London with John Fare—whom I always considered the greatest tragedian of his time—playing the leading heavy rôles. I also was in the company, serving as assistant stage director to Lawrence and doing character parts, as also was Fare's nineteen-year-old son, Rodney, an unusually clever youngster. We three were among the few whom Lawrence decided to take with him in his new American venture.

HERE I must pause a moment in my tale to give an intimate picture of Fare and his son, not only because of the parts they are to play later on, but because theirs was the most beautiful relationship I have ever known. The youth's mother had passed on soon after his birth, leaving the task of rearing him to her troupier husband.

Because of his profession it was necessary for Fare to place Rodney with relatives during his earlier years. But when the lad was

five he took him with him, determined to begin coaching him at once, that he might carry on his father's tradition in the theater. And they never separated from that time on.

FARE and I had been in the same companies for years, and shared the same living quarters whenever we played in London. I was with the lad from the time his mother died, learned to love him as if he were my own son, and knew that his affection for me was second only to that he felt for his father.

I never encountered a youngster who absorbed things as he did, and at the age of seven he began his professional career. From then on, his advancement was rapid until long before he accompanied his father to New York he was looked upon as one of the best young actors in all England.

At the opening performance at the *Royal* we scored a tremendous hit and not only was

the house packed nightly thereafter with enthusiastic audiences, but Fare, Rodney and some of the other principals who enjoyed being entertained socially were welcome visitors at the homes of the theater's leading patrons and accompanied them on coaching and yachting trips and the like. My protégé was a particular favorite, especially among the younger people. Had he desired, I believe he could have married any one of several heiresses who made much of him. But he never encouraged them.

THIS pleasant and prosperous life for the Lawrence Players continued for more than a year. Then came a tragedy which, for a time, threatened to wreck our organization. John Fare, while a week-end guest on a yacht, disappeared from the vessel in the night. His hosts believed he had been taken ill and, going upon deck for more air, had tumbled overboard.

I was the first to learn of the tragedy, but in a manner which all but snapped my reason.

My amazing adventure occurred on the very night of Fare's disappearance. I had been asleep for some hours when something aroused me with a suddenness which caused me to sit up in bed, trembling and in a cold sweat. It was some seconds before my eyes became accustomed to the darkness. Then, standing near the foot of my bed, I beheld the figure of John Fare, shadowy but still sufficiently distinct for me to recognize him instantly.

For a moment I believed I was the victim of a nightmare. I rubbed my eyes and looked again. The figure was still there. But as I gazed, trying to marshal my scattered wits, it extended its arms in a helpless gesture and appeared to be coming toward me, as though floating through the air.

Then—I don't know why, for never to that time had I believed in the supernatural—the thought came to me that I was not dreaming but was looking upon the spirit of John Fare . . . that John was dead!

And the next morning, when a telegram announcing Fare's disappearance arrived, I was positive I had seen the phantom of my old friend; that he had come to me to bid me a final good-by. However, I told no one, partly from fear of ridicule and partly because I did not wish to alarm anyone, particularly Rodney, with a declaration I could not support with anything but my word.

It was a week before Fare's body was washed ashore, and in that time Rodney was almost mad with fear and anxiety, though like some of the others, he clung to the hope that his father had been picked up by some vessel.

Once he learned the inevitable truth, young Fare broke down completely and was in a sanitarium for several months before he recovered sufficiently to be about again. Then he refused to rejoin the company, insisting it would kill him to continue in the theater where he would be constantly reminded of his father. I actually believe he would have lost his reason had he remained in America and, much as I hated to part with him, I felt it was better that he return to England.

Of course the company continued at the *Royal* but, despite the fact that actor after actor was tried out in an effort to replace the elder Fare, we failed to find his equal. However, Lawrence was a master craftsman and he managed to stage such splendid performances that we did not want for paying patronage.

The man the producer finally brought to New York in the hope of obtaining another Fare was Geoffrey Standing. This I regretted. For, though I never had played with him I was familiar with his reputation. No question he was a clever and experienced performer, for he had spent most of his forty-odd years on the stage, but the stories told of him credited him with being a man of vicious passions and an ungovernable temper, when crossed.

When he finally joined the company I disliked him more than ever. For, though he did not look his years when in make-up and was really quite handsome, his features betrayed him when he forgot the set smile he usually wore.

LAURENCE first assigned him to play Macbeth. But, though there was much to commend in his performance, somehow he did not seem to entirely suit the rôle. The manager and I both agreed he would be much better in lighter characters, so we finally decided to put on "As You Like It," with Standing cast as Orlando.

When Geoffrey learned of Lawrence's plan, he made the suggestion which, in time, brought trouble, crime and tragedy to the *Royal*. It was that the producer should at any cost get Adrienne Sheldon, who was creating a sensation in London in Shakespearian rôles. Lawrence had seen Adrienne

perform shortly before coming to America. remembered her as a very beautiful and charming young woman, and when I backed Geoffrey's suggestion, cabled her an offer which was accepted.

I had never seen the girl, but I had played with her mother for some time before her death, so both Standing and I were at the pier to meet her.

She greeted him warmly and thanked him whole-heartedly for his effort in her behalf. My acquaintanceship she welcomed as that of an old friend, saying her mother had often spoken of me and that while she remained in America she would come to me for advice and guidance. I happened to glance at Standing when she made this declaration and his black look caused me both amazement and uneasiness.

ADRIENNE'S connection with the company was a success from the outset, for she was as clever as she was beautiful, and she soon became as popular with our patrons as John Fare had been. This pleased me greatly, but I was more interested in noting the close watch Standing maintained over her. In the theater he did not obtrude to the point of annoying her. But he insisted upon accompanying her to and from the playhouse and, whenever she would consent, took her to supper after the final curtain.

Of course he was unable to prevent Adrienne and me from seeing each other in private occasionally. And though, for a time, I asked no questions and she said but little about him, I judged from remarks dropped now and then that she was not at all pleased with his attempts to monopolize her time. Finally, however, his persistence annoyed her to a point where she decided to rebel. Then she sent for me and blurted the truth.

In the days when she and Standing had played together in London, he had made love to her and had frequently asked her to marry him. But she had not loved him and refused, finally joining another company to be away from him. Then Geoffrey had come to America, and from the letters he wrote to her she judged his infatuation had cooled.

"When I reached here," she said, "I was most grateful for what he had done for me and told him so. But I soon realized his true purpose. Again he resumed his love-making, has asked me more than once to marry him and becomes so angry each time I refuse that I am actually afraid of him. I am beginning to think I had better return to Eng-

land before he makes some violent trouble."

"I know he has a terrible temper," I replied, "but I cannot believe he actually would harm you——"

"Well," she said, "let me think it out for a few days more and I may hit upon some plan which will relieve the situation. You can think, too, if you will, and I won't make any drastic move without consulting you again."

I don't know what might have happened had not Fate suddenly intervened. But from the time that fickle lady decided to take part in our game, the *Royal* was the scene of one disconcerting happening after another until the tragedy which marked the climax of the maddening adventure which revolved about Adrienne and Geoffrey.

The girl made her first move to obtain more freedom the following evening when she left the theater by the front instead of the rear door, thereby avoiding Standing. When Geoffrey learned she had eluded him he came to my room, raving and declaring I was using my influence to set Adrienne against him. I told him bluntly I had done nothing of the kind and left him, still storming.

I had immediate business with Lawrence, who was waiting for me in his office. The actor who had been playing the part of Jaques had been taken very ill during the performance, and I knew the producer intended asking me to take over the rôle. This I didn't want to do, but I was saved from all argument on the matter.

WHEN I pushed open the door, I was brought up gasping. For seated near the manager was Rodney Fare. His features had matured and in his eyes there was a tragically tired look. If anything, he had grown handsomer in the two years since I had seen him. In an instant we were in each other's arms. Then he drew me into a chair and, in response to my queries, said he had been drifting about England. But he had been lonesome for us. And finally, when the passage of time had somewhat dulled the hurt of his father's death, he had decided to return to America. He concluded by stating that he had witnessed our performance from the balcony, had been particularly struck by the beauty and ability of Adrienne, and had then come to Lawrence, who had immediately engaged him to play Jacques, a part with which he was familiar.

The producer announced he would call a

rehearsal for next afternoon, and then we headed for my quarters, which I intended Rodney should share with me. On the way he talked but little and from his expression I judged he was engaged with some thought which troubled him. However, once he had been made comfortable, he took me into his confidence.

"Listen, George, and carefully, for, as in the past, I shall hold no secrets from you. I did not tell the full truth to-night concerning why I returned here."

I was seized with a sudden spasm of fear which turned me cold all over.

"I shall be brief," he said. "Tell me, do you believe the dead ever return to this earth?"

IN a flash I thought I comprehended what he was going to tell me.

"Yes," I whispered hoarsely, "I am certain I once beheld a phantom. . . ."

"I don't want to frighten you, but I must confide in someone, for my secret is one I can no longer carry alone. I returned to America because I was told to do so by my father."

My pulses began pounding so I could not speak.

"My father appeared to me three times," Rodney went on, controlling his agitation with a supreme effort, "and each time he directed that I go to New York. The first and second times I thought I had dreamed. But the last time all doubt vanished, for he appeared to me in my room in the daytime, so close I could almost reach him. His words fairly burned themselves into my brain. 'Return to America,' he said. 'Fortune and happiness await you there. And, though you may never see me again, I shall be near, always'."

It was some time before I regained a sufficient measure of calmness to discuss his revelation rationally. Then I assured him I believed his statement, urged him to forget his great sorrow and advised him to permit nothing to turn him from success. Perhaps, had I realized then all that was to follow my promptings, I would have tempered my suggestions with some words of caution.

It was at the rehearsal next day that Rodney met Adrienne and, as later events proved, they were attracted to each other at once. That night, after young Fare had won acclaim from an unusually large audience which flocked to the *Royal* because of the newspaper statements that he had rejoined the company, Adrienne praised his

success so that the entire company could hear and, to my amazement, suggested that he and I take her to supper to celebrate.

Standing was close to me when she did this and his features expressed such anger as to frighten me. I understood Adrienne's motive. She was determined to rid herself of Geoffrey's unwelcome attentions, and had taken this open stand in the hope of shaming him into a proper understanding of his position.

However, he had not given up yet. Next morning he went to her home, demanded that she marry him at once and, when she refused, threatened to kill any man who obtained her promise to become his wife. She confided this to me under promise not to tell young Fare.

But, though I held my peace, others warned Rodney to be on his guard against Standing. Finally he sought my advice. And then I, too, warned him. The youth's reply was what might have been expected. He and Adrienne loved each other and he would never permit Standing to interfere in their affairs. But he assured me he had not, as yet, asked her to marry him and would not do so until he was able to support her.

Outwardly Geoffrey appeared to accept the situation as one beyond his control. He even made a pretense of giving the youthful lovers free reign by avoiding them, except when upon the stage. But I didn't trust him and was on the alert for the first danger signals.

Then came a new twist to our affairs. Lawrence announced he would soon produce "The Merchant of Venice," with Rodney cast as Shylock, a rôle in which his father had won exceptional favor. At first young Fare wanted to decline the honor, but he finally changed his mind when I pointed out that success would enable him to marry Adrienne without much further delay. During the rehearsals he surpassed anything I ever had seen him do. Adrienne made an ideal Portia, Standing was splendid as Antonio, while I repeated what I often had done in the rôle of Gratiano.

THE night of the opening performance was a gala occasion in New York, and long before curtain time the *Royal* was packed to the doors.

All of us did our utmost to make the performance a success from the rise of the first curtain. That is, all but Standing. For, though he had played his rôle frequently in the past, his speeches lacked fire and there

was not the usual snap to his gestures.

After the first and second acts the audience was most enthusiastic. But it was after the third that they became wildly demonstrative and to cries of, "Bravo, Fare, bravo!" the young star was compelled to respond to repeated curtain calls. Standing, disobeying all the rules of the theater, left the stage after the first encore.

Following the final lowering of the curtain, the others crowded about Rodney, voicing congratulations. But he only laughed happily, left us chattering and hurried away toward his dressing room to change for the next act. When I followed a moment or two later I saw him, without his wig and beard, hurrying toward the rear of the stage. Deciding he was a bit shaken and was going out for a cigarette, I turned into my own quarters without speaking.

Shortly after, when I had changed my costume, I went to Rodney's room. He was not there and his dresser, who had been unable to locate him, was on the verge of collapse, for the star had a complete change to make. Fear seized me and I returned to the hallway to find Lawrence, Standing and the other performers waiting to escort my protégé to the stage. When I told them of his disappearance, they became excited to the point of panic and separated to continue the search begun by his dresser.

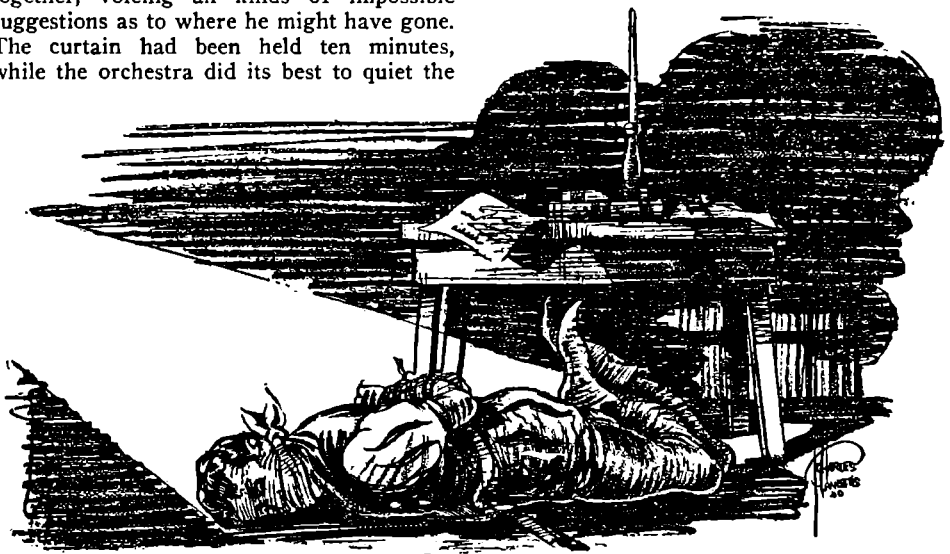
But we failed to locate him, though the watchman assured us he had not left by the stage door. Dazed and fearful we huddled together, voicing all kinds of impossible suggestions as to where he might have gone. The curtain had been held ten minutes, while the orchestra did its best to quiet the

impatience of the over-excited audience.

I don't know what would have happened had the strain been protracted another few minutes. Suddenly the shout of a stage hand caused us to turn and, coming from the rear, we saw Rodney, fully costumed. Sighs of relief went up all about me, while I wondered dazedly how he had managed to slip into his room and don his wig and beard without our seeing him.

"Let us proceed," he said in a commanding tone. Then he walked upon the stage with a majestic stride and an assurance of bearing which caused me to think of his father in his most confident mood. Lawrence immediately began herding us to our places, at the same time pleading that we fight down our nervousness. Then came the signal which silenced the orchestra and the curtain arose on the great courtroom scene.

RODNEY went ahead as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened, and as the act proceeded, I all but forgot my surroundings. Only my actor's instinct enabled me to voice my speeches at the proper times. For, despite my long experience behind the footlights, Rodney's performance thrilled and held me as though I were under a spell. I had never imagined the youth could do so well. To be sure he had shown cleverness at the rehearsals, but nothing like this. He had seen his father in the part hundreds of times, but even so it seemed incredible that he could have memorized the manner in



Lying on the floor, bound and gagged, was—Rodney!

which the elder Fare had enacted it so that he was able to duplicate, if not surpass the other's characterization!

Finally the act approached its tragic climax. Rodney no longer appeared to be acting. He was living the part. He was to the very life the baffled wretch stripped of all hope of vengeance, sniveling, groveling, moaning and shrieking at the realization he was surrounded by enemies who would extend him no mercy.

It was then that a weird thing happened. I had become so engrossed that my brain tricked me and for some minutes I actually imagined I was watching the father and not the son. But my reason quickly asserted itself. It was Rodney whom I had been watching, but such a Rodney as I never had known. If he could continue as he was doing, he would reach acting heights never achieved by his father.

I was snapped back to the business of the moment by a thunderous outburst of applause. The act was over. The curtain was descending. The great audience arose en masse, men and women beating their hands together, cheering and shouting his name. "Bravo, Fare, bravo!"

I swung to grasp my friend's hand. Others also started toward him. But not Standing. He held his position as though paralyzed beyond movement, his features drawn and ugly, his eyes burning with malignant hate. However, Rodney moved beyond our grasp and waved us back with a deprecatory gesture as the curtain arose, then bowed repeatedly to right and left while the pandemonium beyond the footlights seemed to increase in volume.

As the drop came down he smiled, stepped aside and motioned us front to take the next call, while he hastened to the wings.

The audience, however, was disappointed at not seeing him again, and his name was shouted anew. But when we looked for him he had disappeared. So Lawrence directed that the curtain remain down, believing, like myself, that Rodney had gone to his dressing room, probably on the verge of collapse from the strain of his performance.

A crash of melody from the orchestra finally stilled the uproar in the auditorium and we made way for the stage hands who were waiting impatiently to set the stage for the final act. Sensing that something was amiss, Adrienne came to my side, her eyes wide with troubled questioning.

"Everything is all right," I said, though

I was in a chill sweat of apprehension, dreading I knew not what. "Rodney's been under a fearful strain tonight and is resting in his room. We'll take him home later, just you and I. He's lucky he doesn't have to go on again."

"I will do as you wish. But—I do so want to see him now—to tell him how wonderful he was. Why I could scarcely believe he was my Rodney. If you see him first, tell him what I have said, that he has won in a single night more than most of us achieve in a lifetime——"

"I know the greatest prize he won tonight," I interrupted with a forced smile. She nodded understandingly and turned away.

I decided to use the few minutes at my disposal to see Rodney in his dressing room, for I couldn't down the feeling that he was in some kind of trouble.

I passed Standing as I crossed the stage in the rear of the back drop and was astonished at the change in his expression. He appeared suddenly to have grown very old and haggard, and in his staring, unseeing eyes and twitching lips I believed I noted agonizing fear rather than hate.

BUT all thoughts of him were almost immediately driven from my brain. For, pushing open the door of Rodney's room which stood ajar, I found it empty. Turning back to the hallway I encountered Jason, his dresser.

"You are looking for Mr. Fare?" he questioned.

"Yes. Where is he?"

"I don't know. A few minutes back he came from the stage and passed me here without a word. He seemed much disturbed and went down the stairway. I thought he was going to the rear door to smoke, but then I recalled his disappearance after the third act and hurried after him, fearing he was ill."

"And——"

"I don't know what to say, sir. Although I saw him go down the steps, the doorman did not see him. And he insists he did not leave his post for a minute. Thank God, Mr. Fare is not needed for the last act!"

At that moment the warning bell sounded. I was needed in the wings at once. "Find him and keep him here till I return," I whispered hoarsely. Then a thought that he had met with violence at Standing's hand flashed into my muddled brain to further frighten me. But, as I staggered toward

my place, I recalled that Geoffrey had remained near me until the final curtain and afterward, I believed, had remained near the stage.

This thought eased my fear for a moment. But only for a moment. The indefinable something which kept warning me that my friend had not disappeared of his own volition, that he needed my help, would not down.

SOMEHOW I managed to blunder through the last act, recalling my lines only with the utmost effort. But distrait as I was, I was able to note that Standing was even more confused.

The final curtain was hardly down when he hurried away. I tried to overtake him, calling his name. But he paid no heed, slammed his door in my face and I caught the click of the lock. With a shrug I crossed the narrow hallway and entered Rodney's room. Jason shook his head disconsolately and made a significant gesture toward my friend's street clothing which still hung upon the wall.

At that moment I heard the voice of Lawrence, Adrienne and others, obviously coming to learn why Rodney was avoiding them. And, though my nerves were at the breaking point, I determined to prevent any further excitement in the theater that night by attempting a bold stroke.

"Lock the room and admit no one until I return," I said to Jason; then I closed the door behind me and faced the others.

"Don't be alarmed," I said, speaking to all, but clasping the cold hand of Adrienne. "Rodney was completely upset by his efforts to-night and his man tells me he went home, saying he would see no one until to-morrow."

The hand I held gave a spasmodic clutch and Adrienne looked at me with eyes which expressed doubt and fear. The others voiced expressions of regret, coupled with praise for Rodney's brilliant performance. Then all separated toward their dressing rooms, except Adrienne and Lawrence.

"Let us have the truth, George," said the latter when the others were out of ear-shot. "If Rodney had failed there would be a reason for his strange conduct tonight. But he didn't fail. He made a magnificent showing, the greatest performance I have ever seen from a man playing a great rôle for the first time." His tone had become angry. "He's no woman that he has to give way to temperament. Good heavens I've been under enough strain without this. And if he

isn't able to appear to-morrow night——" He lifted his hands high in a despairing gesture.

But although I knew nothing definite to tell him, I wasn't going to confide my wild misgivings. They listened to my argument that he probably had slipped from the stage door unnoticed and taken a cab to some hotel, where he could pass the night quietly, and agreed to leave the search to me.

As I changed into my clothing, calm reason asserted itself. Beyond question, had Rodney gone into the street in costume, he would have been questioned by some policeman and word of his whereabouts would have reached us. Therefore he must still be somewhere in the theater. My final deduction was that he had become temporarily deranged and with madman-like cunning had concealed himself in some place we had overlooked.

I waited until all was quiet outside my room, then located the watchman at the stage door. Telling him I was going to make a final search for Fare, I borrowed his lantern and directed him to remain where he was in case some message came.

Deciding to begin in the flies and the upper loft where scenery was stored, I headed across the littered space in the rear of the stage toward the stairway leading above. With the lantern flashing its tiny circle of light, I had almost reached it when I was brought up short by what seemed to be a faint groan. Trembling all over, I listened. Again I caught the sound, coming from behind the pile of scenery at my elbow.

Instantly I recalled something we had all forgotten. Behind these strips of canvas was a tiny room in which bundles of manuscripts and old costumes were stored. Striving to hold in check the dread which clutched me, I stooped and pushed my way to the hidden door. It yielded to my touch and I stepped inside and swung my light. Then I almost dropped it. For lying upon the floor, gagged and bound, was Rodney. But he was alive and his eyes were open.

WHAT happened immediately thereafter I never was able to recall fully. I know I freed him and pulled him to his feet. But I refrained from questioning him, for he slumped against my shoulder and I literally had to drag him to his dressing room. Seating him upon a trunk with his back propped against the wall, I lighted the gas. Then I noted for the first time a great lump upon his head.

"In heaven's name, Rodney, what happened to you?" I gasped.

"It was Standing. He was determined to ruin me, the crafty devil, and he's done it!"

"Standing? What do you mean?"

"I was unstrung after that third act; wanted to be alone. I went into the little room to smoke. He followed me. As I lighted the gas I heard something, turned and saw him. But before I could defend myself he knocked me unconscious. When I recovered my senses; it was too late. Why didn't he adopt some other method to vent his hate, the cur! Now I am ruined."

"**N**ONSENSE," I interrupted, believing his mind was wandering. "You have suffered a severe shock, but matters would have been infinitely worse had he attacked you before the fourth act; before you scored a triumph that will——"

"Don't try to deceive me, George, I can't stand much more tonight. I know I am ruined with Lawrence, the critics—and Adrienne. What did he tell the audience when I failed to appear for the fourth act?"

I did not answer, for I believed his experience had temporarily shattered his reason and my thought was to get him to a hospital, without delay. But as I tried to pull him to his feet, he pushed my hands away, then wrung his own and repeated his query.

"Rodney, you must be calm," I said. "Your head has been injured and you have forgotten. *You* played in the fourth act!"

"Don't lie to me!" he whispered hoarsely. Then he rose to his feet, his features alight with a new understanding. "Tell me truthfully, George, who played the fourth act for me?"

"Rodney, boy, won't you understand? You played Shylock! It was after the fourth act we failed to find you."

His hands shot out and his fingers gripped me till I winced. "Look at my costume! It is the one I wore in the third act; you know that. I never changed. But everything is clear to me now. It came to me in a flash. Think, think! You remember my telling you what made me return to America. You can't you understand—don't you realize who it was played my rôle when I was lying helpless in that little room?"

I was so bewildered by the sudden change in his manner that for a moment I failed to grasp the significance of his words. But, as their meaning filtered into my muddled brain, I leaned weakly against the wall. What he had suggested to me was too fan-

tastic, too impossible for belief. And yet—hadn't the portrayal of Shylock in the fourth act made me think for a time I was looking upon the father and not the son?

I tried to speak, to tell him I was beginning to grasp the truth. But at that moment the door opened and banged shut and Standing stood before us in street clothing, a pistol in his hand, his features distorted. I started forward, but he had me covered.

"Keep out of this, Malcolm, and I won't harm you," he snarled. "It's you I'm after," and he turned toward Rodney. "I planned to ruin you tonight by keeping you from appearing in the fourth act and chance favored me when you went to the little room. But you were too clever for me. In some way you freed yourself; set the audience wild with your damnable imitation of your father. But you shan't have Adrienne, even though you became a star in a night. For I'm going to kill you—here and now."

As he voiced the final word he raised a revolver. But he never fired. Just as I set myself for a leap, hoping to deflect his aim, the figure of John Fare—as all of us had known him in the life—seemed literally to spring from the air and stood between the would-be murderer and his son.

Standing gave a low cry, his eyes going wide with deadly fear, his lips sagging. Next the pistol slipped from his fingers, he rose stiffly upon his toes, spun about, then crashed to the floor.

Instantly my gaze shifted from the crumpled heap to the place where I had seen the apparition of John Fare. It had vanished.

But Rodney held his position erect and assured, his features radiating happiness.

"Now, George, you understand who took my place?" was all he said.

"It seems incredible," I gasped, "but I can doubt no longer. Your father's spirit has watched over you as it promised—has seen you safely through your darkest hours. But for God's sake take me out of here before I go mad!"

AFTERWARD Rodney told me I fainted and that he and the watchman worked over me for a long time before I recovered sufficiently for him to take me home in a carriage. Geoffrey was dead—from heart failure it was later ascertained.

Lawrence closed the *Royal* for a week out of respect to Standing's memory. In that time Rodney and I recovered sufficiently to resume our rôles, and six months later the youthful lovers were married.