

Unhand Me, Villain!

A Romance

Robert Ervin Howard

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“Be mine, my love!” pleaded young Reginald Adjernon Lancelot Montmorency to the beautiful Gwinivere de Readycash, the lovely and accomplished heiress, daughter of old Readycash, the multi-millionaire.

“Alas,” she sighed; “It cannot be. My father does not like you. Only today he mentioned you and made some remarks about you in a language I took to be Greek for I could not understand it. And there is the duke de Blooeey from Montenegro. He is courting me and father likes him because he can play checkers.”

“I will call the scoundrel out,” whooped Reginald passionately; “he shall fight a duel with me!”

“No, no!” begged Gwinivere, clinging to her lover’s necktie; “you must not! I beg you!”

“Very well, my love!” replied Reggie, with great relief; “I knew you would say so or I would not have — I mean it is a good thing for the duke that I love you too much to disobey your command. I will not force him into a duel.”

He was silent for a few minutes, then “But what are we to do?”

She chewed a cud of gum meditatively for several seconds. “Why not ask father for me?” she suggested.

“I will,” he exclaimed. “This very hour! I will be masterful with him! I shall say, ‘Sir, I am your new son-in-law. No arguments now!’”

“But don’t harm him, Reggie!” she begged; “remember he is my father.”

“I will not touch him,” he promised magnanimously; “I will quell him with the power of my eye.”

He rushed from the room. As he strode toward old Readycash’s study, he rehearsed the speech he would make. “I will say, ‘Sir, I am going to marry your daughter. Be silent, sir! I have decided to do this and I will not be balked by a gouty old father-in-law. I want you to understand that from now on I am the master of this house. You may write out a check for ten thousand dollars for our honeymoon.’ If he refuses and talks impudently I may forget he is my future father-in-law and handle him roughly.”

He was now at the door of the study. He paused before it. Glancing around, he found several cushions on chairs and sofas. These he placed on the floor in front of the door. Then after several attempts, he put on a bold front and knocked timidly on the door. A deep, gruff voice from within said, “Come in!”

Reginald pushed open the door and entered cautiously. Old man Ready-cash glared furiously at him.

"Oh, it's you, eh? What the —— do you want?"

"Why," replied Reginald, "I, er, you, er, that is, your girl, I mean my girl, what I meant to say is that I, er she, you, er, that is to say you."

"No doubt," old Ready-cash answered dryly, "have you anything else to tell me?"

"Sir," said Reginald with dignity, "you have a daughter — a girl."

"Remarkable," exclaimed the old man.

"As I said, sir," continued Reginald, ignoring the interruption, "you have a daughter."

"I have several," was the reply; "also seven old maid sisters. I will introduce them to you, if you like."

Reginald shuddered. "I ccccame ttto aaask yyou ffor your daughter's, your daughter's, your daughter's."

"My daughter's what?" roared old man Ready-cash.

"Hand!" gasped Reginald.

Old Ready-cash rose. "Would you just as soon take my foot?" he asked.

Reggie fled. As he neared the door he was struck from behind by a force that lifted him from his feet and propelled him irresistibly through the door which was opened just then by a well-dressed gentleman with a monocle and mustache. Reggie lit on this gentleman and they rolled across the hall, until stopped by the wall.

"Sapristi!" exclaimed the duke de Blooey (for it was he), leaping to his feet. "Caramba! Le diable! Tamale! Asparagus tips! I will have your life for this!"

Just at that moment old Ready-cash charged out of his room. "You young villain!" he yelled at Reggie, "what do you mean by knocking down my guests?"

Reggie fled toward the stairs. At the top step he felt the same force that had sent him from the presence of Ready-cash. The young man soared gracefully into the air and floated down the stairs.

"What!" yelled old Ready-cash; "you still here? Get out of my house! And as for you," turning to the girl, "you shall marry the duke this very day."

"But father," began Gwinivere.

"Shut up!" yelled old Ready-cash, brutally; "do you want me to whip you?"

The duke seized her by the wrist. “Aha, me proud beauty,” he exclaimed, diabolically; “I have you in my power at last!”

“Unhand me, villain!” she cried.

At that moment the door flew open and two men rushed in. One was a tall, thin man and the other a short stocky man.

They rushed upon the duke, knocked him down and handcuffed him.

“Aha,” exclaimed the tall man, “a duke now, are you, eh?”

“What does this mean, sir?” asked old Readycash.

“This man is a crook in disguise,” the tall man answered. “I have followed him half across the world. You see before you,” he continued, kicking off the duke’s mustache and monocle, “Booze Bill, the Bowery Bum! One of the slickest crooks on record.”

“Curses,” hissed the duke. “One thousand curses. Ay, one thousand five hundred curses!”

“As for you, sir,” the stranger continued, to old Readycash, “your daughter wants to marry this young man,” indicating Reggie, “and you give him your consent and your check for £10,000. Also a check for the same amount to me as a token of your gratitude in preventing you from marrying your daughter to a villain. If you do not I will send you to jail for 2,000 years. I used to drink my beer at Dinty Moore’s saloon when you were bartender there and you often shortchanged me.” Then to the short man, “Take the prisoner outside and call a cab, Colonel; I will follow presently.”

“But, who are you?” asked old Readycash, as he reached for his check-book and Reggie and Gwinivere fell into each other’s arms, “who are you?”

“I?” answered the stranger with a smile; “I am Hawkshaw, the Detective.”

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