

# **THE BENEFICENT BURGLAR**

Charles Neville Buck

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## CHAPTER I

### A CALL FOR HELP

The agitated transit of Mr. Lewis Copewell through the anteroom of the Honorable Alexander Hamilton Burrow created a certain stir. With all the lawless magnificence of a comet that runs amuck through the heavens, he burst upon the somewhat promiscuous assemblage already seated there. The assemblage sat in dumb and patient expectancy. Quite obviously it was a waiting-list, already weary with enforced procrastination. Its many eyes were anxiously focussed on the door that sequestered the great man in the aloofness of his sanctum.

A young woman gazed across her typewriter at the supplicants seeking audience, with a calm hauteur which seemed to say, "Wait, varlets, wait! The great do not hurry."

They returned her gaze sullenly but in silence. None ventured to penetrate beyond her desk to the portal forbiddingly placarded, "Private." None, that is, until Mr. Copewell arrived.

"Where's Aleck?" demanded that gentleman, mopping his perspiring brow with a silk handkerchief. "I want to see him quick!"

The young woman looked up blankly. She knew that Mr. Copewell and her employer were, in their private capacities, on terms of intimacy, but duty is duty, and law is impartial. Many persons wanted to see him quick. Since the triumph of civic

reform had converted the attorney who paid her salary from a mere Aleck, who was even as other Alecks, into Alexander the Great, she felt that his friends in private life must adapt themselves to the altered condition of affairs.

Accordingly her reply came with frigid dignity. "Mr. Burrow instructed that he was not to be, on any account, interrupted."

"Huh?" Into Mr. Copewell's surprised voice crept the raucous note that the poet describes as "like the growl of the fierce watch-dog."

"Huh?"

The young woman became glacial. "Mr. Burrow can't see you."

The glance which Mr. Copewell bent on this deterring female for a moment threatened to thaw her cold reserve into hot confusion. The waiting assemblage shuffled its feet, scenting war.

At the same moment the private door swung open and Mr. Burrow himself stood on the threshold. At the sight of him several gentlemen who were patriotically willing to serve their city in the police and fire departments came respectfully to their feet. One contractor, who had for sale a new paving-block, saluted in military fashion. Mr. Lewis Copewell took a belligerent stride toward the door as though he meant to win through by force of assault.

But Mr. Burrow made violence unnecessary. His smile revealed a welcoming row of teeth, which in modern America means "dee-lighted."

“Trot right in, old chap,” he supplemented.

The young woman looked crestfallen. She felt that her chief had failed to hold up her hands in the stern requirements of discipline.

“Good morning, everybody!” rushed on Mr. Burrow, with a genial wave of his hand and a smile of benediction for the waiting minions. This second Alexander the Great knew that you can abuse a man’s patience if you are a person of importance and smile blandly enough. Some of the Cæsars could even massacre and remain popular—but they had to smile very winningly. “Terribly busy! Must make all interviews brief this morning,” went on the new dictator. “Must get over to the City Hall!” Then in view of congealing acidity on the visages of three newspaper men, he added, since no man is great enough to offend a reporter: “I’ll have a big story for you boys to-morrow. You know I’m your friend.” He swept Mr. Copewell into the private office and the door slammed on his smile.

“I haf been sedding here for an hour alretty,” confided Alderman Grotz to his next neighbor. The Alderman’s heavy lids blinked with a stolid, bovine disapproval. “Der more I vait, der more I do not see him. Id iss nod right!” Alderman Grotz was reported to carry the lager and bratwurst vote about in the pocket of his ample, plaid waistcoat. Such discrimination against him was venturesome politics.

“That guy that went in there ain’t like us,” explained Tommy Deveran, whose florid oratory had been the machine’s prized asset until the drift of political straws had guided him toward reform. “He wears silk half-hose where you an’ me wears

cotton socks. This here is a classy, high-brow administration. Myself not bein' no cotillion-leader, I'm goin' to beat it!" The Hon. Thomas rose and beat it in all the majesty of affronted dignity.

Inside, Mr. Copewell threw his hat and stick on the desk and himself into a chair. He commenced to speak and suddenly stopped. A fine flow of high-pressure language was arrested by the sight of Chief-of-Police Swager, sitting just across the room. The Chief rose and took up his gold-trimmed cap. The new administration had added to the pulchritude of its police officials by more jaunty uniforms. The Colonel felt conscious of a distinguished and military bearing.

"I'm going to shift Captain McGarvey from the Tenderloin—if you don't object," he announced.

Mr. Burrow did not object. He did not know who Captain McGarvey was, but that fact he did not mention. "What for, Chief, what for?" he inquired brightly. His air was that of a field-marshal for whom no little thing is too small to merit consideration.

"Well," thoughtfully pursued Colonel Swager, "I doubt if he's on the level, though I haven't got him dead to rights yet—can't prefer charges. McGarvey's a machine hold-over and he's likely to be a little blind in one eye where some of the thieves and yeggs that used to buy protection are concerned. 'Rat' Connors was seen last night, down at Corkhill's place. You know 'Rat' Connors?"

Mr. Burrow had not that honor. The name was not on the membership books of his clubs. "Let's see—" he repeated carefully, "Rat Connors, Rat Connors. I don't, at the moment, seem to place him."

"Second-story man, drum-snuffer, stone-pincher, porch-climber—general all-round expert," illuminatingly itemized the Chief, "variously wanted for a large assortment of felonies. McGarvey ought to have ditched him."

"Ah, yes, quite so," agreed Mr. Burrow. Mr. Copewell petulantly shifted in his chair. These matters seemed to him extremely trivial in view of his own more engrossing affairs.

"This Connors party," enlarged the Chief, halting a moment by the door and inspecting with pride the gold oak-leaves that went around his cap like a garland of greatness, "he's a solemn little runt with one front tooth broke and one finger gone off the left hand. He's got straight black hair and a face like a rat. He looks like a half-witted kid, but he's there with the goods."

Mr. Burrow nodded. "Go right after him, Chief," he authorized, "I give you *carte blanche*."

Exit the Chief, and in his wake appears at the door the accusing face of the young woman stenographer.

"Alderman Grotz insists——" she began.

"Impossible!" sighed Mr. Burrow dropping into an easy chair. "I'm rushed to death just now." He gazed off across the roofs and searched his pockets for a cigarette. "Let him wait—let 'em all wait," he murmured restfully. "That's good politics." Then,

turning to Copewell, whose frantic pacing of the floor disturbed his composure, he demanded:

“What’s your trouble?”

“Trouble!” exploded the visitor. “Trouble! Why it’s plural multiplied by many, then squared and cubed and——”

“Well, just for a starter, give us one or two and build up from that,” suggested Mr. Burrow placidly. “Another girl, I’ll bet.”

“Another girl!” snorted Mr. Copewell. “There isn’t any other girl! All the rest are counterfeits! There never was but one girl, and I’m going to lose her!” This with deep stress of tragedy. “You must help me.”

“Certainly, I’ll help you.” Mr. Burrow waved his cigarette with airy assurance. “But what’s the matter? Can’t you lose her yourself?”

On the facetious and Honorable Alexander Mr. Copewell permitted the withering blight of his scorn to beat for one awful moment in silence, then he proceeded to enlighten. “I’ve got to steal this girl, or it’s all off. You’ve got to help steal her!”

Mr. Burrow appeared shocked. “But my dear lad,” he demurred, “I’m supervising a police force and a city administration in the interests of Righteousness with a large R. I doubt if it would be just exactly appropriate for me to go into the girl-stealing business on the side.”

“All politicians steal,” dogmatized Mr. Copewell, who had failed to be properly impressed with the piety of the new administration. “It’s time you were learning your new trade.”



“If it comes to that,” explained Mr. Burrow with a smile, “I have subordinates who——”

“I tell you this is serious!” interrupted the other tempestuously. “It’s desperate!”

“I’m very —— busy,” evasively suggested the new political power.

“If you’re too —— busy to help an old friend who needs you,” stormed Mr. Copewell, “you can eternally go to ——”

“Hold on! Hold on!” placated the other before Mr. Copewell had enjoyed the opportunity of designating the locality to which Mr. Burrow had his permission to go. “I merely meant to point out that when you want something done, it is well to go to a busy man. The other kind never have time.”

## CHAPTER II

### THE PLOT OF AN ELOPEMENT

Mr. Copewell crossed and stood tensely before Mr. Burrow. When he spoke it was with the hushed voice of a man who divulges an unthinkable conspiracy:

“They are going to send her to Europe!”

“You don’t tell me?” observed Mr. Burrow pleasantly. “Well, what’s the matter with Europe?”

Mr. Copewell looked as much astonished as though he had been suddenly called on for proof that Purgatory is not pleasant in August. His voice almost broke.

“They are sending her—so that she may forget me!”

“You can send a girl to Europe,” reassured his friend, “but you can’t make her—sane.”

“They don’t have to make her sane—she is perfectly sane now!” retorted Lewis with commendable heat.

“Then why,” inquired the lawyer logically, “should it be necessary to send her to Europe?”

“It’s not necessary. It’s hideous!” Emotion strangled Mr. Copewell. “They are packing her off—because she loves *me!*”

“Oh!” Mr. Burrow’s voice was apologetic. “I thought you said she was sane.”

Mr. Copewell's reply may be omitted. In fact the Editor insists upon its being omitted. The following is an inadequate indication of its tenor: "——!——!!——!!!——!!!!——!!!!!"

"Going to send her to Europe," mused Mr. Burrow as though he had not heard. Then he inquiringly raised his brows and added, "Who?"

"Who? What?" repeated Mr. Copewell, bewildered.

"Who are they going to send to Europe?"

"You are insufferable! That's precisely what I've been telling you—the One Girl—Mary, of course—Mary Asheton."

The Honorable Alexander Hamilton spoke soothingly: "You just said the only lady in the world. You didn't say which only one. Statistics show that in America alone there are perhaps twenty millions."

"Mary!" breathed Mr. Copewell with fervor.

"Mary is a grand old name," recitatively acknowledged Mr. Burrow. "Who objects to this match between you and this young person, Mary?"

"Her family—fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts—everybody like that."

"Then I gather from your somewhat disjointed statement," Mr. Burrow summarized with concise, court-room clarity, "that the situation is this: It is *practically* a unanimous verdict that the marriage is undesirable, ill-advised and impossible."

"On the contrary, both Mary and I know——"

Mr. Burrow raised a deprecating hand and interrupted. "I said practically unanimous. I admit, of course, that you and the young woman hold dissenting opinions. There is always a minority report."

"I'm not trying to marry the majority. I'm not a Turk."

"How long have you known this particular Only One?"

"A year."

"How long an interval elapsed between introduction and proposal?"

"A month."

Mr. Burrow groaned.

"Abject surrender! No brave defense of your heart, no decently stern resistance! Why, Stoessel held Port Arthur a hundred days and more—though he was hungry!" After a momentary pause he inquired sternly, "If you proposed eleven months ago, why in thunder are you just now planning this abduction?"

Mr. Copewell blushed. "It took her some time to decide."

"It didn't take you long, poor creature!" Mr. Burrow studied a stick of sealing-wax with a judicially wrinkled brow. "Mind you," he generously acceded, "I'm not censuring the young woman. It's the female vocation to lure men. Can't blame 'em. Can't blame spiders for weaving filmy traps, but I am very, very sorry for flies and fools that rush in where angels fear the web."

"I don't need your sympathy. It's merely crass ignorance," snapped Mr. Copewell. "If you only knew her!"

"I don't," snapped Mr. Burrow back at him, "but I know her sex. I know that women differ from other birds of prey in only one particular and the distinction is in favor of the other birds of prey."

"That's a lie, of course, but I haven't time to argue it."

"The difference is," calmly pursued Mr. Burrow, "that the others wear their own feathers. Women wear those of the others."

The office door opened. The head of the young woman stenographer appeared. Her voice was chilling. "Alderman Grotz says——"

"Say to Mr. Grotz," replied the Hon. Alexander Hamilton in a voice loud enough to carry, "that it is very good of him to wait. If he'll indulge me—just ten minutes longer——" His voice trailed off ingratiatingly as the door closed, and he turned again on his visitor. "No woman in the world could reduce me to so maudlin a condition in a month! No, nor in a century. Now, having warned you in behalf of friendship, I'm entirely ready to help you ruin yourself. What's the idea?"

This was the moment for which Mr. Copewell had waited. He began with promptness.

"Mary has telephoned me. She lives in Perryville, two hundred and fifty miles away. They won't let me see her."

“They won’t let him see her!” commiserated Mr. Burrow with melancholy.

“This trip to Europe was planned on the spur of the moment. It was meant to surprise us. It did. She starts to-morrow, unless——”

“Unless you interfere to-day,” prompted Mr. Burrow. Mr. Copewell became intense. “She slipped away from home when she learned it, and we planned it all by ’phone. I can’t go to Perryville—they would watch us both. I must stay here till the last minute and establish an alibi. Mary leaves there this evening on the train that reaches here about midnight, which makes no regular stops between. She starts unaccompanied, but is to be met at the station here in Mercerville by her aunt, Mrs. Stone, who is to chaperone the European trip. It is to be strictly and personally conducted.”

“I know Mrs. Stone,” grinned Mr. Burrow. “I can recommend her as a reliable duenna.”

“But I leave here on a train that starts west at the same time hers starts east. Those trains pass each other about half-way. Both are through expresses and neither makes any regular stop between Mercerville and Perryville.”

“I am following you.” Once the plan involved action, the Hon. Alexander Hamilton Burrow became interested.

“I have got, quite secretly of course, an order from the train-despatcher’s office. In pursuance, my train stops at Jaffa Junction, which it reaches at ten o’clock to-night. Her train also stops at Jaffa Junction, forty minutes later. We both disembark.

When aunty goes to the Mercerville station there will be no Mary there!"

"Almost you had persuaded me," said Mr. Burrow sadly, "but if any additional shred of evidence were necessary to establish the lunacy of this enterprise, it is the selection of Jaffa Junction as an objective point for elopement. Were you ever in Jaffa Junction? A tank, a post-office and a streak of mud!"

"It may lack certain advantages," defended Mr. Copewell, "but it is a strategic position. You don't seem to grasp the strenuousness of this undertaking—or the peril. Mary is sent across the ocean on twenty-four hours' notice. She is put on the train at Perryville by her family. The train does not, so it is presumed, stop till it reaches here. Here a grim relentless aunt catches her on the fly and keeps her bouncing! Good Heavens, man, the only chance I have is train-robbery in between—and Jaffa Junction is gloriously in between!"

"What part do I play in this praiseworthy enterprise? Do you want my police to lock aunty up, so that she can't telephone to mama?"

"Worse than that. When we drop off that train at Jaffa Junction, unless we have some way to beat it quick, our last predicament will be worse than our first. We will need an automobile and a trustworthy chauffeur. He can also be best man, and officiate at swearing to things when we get the license. You and your six-cylinder car have been elected."

"Are you quite sure," inquired Mr. Burrow in a chastened voice, "that you don't overestimate my merits?"

“I am willing to give you a try,” was the generous response. “It would be nice and considerate if we could get it all finished up in time to wire aunty that we are perfectly well married before she grows hysterical about Mary. Mary is very fond of her family and would appreciate a little attention like that.”

“And have you considered the time it takes to drive one hundred and twenty miles over those infernal, hog-backed roads?” queried Mr. Burrow with suspicious politeness.

“Really, I can’t say, but it’s only ten o’clock now. You can start as soon as you’re ready, you know. You have about thirteen hours.”

“I salaam before your unparalleled nerve! Do you realize that I have public duties to perform?”

Mr. Copewell shrugged his shoulders.

The stenographer’s brown head was thrust into the door.

“Alderman Grotz says——” she began.

“Send him right in,” exclaimed Mr. Burrow energetically. “Ah, Mr. Grotz, I’m very sorry indeed to have kept you waiting! Miss Farrish, tell the other gentlemen I have just received urgent news that will call me out of town until to-morrow. ’Phone over to the City Hall and make my apologies to the Mayor. Call up the garage and have my car ready for a long trip in a half-hour; telephone to my rooms and have my man pack a suit-case and rush it over to the garage. Let’s see—yes, I believe that’s all, thank you.”



## CHAPTER III

### ON THE WAY TO JAFFA JUNCTION

The allegation that Love laughs at locksmiths has become more generally accepted than verity warrants. In point of fact the locksmith has never been altogether without the honors of war, and during the last century or two he has made commendable progress in the matter of bolts and tumblers and burglar-proof devices.

Love was supervising the packing of Mary Asheton's steamer-trunks and was particularly interested in the single suit-case surreptitiously intended for the Jaffa Junction trousseau. Love giggled as he looked on, but the giggle was rather hysterical. "*He* likes that black gown," said Mary, alone in her room with Love. "I wore it the evening he proposed the last time—no, it was the third from the last time."

The small god, Love, approved of Mary. Her red-brown hair, hanging in braids, was very thick and long. About her temples were soft, tendril-like curls of the variety that is most valuable to Love in his business, because they are more enmeshing and binding than some of the other links he is supposed to forge with the aid of his stout smith, Hymen. He approved of her deep violet eyes, liquid with the electric potency of personality. He approved of her willowy slenderness and the grace of her carriage.

Love made an inventory of these assets, for like Napoleon Bonaparte he was arraying his forces against all Europe. As he

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