

Circumstantial Evidence

By
Edgar Wallace

*Free*editorial 

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

1. CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

Colonel Chartres Dane lingered irresolutely in the broad and pleasant lobby. Other patients had lingered awhile in that agreeable vestibule. In wintry days it was a cozy place; its polished panelled walls reflecting the gleam of logs that burnt in the open fireplace. There was a shining oak settle that invited gossip, and old prints, and blue china bowls frothing over with the flowers of a belated autumn or advanced spring-tide, to charm the eye.

In summer it was cool and dark and restful. The mellow tick of the ancient clock, the fragrance of roses, the soft breeze that came through an open casement stirring the lilac curtains uneasily, these corollaries of peace and order had soothed many an unquiet mind.

Colonel Chartres Dane fingered a button of his light dust-coat and his thin patrician face was set in thought. He was a spare man of fifty-five; a man of tired eyes and nervous gesture.

Dr. Merriget peered at him through his powerful spectacles and wondered.

It was an awkward moment, for the doctor had murmured his sincere, if conventional, regrets and encouragements, and there was nothing left but to close the door on his patient.

"You have had a bad wound there, Mr. Jackson," he said, by way of changing a very gloomy subject and filling in the interval of silence. This intervention might call to mind in a soldier some deed of his, some far field of battle where men met death with courage and fortitude. Such memories might be helpful to a man under sentence.

Colonel Dane fingered the long scar on his cheek.

"Yes," he said absently, "a child did that—my niece. Quite my own fault."

"A child?" Dr. Merriget appeared to be shocked. He was in reality very curious.

"Yes... she was eleven... my own fault. I spoke disrespectfully of her father. It was unpardonable, for he was only recently dead. He was my brother-in-law. We were at breakfast and she threw the knife... yes...."

He ruminated on the incident and a smile quivered at the corner of his thin lips.

"She hated me. She hates me still... yes...."

He waited.

The doctor was embarrassed and came back to the object of the visit.

"I should be ever so much more comfortable in my mind if you saw a specialist, Mr.—er—Jackson. You see how difficult it is for me to give an opinion? I may be wrong. I know nothing of your history, your medical history I mean. There are so many men in town who could give you a better and more valuable opinion than I. A country practitioner like myself is rather in a backwater. One has the usual cases that come to one in a small country town, maternity cases, commonplace ailments... it is difficult to keep abreast of the extraordinary developments in medical science...."

"Do you know anything about Machonics College?" asked the colonel unexpectedly.

"Yes, of course." The doctor was surprised. "It is one of the best of the

technical schools. Many of our best doctors and chemists take a preparatory course there. Why?"

"I merely asked. As to your specialists... I hardly think I shall bother them."

Dr. Merriget watched the tall figure striding down the red-tiled path between the banked flowers, and was still standing on the doorstep when the whine of his visitor's machine had gone beyond the limits of his hearing.

"H'm," said Dr. Merriget as he returned to his study. He sat awhile thinking.

"Mr. Jackson?" he said aloud. "I wonder why the colonel calls himself 'Mr. Jackson'?"

He had seen the colonel two years before at a garden party, and had an excellent memory for faces.

He gave the matter no further thought, having certain packing to superintend—he was on the eve of his departure for Constantinople, a holiday trip he had promised himself for years.

On the following afternoon at Machonics Technical School, a lecture was in progress.

"... by this combustion you have secured true K.c.y.... which we will now test and compare with the laboratory quantities... a deliquescent and colorless crystal extremely soluble...."

The master, whose monotonous voice droned like the hum of a distant, big, stationary blue-bottle, was a middle-aged man, to whom life was no more than a chemical reaction, and love not properly a matter for his observation or knowledge. He had an idea that it was dealt with effectively in another department of the college... metaphysics... or was it philosophy? Or maybe it came into the realms of the biological master?

Ella Grant glared resentfully at the crystals which glittered on the blue paper before her, and snapped out the bunsen burner with a vicious twist of finger and thumb. Denman always overshot the hour. It was a quarter past five! The pallid clock above the dais, where Professor Denman stood, seemed to mock her impatience.

She sighed wearily and fiddled with the apparatus on the bench at which she sat. Some twenty other white-coated girls were also fiddling with test tubes and bottles and graduated measures, and twenty pairs of eyes glowered at the bald and stooping man who, unconscious of the passing of time, was turning affectionately to the properties of potassium.

"Here we have a metal whose strange affinity for oxygen... eh, Miss

Benson?... five? Bless my soul, so it is! Class is dismissed. And ladies, ladies, ladies! Please, please let me make myself heard. The laboratory keeper will take from you all chemicals you have drawn for this experiment...."

They were crowding toward the door to the change room. Smith, the laboratory man, stood in the entrance grabbing wildly at little green and blue bottles that were thrust at him, and vainly endeavoring by a private system of mnemonics to commit his receipts to memory.

"Miss Fairlie, phial fairly; Miss Jones, bottle bones; Miss Walter, bottle salter."

If at the end of his collection he failed to recall a rhyme to any name, the owner had passed without cashing in.

"Miss Grant—?"

The laboratory of the Analytical Class was empty. Nineteen bottles stood on a shelf and he reviewed them.

"Miss Grant—?"

No, he had said nothing about "aunt" or "can't" or "pant."

He went into the change room, opened a locker and felt in the pockets of the white overall. They were empty. Returning to the laboratory, he wrote in his report book:

"Miss Grant did not return experiment bottle."

He spelt experiment with two r's and two m's.

Ella found the bottle in the pocket of her overall as she was hanging it up in the long cupboard of the change room. She hesitated a moment, frowning resentfully at the little blue phial in her hand, and rapidly calculating the time it would take to return to the laboratory to find the keeper and restore the property. In the end, she pushed it into her bag and hurried from the building. It was not an unusual occurrence that a student overlooked the return of some apparatus, and it could be restored in the morning.

Had Jack succeeded? That was the thought which occupied her. The miracle about which every junior dreams had happened. Engaged in the prosecution of the notorious Flackman, his leader had been taken ill, and the conduct of the case for the State had fallen to him. He was opposed by two brilliant advocates, and the judge was a notorious humanitarian.

She did not stop to buy a newspaper; she was in a fret at the thought that Jack Freeder might not have waited for her, and she heaved a sigh of relief when she turned into the old-world garden of the courthouse and saw him pacing up and down the flagged walk, his hands in his pockets.

"I am so sorry...."

She had come up behind him, and he turned on his heel to meet her. His face spoke success. The elation in it told her everything she wanted to know, and she slipped her arm through his with a queer mingled sense of pride and uneasiness.

"... the judge sent for me to his room afterwards and told me that the attorney could not have conducted the case better than I."

"He is guilty?" she asked, hesitating.

"Who, Flackman... I suppose so," he said carelessly. "His pistol was found in Sinnit's apartment, and it was known that he quarrelled with Sinnit about money, and there was a girl in it, I think, although we have never been able to get sufficient proof of that to put her into the box. You seldom have direct evidence in cases of this character, Ella, and in many ways circumstantial evidence is infinitely more damning. If a witness went into the box and said, 'I saw Flackman shoot Sinnit and saw Sinnit die,' the whole case would stand or fall by the credibility of that evidence; prove that witness an habitual liar and there is no chance of a conviction. On the other hand, when there are six or seven witnesses, all of whom subscribe to some one act or appearance or location of a prisoner, and all agreeing... why, you have him."

She nodded.

Her acquaintance with Jack Freeder had begun on her summer vacation, and had begun romantically but unconventionally, when a sailing boat overturned, with its occupant pinned beneath the bulging canvas. It was Ella, a magnificent swimmer, who, bathing, had seen the accident and had dived into the sea to the assistance of the drowning man.

"This means a lot to me, Ella," he said earnestly as they turned into the busy street. "It means the foundation of a new life."

His eyes met hers, and lingered for a second, and she was thrilled.

"Did you see Stephanie last night?" he asked suddenly.

She felt guilty.

"No," she admitted, "but I don't think you ought to worry about that, Jack. Stephanie is expecting the money almost by any mail."

"She has been expecting the money almost by any mail for a month past," he said dryly, "and in the meantime this infernal note is becoming due. What I can't understand—"

She interrupted him with a laugh.

"You can't understand why they accepted my signature as a guarantee for Stephanie's," she laughed, "and you are extremely uncomplimentary!"

Stephanie Boston, her some-time room mate, and now her apartmental neighbor, was a source of considerable worry to Jack Freeder, although he had only met her once. A handsome, volatile girl, with a penchant for good clothes and a mode of living out of all harmony with the meager income she drew from fashion-plate artistry, she had found herself in difficulties. It was a condition which the wise had long predicted, and Ella, not so wise, had dreaded. And then one day the young artist had come to her with an oblong slip of paper, and an incoherent story of somebody being willing to lend her money if Ella would sign her name; and Ella Grant, to whom finance was an esoteric mystery, had cheerfully complied.

"If you were a great heiress, or you were expecting a lot of money coming to you through the death of a relative," persisted Jack, with a frown, "I could understand Isaacs being satisfied with your acceptance, but you aren't!"

Ella laughed softly and shook her head.

"The only relative I have in the world is poor dear Uncle Chartres, who loathes me! I used to loathe him too, but I've got over that. After daddy died I lived with him for a few months, but we quarrelled over—over—well, I won't tell you what it was about, because I am sure he was sorry. I had a fiendish temper as a child, and I threw a knife at him."

"Good Lord!" gasped Jack, staring at her.

She nodded solemnly.

"I did—so you see there is very little likelihood of Uncle Chartres, who is immensely rich, leaving me anything more substantial than the horrid weapon with which I attempted to slay him!"

Jack was silent. Isaacs was a professional moneylender... he was not a philanthropist.

When Ella got home that night she determined to perform an unpleasant duty. She had not forgotten Jack Freeder's urgent insistence upon her seeing Stephanie Boston—she had simply avoided the unpalatable.

Stephanie's flat was on the first floor; her own was immediately above. She considered for a long time before she pressed the bell.

Grace, Stephanie's elderly maid, opened the door, and her eyes were red with recent weeping.

"What is the matter?" asked Ella in alarm.

"Come in, miss," said the servant miserably. "Miss Boston left a letter for you."

"Left?" repeated Ella wonderingly. "Has she gone away?"

"She was gone when I came this morning. The bailiffs have been here...."

Ella's heart sank.

The letter was short but eminently lucid:

"I am going away, Ella. I do hope that you will forgive me. That wretched bill has become due and I simply cannot face you again. I will work desperately hard to repay you, Ella."

The girl stared at the letter, not realizing what it all meant. Stephanie had gone away!

"She took all her clothes, miss. She left this morning, and told the porter she was going into the country; and she owes me three weeks' wages!"

Ella went upstairs to her own flat, dazed and shaken. She herself had no maid; a woman came every morning to clean the flat, and Ella had her meals at a neighboring restaurant.

As she made the last turn of the stairs she was conscious that there was a man waiting on the landing above, with his back to her door. Though she did not know him, he evidently recognized her, for he raised his hat. She had a dim idea that she had seen him somewhere before, but for the moment could not recollect the circumstances.

"Good evening, Miss Grant," he said amiably. "I think we have met before. Miss Boston introduced me—name of Higgins."

She shook her head.

"I am afraid I don't remember you," she said, and wondered whether his business was in connection with Stephanie's default.

"I brought the paper up that you signed about three months ago."

Then she recalled him and went cold.

"Mr. Isaacs didn't want to make any kind of trouble," he said. "The bill became due a week ago and we have been trying to get Miss Boston to pay. As it is, it looks very much as though you will have to find the money."

"When?" she asked in dismay.

"Mr. Isaacs will give you until to tomorrow night," said the man. "I have been waiting here since five o'clock to see you. I suppose it is convenient, miss?"

Nobody knew better than Mr. Isaacs' clerk that it would be most inconvenient, not to say impossible, for Ella Grant to produce four hundred pounds.

"I will write to Mr. Isaacs," she said, finding her voice at last.

She sat down in the solitude and dusk of her flat to think things out. She was overwhelmed, numbed by the tragedy. To owe money that she could not pay was to Ella Grant an unspeakable horror.

There was a letter in the letter-box. She had taken it out mechanically when she came in, and as mechanically slipped her fingers through the flap and extracted a folded paper. But she put it down without so much as a glance at its contents.

What would Jack say? What a fool she had been, what a perfectly reckless fool! She had met difficulties before, and had overcome them. When she had left her uncle's house as a child of fourteen and had subsisted on the slender income which her father had left her, rejecting every attempt on the part of Chartres Dane to make her leave the home of an invalid maiden aunt where she had taken refuge, she had faced what she believed was the supreme crisis of life.

But this was different.

Chartres Dane! She rejected the thought instantly, only to find it recurring. Perhaps he would help. She had long since overcome any ill-feeling she had towards him, for whatever dislike she had, had been replaced by a sense of shame and repentance. She had often been on the point of writing him to beg his forgiveness, but had stopped short at the thought that he might imagine she had some ulterior motive in seeking to return to his good graces. He was her relative. He had some responsibility ... again the thought inserted itself, and suddenly she made up her mind.

Chartres Dane's house lay twelve miles out of town, a great rambling place set on the slopes of a wooded hill, a place admirably suited to his peculiar love of solitude.

She had some difficulty in finding a taxi-driver who was willing to make the journey, and it had grown dark, though a pale light still lingered in the western skies, when she descended from the cab at the gateway of Hevel House. There was a lodge at the entrance of the gate, but this had long since been untenanted. She found her way up the long drive to the columned portico in front of the house. The place was in darkness, and she experienced a pang of apprehension. Suppose he was not there? (Even if he were, he would not help her, she told herself.) But the possibility of his being absent, however, gave her courage.

Her hand was on the bell when there came to her a flash of memory. At such an hour he would be sitting in the window-recess overlooking the lawn at the side of the house. She had often seen him there on warm summer nights, his glass of port on the broad window-ledge, a cigar clenched between his white teeth, brooding out into the darkness.

She came down the steps, and walking on the close-cropped grass bordering the flower-beds, came slowly, almost stealthily, to the library window. The big casement was wide open; a faint light showed within, and she stopped dead, her heart beating a furious rat-a-pan at the sight of a filled glass on the window-ledge. His habits had not changed, she thought; he himself would be sitting just out of sight from where she stood, in that window-recess which was nearest to her. Summoning all her courage, she advanced still farther. He was not in his customary place, and she crept nearer to the window.

Colonel Chartres Dane was sitting at a large writing-table in the center of the room; his back was toward her, and he was writing by the light of two tall candles that stood upon the table.

At the sight of his back all her courage failed, and, as he rose from the table, she shrank back into the shadow. She saw his white hand take up the glass of wine, and after a moment, peeping again, she saw him, still with his back to her, put it on the table by him as he sat down again.

She could not do it, she dare not do it, she told herself, and turned away sorrowfully. She would write to him.

She had stepped from the grass to the path when a man came from an opening in the bushes and gripped her arm.

"Hello!" he said, "who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"Let me go," she cried, frightened. "I—I—"

"What are you doing by the colonel's window?"

"I am his niece," she said, trying to recover some of her dignity.

"I thought you might be his aunt," said the gamekeeper ironically. "Now, my girl, I am going to take you in to the colonel—"

With a violent thrust she pushed him from her; the man stumbled and fell. She heard a thud and a groan, and stood rooted to the spot with horror.

"Have I hurt you?" she whispered. There was no reply.

She felt, rather than saw, that he had struck his head against a tree in falling, and turning, she flew down the drive, terrified, nearly fainting in her fright. The cabman saw her as she flung open the gate and rushed out.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"I—I think I have killed a man," she said incoherently, and then from the other end of the drive she heard a thick voice cry:

"Stop that girl!"

It was the voice of the gamekeeper, and for a moment the blood came back to her heart.

"Take me away, quickly, quickly," she cried.

The cabman hesitated.

"What have you been doing?" he asked.

"Take—take me away," she pleaded.

Again he hesitated.

"Jump in," he said gruffly.

Three weeks later John Penderbury, one of the greatest advocates at the Bar, walked into Jack Freeder's chambers.

The young man sat at his table, his head on his arm, and Penderbury put his hand lightly upon the shoulders of the stricken man.

"You've got to take a hold of yourself, Freeder," he said kindly. "You will neither help yourself nor her by going under."

Jack lifted a white, haggard face to the lawyer.

"It is horrible, horrible," he said huskily. "She's as innocent as a baby. What evidence have they?"

"My dear good fellow," said Penderbury, "the only evidence worth while in a case like this is circumstantial evidence. If there were direct evidence we might test the credibility of the witness. But in circumstantial evidence every piece of testimony dovetails into the other; each witness creates one strand of the net."

"It is horrible, it is impossible, it is madness to think that Ella could—"

Penderbury shook his head. Pulling up a chair at the other side of the table, he sat down, his arms folded, his grave eyes fixed on the younger man.

"Look at it from a lawyer's point of view, Freeder," he said gently. "Ella Grant is badly in need of money. She has backed a bill for a girl-friend and the money is suddenly demanded. A few minutes after learning this from Isaacs' clerk, she finds a letter in her flat, which she has obviously read—the envelope

was opened and its contents extracted—a letter which is from Colonel Dane's lawyers, telling her that the colonel has made her his sole heiress. She knows, therefore, that the moment the colonel dies she will be a rich woman. She has in her handbag a bottle containing cyanide of potassium, and that night, under the cover of darkness, drives to the colonel's house and is seen outside the library window by Colonel Dane's gamekeeper. She admitted, when she was questioned by the detective, that she knew the colonel was in the habit of sitting by the window and that he usually put his glass of port on the window-ledge. What was easier than to drop a fatal dose of cyanide into the wine? Remember, she admitted that she had hated him and that once she threw a knife at him, wounding him, so that the scar remained to the day of his death. She admitted herself that it was his practice to put the wine where she could have reached it."

He drew a bundle of papers from his pocket, unfolded them, and turned the leaves rapidly.

"Here it is," and he read:

"Yes, I saw a glass of wine on the window-ledge. The colonel was in the habit of sitting in the window on summer evenings. I have often seen him there, and I knew when I saw the wine that he was near at hand."

He pushed the paper aside and looked keenly at the wretched man before him.

"She is seen by the gamekeeper, as I say," he went on, "and this man, attempting to intercept her, she struggles from his grasp and runs down the drive to the cab. The cabman says she was agitated, and when he asked her what was the matter, she replied that she had killed a man—"

"She meant the gamekeeper," interrupted Jack.

"She may or may not, but she made that statement. There are the facts, Jack; you cannot get past them. The letter from the lawyers—which she says she never read—the envelope was found open and the letter taken out; is it likely that she had not read it? The bottle of cyanide of potassium was found in her possession, and—" he spoke deliberately—"the colonel was found dead at his desk and death was due to cyanide of potassium. A candle which stood on his desk had been overturned by him in his convulsions, and the first intimation the servants had that anything was wrong was the sight of the blazing papers on the table, which the gamekeeper saw when he returned to report what had occurred in the grounds. There is no question what verdict the jury will return...."

It was a great and a fashionable trial. The courthouse was crowded, and the public had fought for a few places that were vacant in the gallery.

Sir Johnson Grey, the Attorney-General, was to lead for the Prosecution, and Penderbury had Jack Freeder as his junior.

The opening trial was due for ten o'clock, but it was half-past ten when the Attorney-General and Penderbury came into the court, and there was a light in Penderbury's eyes and a smile on his lips which amazed his junior.

Jack had only glanced once at the pale, slight prisoner. He dared not look at her.

"What is the delay?" he asked irritably. "This infernal judge is always late."

At that moment the court rose as the judge came on to the Bench, and almost immediately afterwards the Attorney-General was addressing the court.

"My lord," he said, "I do not purpose offering any evidence in this case on behalf of the Crown. Last night I received from Dr. Merriget, an eminent practitioner of Townville, a sworn statement on which I purpose examining him.

"Dr. Merriget," the Attorney-General went on, "has been traveling in the Near East, and a letter which was sent to him by the late Colonel Dane only reached him a week ago, coincident with the doctor learning that these proceedings had been taken against the prisoner at the bar.

"Dr. Merriget immediately placed himself in communication with the Crown officers of the law, as a result of which I am in a position to tell your lordship that I do not intend offering evidence against Ella Grant.

"Apparently Colonel Dane had long suspected that he was suffering from an incurable disease, and to make sure, he went to Dr. Merriget and submitted himself to an examination. The reason for his going to a strange doctor is, that he did not want to have it known that he had been consulting specialists in town. The doctor confirmed his worst fears, and Colonel Dane returned to his home. Whilst on the Continent, the doctor received a letter from Colonel Dane, which I purpose reading."

He took a letter from the table, adjusted his spectacles, and read:

"DEAR DR. MERRIGET,—It occurred to me after I had left you the day before yesterday, that you must have identified me, for I have a dim recollection that we met at a garden party. I am not, as you suggested, taking any other advice. I know too well that this fibrous growth is beyond cure, and I purpose tonight taking a fatal dose of cyanide of potassium. I feel that I must notify you in case by a mischance there is some question as to how I met my death.—Very sincerely yours, "CHARTRES DANE."

"I feel that the ends of justice will be served," continued the Attorney-General

"if I call the doctor..."

It was not very long before another Crown case came the way of Jack Freeder. A week after his return from his honeymoon, he was sent for to the Public Prosecutor's office, and that gentleman interviewed him.

"You did so well in the Flackman case, Freeder, that I want you to undertake the prosecution of Wise. Undoubtedly you will gain kudos in a trial of this description, for the Wise case has attracted a great deal of attention."

"What is the evidence?" asked Jack bluntly.

"Circumstantial, of course," said the Public Prosecutor, "but—"

Jack shook his head.

"I think not, sir," he said firmly but respectfully. "I will not prosecute in another case of murder unless the murder is committed in my presence."

The Public Prosecutor stared at him.

"That means you will never take another murder prosecution—have you given up criminal work, Mr. Freeder?"

"Yes, sir," said Jack gravely; "my wife doesn't like it."

Today, Jack Freeder is referred to in legal circles as a glaring example of how a promising career can be ruined by marriage.

2. THE CHILD OF CHANCE

It is absurd to say that truth is stranger than fiction because, as everybody knows, fiction is the unstrangest product of life. That is to say, fiction would be very strange if it was not stranger. For if it had no novelty, it would be no better than the News-That-is-Fit-to-Print, which is just the dullest kind of printed matter (with the exception of the Theology section of a Free Library catalogue) that offends the eye of mankind.

There was a girl who lived in a tenement house in a very poor part of London, who used to pray to God every night that a nice clean dragon with blunt teeth would seize her and be starting to fly away with his prey, when there would appear upon the scene a young and beautiful man in shining armor, who would slice the head from the dragon and carry her off to a white castle on a purple hill where she would be arrayed in white garments by handmaidens, and given bread and milk in a golden bowl.

She never reached very far beyond that breathless preamble, leaving it to God to fill in the blanks of her imaginings and to supply an adequate continuation of her story—which she had designed as a non-stop serial, each chapter of which was to be more delicious than the last.

Her name was Verity Money, and her age was eighteen. She was very pretty, very slim, and childlike, both in her appearance and in her faith. Her uncle, for whom she kept house—there were two rooms and a kitchen, and she slept in the kitchen, which was warm and cozy—was a grim old market-porter intensely religious for eleven months and two weeks of the year, and somewhat unsober for the remainder. He was never unkind to the girl—indeed he was most lavish in his gifts, and had been known to present her with such undreamt of luxuries as a feather boa and a musical box.

For the other fifty weeks of the year he was a sober and taciturn man—you can picture him lean faced, with a fringe of gray whiskers, poring earnestly over the big print of his Testament and declaiming at length on the virtues of Paul and the vacillations of Peter, the girl, darning needle in hand, listening with every evidence of interest, but her mind occupied by visions of the mythological youth in glittering armor.

When Tom Money died, he left her about fifty pounds and all his furniture. He had been a careful man, and it was discovered that he had paid his rent in advance, and that there was still three years of unexpired tenancy.

So Verity Money lived alone, earning just enough by her needle to keep body and soul together, and was happy in her dreams, and as she had no women friends, she suffered no disillusionment. Her ideals had undergone a change, for a new factor had come into her life. The movies had opened a new world to her and shifted the angle of her visions. Now, she was a little girl with sunlight in her hair, with a slow dawning smile and little uplift of the big, serious eyes to greet the handsome stranger who had ridden into her picture from nowhere in particular. In fine, she adored Mary Pickford, and pinned a picture of that lady on the wall so that it was the first object she saw when she opened her eyes in the morning.

She would slip from her bed, carefully remove the print, and re-pin it above the mantelpiece. She could light the fire and wash the cups, spread the table and take her morning tea and bread and butter with a sense of companionship which was very precious to her.

Her heroes were no longer armed cap-à-pie. They were handsome young men in sombreros and who wore sheepskin trousers. They rode fiery mustangs and earned a precarious livelihood by shooting one another with revolvers....

The war brought nothing of reality to Verity Money. The wilful murder on a

small scale which was screened for her amusement was more real, more terrible, more thrilling than the grand murdering up and down the hundred-league line, eighty miles from her door, where day and night the guns of Flanders crashed and roared and massed ranks went down before the spraying fire of machine-guns.

The war dawned upon her slowly as one by one her customers dropped their orders. Her work was the finest embroidery on cambric and silk. There was plenty of sewing work to be had, but she could not make soldiers' shirts or stitch button-holes in such quantity as would give her a living wage. She was slow and careful, and the few button-holes she made were very beautiful indeed, but she earned exactly eightpence in two days.

She had exhausted much of the money which had been left to her, and there came a time when she had to reduce her expenditure to a point which gave her one square meal a day.

She had no friends. There was neither boy nor man in her life. Her lovers were living in the sunny places of the world, holding their wide-brimmed hats on the pommels of high Mexican saddles whilst they passed the time of day with lovely girls who wore divided skirts and rode astride.

One day she started to starve and nobody knew anything about it. If she had died, the coroner would have had some unpleasant things to say about moving pictures, because she had spent her last threepence to see a great railway picture where half the story was told in the cab of an engine and half in the bullion van, where train robbers and bullion guards took pot shots at one another with deadly effect.

On the second evening of her starvation she went to a house in Berkeley Square to deliver some d'oyleys. The lady was not at home, and nobody had orders to pay this girl with the curious pinched look in her face.

She came slowly down the steps of the house into the dark square, took a few steps, and staggered. Somebody caught her by the arm and pulled her to her feet.

"Hold up," said a voice, but she was beyond obedience, and the stranger lifted her in his arms as though she were a child and stood for a moment frankly embarrassed by the situation in which he found himself.

He looked helplessly around, then whistled to two bright points of light in the distance.

The taxi drove up.

"Take me to the nearest hospital," said the stranger.

"Middlesex?" suggested the driver.

The stranger hesitated.

"Is it near?" he asked cautiously.

"It's nearest if your friend is badly hurt," said the driver.

"That's just what I can't say," said the other.

"Put her in the cab," suggested the chauffeur, getting down; "there's an electric light inside."

"What a brain!" laughed the stranger.

He looked at the girl lying limp and white in one corner of the cab and whistled softly.

Then he pushed back his khaki cap and scratched his head.

"Now what is the matter with her?" he asked irritably—irritability is a natural condition of man in the presence of a sick woman.

"If you ask me," said the driver carefully, "she wants grub."

"Good Lord!" cried the soldier, startled; "food... hungry?"

The driver nodded.

"I've seen them symptoms before—I've driven a cab for twenty-eight years in London."

Still the rescuer was undecided.

"Drive around for a while and if she doesn't recover I'll tell you—then you can go hell for lick to the nearest hospital."

The car had hardly moved before Verity blinked open her eyes and stared, first at the cab and then with a frightened frown at the young man who sat on the opposite seat.

"Are you feeling better?" he asked.

She saw a soldier, indistinguishable from any other of the thousands who had passed her in the mist of her dreams. He was a good-looking mortal, as clean shaven as any cowboy or train robber or even as the blessed saint of England. His uniform was no different from any other, but the badge upon his collar was a bronze leaf.

She was seized with a sudden panic.

"Can I get out please?" she asked in a flutter.

"Sure," he nodded, "but we'd better have some food—I'm starving, and you've made me miss an appointment with a fellow of ours."

To say that she was horror-stricken at this last revelation, is to tell no more than the truth. She had never intruded her influence upon the machinery of society before. Not once, by any act, had she knowingly affected the plans or movements of others. She felt, as she looked at him with troubled eyes and parted lips, that no sacrifice she could make could be too great to repair the mischief which she had caused.

"I'm—I'm very sorry," she gulped; "I would buy you some supper, but—but...."

She went red and her eyes were moist and shining. The young man whistled again—but quite inside himself.

"We will have supper together," said he, with a smile.

So he brought her to a golden palace of splendor. She was not self-conscious and did not realize that she might be an incongruous figure in the midst of all this amazing luxury. He noted that she was neatly dressed and that she was very young—she saw only the clustering bulbs of light in the gilded ceiling, the snowy tables glittering with silver and glass, the gentlemanly waiters who spoke English so funnily, the flowers ... beautifully dressed ladies... some of them smoking.... She drew a long breath which was half a sigh and half a sob.

They brought her soup—thick white creamy soup and curly strips of crisp brown sole, and white slithers of chicken, and an ice and coffee. The man did not offer her wine, knowing instinctively that she would be shocked, and for this reason he denied himself the half bottle of Chablis his soul craved.

He tried to draw her, gently and tactfully, but it was not until he touched on the cinema as a method of filling up odd moments of waiting that she began to talk. He did not laugh, he did not even smile when she revealed herself, her dreams (this she did with a naïveté which brought a lump to his throat), and her illusions. He told her something of the untamed places of the world, of the country north of Edmonton, of the forest of Ontario, of lumber camps on the Kootenay lakes, and of Alberta.

"Are you—you aren't American?" she asked suddenly.

He smiled.

"I am Canadian," he said, "but that is near enough."

She looked at him in awe.

"Do you have cowboys and—and things like that?" she asked. "I mean... is it

dreadfully rough there?"

They sat until they were the last people in the restaurant and the waiters stood about them in silent reproach, and in that time he had learnt all there was to tell about her. He learnt, too, of the lady in Berkeley Square who had ordered d'oyleys and had not paid. Then he drove her home by way of the square.

"Lady Grant is a friend of mine," he lied, "and she would like me to see that you were paid—I will go in and get the money."

"Her name is Lady Grey," corrected the girl timidly.

"Didn't I say Grey?" he asked in surprise.

Though she protested that her client should not be disturbed at that hour of the night, he insisted; and stopping the cab some distance from the house, he disappeared into the darkness, returning in triumph with a whole pound note.

"Lady Green asked me to say—" he began.

She looked at him in consternation.

"You went to the wrong house!" she whispered in horror; "oh, you must go back, please! It was Lady Grey—"

He groaned in spirit.

"Lady Grey asked me to say," he went on patiently, "that you—"

"But you said 'Green,'" she protested.

"I did not mention the fact," he answered gravely, "but I am color blind—I always say Grey when I mean Green—anyway, she said the work was so well done that she would like you to accept a little extra...."

All the way to her rooms on the south side of the river she was one babble of gratitude and adoration; Lady Grey was so kind, so generous, so good.

He caught himself yawning.

He went back to his hotel that night singularly thoughtful. A lean man from Toronto sprawling on the settee in the vestibule of the hotel rose up to meet him, and Private John Hamilton met his disapproving eye with a guilty smile.

"I waited till nine o'clock for you at Frascati's," growled the man from Toronto, clipping his canvas belt together, "you're the darnedest old—"

"Gee, Corporal, I'm sorry!" said the young man humbly, "but I met—my—er—cousin—and she—I mean he—well, he insisted—"

"Don't you try to put anything over me," warned the other, stretching himself.

"I wouldn't have waited up for you, but I've seen the Colonel—he's going back tomorrow."

He looked round and lowered his voice.

"There's to be a big attack this week," he said, "and the Canadians will be in it. I've made my will," he added.

Hamilton looked at his lank friend with a twinkling eye.

"You're a cheerful soul," he said.

"Yep," said the other complacently. "I've left twenty-four dollars seventy-five cents, and any balance due from my army pay, to three lawyer fellers in Toronto."

He elaborated the scheme of his will, which with any good fortune must lead to endless law suits.

"I hate lawyers worse'n poison," he said, "and I guess I shall be as cheerful as any poor guy that goes west this week."

Hamilton was a long time getting to bed that night. He wrote a letter to his agents in Montreal and one to the manager of his office at Toronto—he was Hamilton of the Hamilton Steel Corporation before he became No. 79743, Private Hamilton of the 40th Canadian Infantry—and another to his London banker.

For an hour he sat on the edge of his bed, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, thinking.

At two o'clock in the morning he rang his bell and demanded of the astounded night porter the address of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The request was received tolerantly by the porter as an example of youthful good spirits. When the young man angrily persisted, the porter diagnosed the case as one of truculent intoxication and went in search of a reference book.

Verity Money had never received a telegram in her life and had no idea who "Hamilton" was. It was an imperative telegram ordering her to meet the said Hamilton at Marble Arch at three o'clock.

She obeyed the summons meekly, for it would have been flying in the face of Providence to disregard a message upon which nineteen cents had been spent.

In truth, she never suspected the identity of the sender, and puzzled her little brain to recall the Mrs. Hamiltons and the Misses Hamiltons who had swum majestically into her placid sea, had thrown overboard instructions and orders for embroidered nightdress cases and pillow-slips, and had as majestically retired.

She was dressed very plainly and very neatly in black, and could have found no more attractive setting to her undeniable beauty, for she was fair and petite, with a complexion like milk and hair of spun gold. Her big gray-blue eyes, her firm little chin, her generous mouth—all these details Hamilton took in as he came forward to meet her. She was frankly and unfeignedly surprised and glad to meet him. He had joined the angels, did he but know it, and was one with St. George and Bronco Billy and other great heroes.

"I want to talk to you," he said brusquely, and looked at his wrist-watch. "We have only a quarter of an hour."

He led her to a seat in the park under a big oak. They were free from interruption but, as the girl was relieved to discover, within call of the police.

"My name is Hamilton," he said, without any further preliminary, "and I am going back to the front by the six o'clock train."

She nodded and looked at him with a new interest. He was going back to the front! It seemed rather splendid and she regretted that she had not paid closer attention to the war. But then, of course, she had not known that he was in it, and that all the bombardments, charges, minings, and bombings had been either designed to destroy him, or to rescue him from danger. For the first time she felt a sense of personal animosity against the German Emperor.

"Now, I want to say this," he went on carefully, choosing his words and speaking slower than was his practice, "I have no relations in the world, and if I am killed nobody will be very miserable."

"I should be—awfully," she said, with an eagerness that brought a smile to his tanned face.

"I am sure you would," he said gently, "and that is what I want to speak about. You see, a man is always sorry for himself. The thought of dying and not being able to continue being sorry for himself is one of the most dreadful thoughts his mind can hold. You've read that in books, haven't you?"

She was doubtful, but admitted that she had often read of people who were quite bitter at the prospect of nobody being unhappy when they died.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "I want you to be unhappy—"

"But I shall be," she insisted, and he laughed again.

"I want you to have the right to be unhappy," he said; "naturally, I don't want to put people who aren't—related—or connected with me to a lot of trouble—so I thought it would be a good idea if you married me before I left."

"Married you?" she said blankly, and stared at him.

He nodded.

"But I—I couldn't marry you, could I—without being your wife?"

It was an insane question and she knew it, but for any words she could utter, she was grateful enough. She found speech almost a physical impossibility, and was amazed that she could speak at all.

"I have a special license," he said deliberately, "and I have a parson waiting. If you will marry me we shall have time for a meal before I go."

"But—I don't think I love you," she faltered, "and that wouldn't be right—would it?"

"I don't want you to love me," he said loudly; "all you have to do is to marry me and be sorry."

"Oh!"

She looked round helplessly.

She could hardly call the policeman to assist her in coming to a decision, and yet she felt the need of legal advice.

"I don't know what to do," she said at length, "I've never been—nobody has ever asked me—suppose I were your—your sister, what would you advise?"

"Come and be married," he said practically, and rose.

At five o'clock she stood upon the platform at Charing Cross Station and waved adieu to the man whose name she bore.

She waited until the train was out of sight, gently twisting the gold band upon her finger, and then with a little lift of her chin she came out to the crowded courtyard.

"Cab, miss?"

She looked at the porter a little frightened, and then with no small amount of dignity inclined her head.

The cab drew up.

"Where do you want to go, miss?" demanded the driver.

"Mrs. John Hamilton!" said the girl and grew for a moment incoherent. "I mean—oh, Hagan's Rents, please!"

Verity Money learnt much from books. Even by cultured standards she was well read, but she found neither in Dickens, nor Dumas, nor in the efforts of the modern authors any situation analogous to her own. Nor did the cinema

help her, though she indulged in a systematic search for parallels.

She had letters from her husband—kindly, brotherly letters. He had been in a big fight, and had come out without a scratch, though his friend ("you remember the Corporal who was at the church?") had been severely wounded, though he was now on the way to recovery. Was she well? Did she receive her allowance regularly? Had she moved as he suggested to the furnished flat he had urged her to take?

She answered his letters in a firm, childish hand, perfectly punctuated, and to his surprise and relief not only literate but literary in the sense that they conveyed a freshness and a clarity of view which was little short of marvelous.

"I shall try to be a good wife to you," she wrote, "and I am already reading the newspapers carefully. I have written to Lord Kitchener—"

He sat back on the step of the trench and gasped—then he laughed and laughed till the tears rolled down his face.

"I have written to Lord Kitchener to ask him when the war will be over, and he has written to me saying that he isn't sure, but he will let me know. I hope our marriage isn't a mistake, but I will try to be worthy of a hero who is fighting for his country. I have a picture of a Canadian soldier, and I am learning to sing 'The Maple Leaf.' I went to the flower shop in Regent Street and asked them if they had any maple leaves, but they had none. It was so silly of me, but I did want to buy some."

When John Hamilton came out of the trenches he went to No. 8 Base Hospital and saw a certain swathed and bandaged corporal, and discussed matters.

"Well, Don Quixote, and how is Mrs. Don?" asked the voice behind a large square of medicated gauze.

John sat on the bed and read extracts from the letter.

"I thought you were crazy," said the wounded man, "but I guess you've instinct. There's the making of a woman in that child. You're not feeling sorry for yourself?"

"On the contrary, I'm looking forward to life—it has possibilities," said the other.

Verity Hamilton in the Baker Street flat, with a maid of her own, was a serious little figure facing those possibilities for herself.

She adored her ten-minute husband because she was made to adore those who were kind to her. She prayed for him, she evolved great plans for his future, and she fought hard against the pin-point of doubt which had come into her

mind and which was growing with every day which passed.

In a sense he had fulfilled her ideals and her dreams, for he had come violently into her life and had in a sense saved her from destruction. At any rate he had given her food when she was very hungry. And then she had seen him again—and whisk! she was married!

She used to sit with compressed lips, and eyes that were fixed in the far-away, wondering—and doubting.

He could not love her: he had never said that he did. He had not so much as kissed her, and it was only the strong grip of his hand that she remembered.

Her problem was a simple one. She loved her husband and he did not love her. Why he had married her she did not ask herself, curiously enough. Who was she to inquire into his godlike whims?

How could she make her husband love her? That was the problem, and presently a fortuitous visit to the movies told her.

Four months after his marriage, John Hamilton was sent to England on sick leave pending his discharge. The shrapnel bullet which was responsible for so much left him with a perceptible limp, and there was a big chance that he might rid himself of all traces of his wound (so the army doctors told him), but it would take time.

He arrived at Southampton in the early hours of a spring morning, and telegraphed to his wife that he would be staying at the Cranbourne Hotel and that he would call and see her.

He expected she would be waiting for him at Waterloo, but here he was disappointed and a little hurt. Yet—he had heard something of the commotion she had caused at the War Office when the news of the wounding had come through; of how she had appeared armed with a letter authorizing her to call upon a high personage. Being somewhat vague as to her husband's position in the army since he had been promoted to lance-corporal, she had described him as "Colonel," which accounted for her facilities.

And she had demanded to be taken at once to the Holy of Holies to meet the steel-eyed man from Khartoum, and had wept on the breast of a flustered field officer when that permission had been gently denied her.

All this John Hamilton had learnt, and, lying on his back in the Versailles hospital, had chuckled the morning through at the recital.

Perhaps she had a surprise for him? She had indeed.

When he came to her flat the maid opened the door expectantly and primly.

Would he go to the drawing-room—Mrs. Hamilton was waiting.

The drawing-room door was opened and he was announced. He did not hear the door close behind him, for he stood out of breath and speechless looking down at the girl.

She was seated in a low chair before the fire, and on her knees lay a tiny pink-faced thing that scowled and spluttered and stared into space.

"My God!" whispered John Hamilton.

She looked up at him serenely with that smile which was peculiarly her own.

"Isn't he lovely?" she whispered.

John Hamilton said nothing.

"Whose—whose baby is that?" he managed to say at last.

"Mine," she said gravely.

"Y-yours—how old is it?" he asked, a cold sweat of apprehension breaking over him.

"Two months," she said.

He sat down heavily and she looked across at him with growing distress.

"Oh dear—please, aren't you glad?" she pleaded. "I thought you would be—"

He glared from the child to Verity and from Verity to the child, and then he laughed, but it was not a happy laugh.

"What an ass I am!" he said, half to himself. "What a stupid blind fool!"

The tears were standing in her eyes, tears of disappointment and chagrin. She was hurt—he saw the immeasurable pain in her eyes and was kneeling by her side in an instant.

"My dear, my dear," he said softly, "I am an awful brute—but it was such a surprise and I had no idea—"

"I thought—it would make you so happy," she sobbed. "I wanted you—to love me—and children bring people together as nothing else does—I've seen it in stories and things."

He patted her hand.

"Yes, dear—but this is not—my child."

She looked at him open-eyed.

"Of course it is your child!" she cried.

John Hamilton rose unsteadily.

"I think—I rather think you're wrong," he said, his head whirling.

She laid the unconscious cause of her unhappiness upon the downy deeps of the big arm-chair and faced him, her hands clasped behind her back.

"It's no use trying," she said brokenly. "I thought you would love a little baby about the house—I'll have to send it back."

She covered her face with her hands.

"Send it back!" he gasped.

He took her by the wrists and gently pulled her hands apart.

"I—I was going to adopt it," she gulped. "I have it on a week's—a week's trial —"

He took her in his arms and his laughter filled the flat with joyful sound. The baby on the sofa, scenting disaster for itself, opened its little red mouth very wide, screwed up its eyes into the merest buttons and added its voice to the chorus.

3. THE DEAR LIAR

Sylvia Crest walked back to her surgery, her quick steps beating time to the song of triumph in her heart. She had declined Jonas Picton's offer to send her home in one of his many cars. Walking, movement of any kind, physical action she wanted to work down the bubbling exuberance which was within her. So she swung down the hill from the big house and through Broadway into busy Market Street, and people who knew her and who observed the lifted chin and the light in her eyes, saw Tollford's one woman doctor as a new being. They saw, though this they could not know, merely the reaction from months of depression bordering upon despair, months of waiting when her most precious quality, her faith in herself and her invincibility had been gradually shrinking until she had almost lost hold.

For she had thrown down the gage to the town of Tollford, and until this morning the glove lay moulding where it fell.

If Tollford had not been founded a couple of hundred years before the birth of Jonas Picton, it might and undoubtedly would have been known to history as Pictonville. It is on record that Jonas offered pretty substantial inducements, including the building of a new Town Hall, the presentation of a town park,

and the equipment of a new Fire Station to induce such a change of name; but Tollford was more conservative in those days before Picton's tall smoke stacks stabbed the skyline east and north, and his great glass-roofed factory buildings sprawled half-way down the valley.

And when the Picton works, and some eight thousand Picton employees, had become so important a factor in the municipal life of Tollford, Jonas had outgrown the desire for advertisement and had found life held something bigger than the flattery of a purchased honour.

Yet, in every other sense, Tollford remained conservative. Strangers who came and surveyed the town and marked it down as easy, who saw gold lying on the sidewalks waiting to be lifted, and returned joyously to show Tollford how much better stores, theatres, and newspapers could be run—these people lost money.

Dr. Sylvia Crest had come straight to Tollford from Mercer's Hospital, her diploma painfully new but her heart charged with confidence. She, too, had surveyed the land and had duly noted the poverty of medical resources in the town. Of women doctors there were none—and there were at least four thousand women employed at Picton's. She sat down the night following her visit to Tollford, and, with a pencil and paper and the local health statistics before her, she took stock of opportunity and found the prospects beautiful.

So she arrived one dull day in February, rented a corner house, furnished her rooms with proper severity, put up her sign, and waited. The local newspaper man gave her a most outrageous puff, for Sylvia was pretty—the prettiness of regular features and a skin like silk; but, brazen sign and as brazen advertisement notwithstanding, few patients sought the advice of the new doctor.

Tollford was conservative.

Moreover, working women did not like women doctors. About the female of the medical profession all manner of legends circulated. Women practitioners (by local and even more general account) did not treat women as kindly as men doctors. They were liable to fainting spells, and think what would happen if, in the middle of a critical operation, the doctor needed medical attention!

All these things were said and agreed upon in the lunch hour at Picton's, when the women talked over the new arrival.

"I'd as soon die as have a woman doctor fussing round me," said one oracle, and her light-hearted preference for death before the attentions of one of her sex was endorsed with unanimity.

A haggard and droop-lipped Jonas Picton sitting in his ornate office at the

works had heard of Dr. Sylvia Crest, and sighed. Where the great Steyne, most famous of modern physicians, had failed to find any other remedy than the knife, and offered even that dread remedy without assurance of cure, what hope could a "bit of a girl" bring? His secretary had pointed her out to him once when he was driving through Tollford. And yet one day in sheer desperation he had sent for her. The messenger had come at a moment when Dr. Sylvia was facing, perilously near tears, an accumulation of bills which called for an earlier settlement than her bank manager could sanction. No wonder that the sun shone more wonderfully, and the homely folk of Tollford took on a foreign charm under her benignant eyes as she made her way homeward.

Alan Brock was waiting in her study, and the hearth she had left clean and tidy was strewn with his cigarette ends. She looked suspiciously at him as she came in, his face was more yellow, his appearance more untidy than usual, and he had not shaved.

He was the one doctor in Tollford who had given her welcome—he was more presentable the first day he had called upon her—and she had been grateful. She did not realize until later that in seeking her out he had advertised his belief in her failure.

Alan Brock had neither friend nor practice in Tollford, and for good reason.

She took off her wrap, her disapproving eyes upon the figure sprawling in the one easy-chair she possessed.

"Doctor Brock, you have been taking morphine again," she said severely.

He chuckled, stretching out his hand to flick away the ashes of his cigarette. "I must keep one patient, you know," he grinned, "to alleviate suffering, to restore vitality—what used old Professor Thingummy say were the three duties of medicine?"

She smiled.

She was too elated to take anything but a charitable view even of one whose acquaintance she was determined to drop.

"Why don't you go away from here?" she asked. "You need not be a doctor—"

"The good people of Tollford make it obvious," he growled.

"You have money," she went on; "why stay here where—" She stopped, and he looked up.

"Where I'm not exactly respected, eh?" he asked. "Well, there are several reasons, and you're one of them."

"Me?" she was genuinely surprised.

He nodded.

"Yes, you. Do you know, Sylvia, doctoring isn't your line. You haven't the temperament for it, for one thing—it's a horrible profession for a woman, anyway."

Her lips were set tight now.

"That isn't the view you took a month ago, Dr. Brock," she said, and he waved his hand feebly.

"A few weeks ago I wanted to know you and I wasn't such a fool as to start right in telling you your faults. Sylvia, you and I are both hopeless failures."

He rose unsteadily and reached out his hand. Had she not moved quickly it would have rested on her arm.

"I want you to listen to me, Dr. Brock," she said quietly. "There is nothing in our relationship which justifies your calling me by my Christian name. There is, I am sorry to say, very little in our common profession which makes a continuance of our friendship possible or desirable—even the communion of failure has no attraction for me."

He was standing by the table, swaying slightly. The effect of the morphine was beginning to wear off and his face was drawn and haggard. He muttered something and sank back to his chair. Then lifting his sunken head with an unexpected alertness:

"Look here," he said, "I've got money, that's true. I tell you I'm mighty fond of you, and that's true also. Why don't you throw up this business and come away? It would make a new man of me, Sylvia."

She shook her head.

"Supposing I was fond of you, which I'm not, marrying a man to reform him would be a pretty thin occupation; and, honestly, I don't think you're going to be cured."

"You're certain about that, are you?" he said, with an ugly little smile.

"Do you realize," he asked suddenly, "that you're certain about almost everything?"

He was surprised to see the red come into her face. Later he was to learn the reason why.

"I'm sorry," he said humbly. "Don't let us quarrel—anyway, I'm leaving this hole. How did you get on this morning? Did you see the kid?"

"I saw the child," said the girl.

"Well?" He was looking at her queerly. There was something skeptical and challenging in his attitude which annoyed her, until she remembered that there had been a time when this broken man had been Picton's family doctor.

"I saw the child," she said again, "and I think that the trouble is local—in fact, I am certain." She cut the word short, as though it had slipped out against her will, and again she flushed.

"You think the spinal trouble will yield to treatment—in fact, you're certain, eh?" he said slowly. "Well, you're putting your opinion against the biggest expert."

"I realize that," she replied; "but I must say what I believe. I gave the child a thorough examination; she's a pretty little girl, isn't she? I am satisfied that with massage and fairly simple local remedies, the swelling on the back can be absorbed."

Brock was silent. He sat with his chin on his hands looking into the fire.

At last he broke the silence.

"And naturally old man Picton fell on your neck and blessed you."

She looked at him in surprise.

"He was rather grateful—why?"

"Because," said the other grimly, "that's the kind of verdict he's been trying to get for years. Jonas Picton hates the knife. His wife died on the table. His mother died in similar circumstances, and I believe one of his sisters had a very unhappy experience at the hands of a fashionable surgeon. It is just the knife that he wants to avoid, and naturally he believed you and was glad to swallow everything you told him. Do you know what you are, Sylvia? You're the straw, and he clutched you!"

The girl repressed her irritation with an effort.

"I gave what I believe to be an honest opinion," she said.

Dr. Brock had reached out his hand and taken a book from the bookcase and was looking at it idly. He turned the cover.

"S.A.C.—your initials," he said. "'Sure and Certain,' eh?" He laughed.

This time she made no attempt to conceal her anger.

"You are not quite as original as you think, Dr. Brock," she said, her lips trembling. "Those initials have been interpreted that way before by a man who

would be a little more competent than you to sit in judgment on my diagnosis."

"Who is that?" he asked in surprise.

He had reached the stage in morphiomania where he found it impossible to take offense at rebuffs more pointed than Sylvia Crest's.

"John Wintermere," she said shortly, and he whistled.

"I remember," he said softly. "I heard some story about it from Mercers. He was rather sweet on you, wasn't he, and you had an awful row with him when you were a student, and—"

The girl had opened the door.

"If you will excuse me now, Dr. Brock, I shall be very glad to have this room," she said. "I am expecting some patients."

"Wintermere, eh?" He rose slowly, groping for his hat. "Good chap, Wintermere. He's married now, isn't he?"

He saw the girl's face go white.

"Married?" she faltered. "I don't know—perhaps—at any rate, it's no business of mine."

He chuckled. The effect of the marriage invention on the spur of the moment satisfied him.

"Perhaps he isn't—now I come to think of it. I was wrong to say he was married. Scared you, didn't it?"

She made no answer.

He turned at the door of the little house. "Jonas has taken you up and you'll get all the patients you want now, but, take my advice, combine business and pleasure by getting John Wintermere down to see Picton's kid. Picton has funked sending for him, though he knows Wintermere's opinion is the last word on spinal trouble—"

The door was slammed viciously in his face.

It seemed almost as though Brock's prophecy was to be fulfilled. As if some secret courier had run from house to house telling Tollford that the new woman doctor was under the sublime patronage of Jonas Picton and was no longer to be avoided. Patients appeared miraculously. Never before had Dr. Sylvia Crest's waiting-room been so crowded as it was that night.

She called the next day at the big house to see her little patient. Picton's car

was at the door, and, as she walked up, the big man was pulling on his gloves in the hall and greeted her with almost pathetic eagerness.

"Just come into the library, doctor," he said, opening a door. "I want to talk to you about Fay."

He ushered her into the room, closed the door behind her, and lowered his voice.

"I didn't tell you yesterday, doctor, that I had consulted Dr. Steyne. You've heard of Steyne?"

Sylvia nodded.

"I have heard of him," she smiled, "and I also know that you've consulted him."

Picton looked relieved.

"I'm glad to hear that," he said. "Somehow I didn't like telling you for fear"—he laughed a little nervously—"for fear the knowledge that Steyne had seen her would influence your opinion. You know that he takes a different view from yours? He calls the disease some infernal long name and says that it cannot be cured save by an operation, and that it is extremely rare that such operations are successful. Sit down, won't you?"

He followed her example, stripping off his gloves as he spoke, and gaining something of the animation and forcefulness which Tollford associated with his dominating personality.

"There's another man, Wintermere," Picton went on. "You've heard of him?"

"I've heard of him," said Sylvia steadily.

"Well, they wanted me to bring him down to see the child, and I've heard that he's a pretty clever man. I met him when I was on my vacation, and he seems a very clever fellow, though a bit young looking for a specialist."

The name of John Wintermere invariably annoyed her. Today, with the memory of Brock's gibes so fresh in her mind, there was sounder reason for her irritation. But John Wintermere had been her master in surgery, and common decency demanded a testimonial.

"I don't think I should be deceived by his youthful appearance, Mr. Picton," she said. "I think he is the greatest surgeon in this country."

Jonas Picton pulled a wry face.

"I don't want any great surgeons," he said shortly. "I want a cure without surgery. And you think you can do it, don't you?"

Only for the fraction of a second did Sylvia hesitate.

"Yes, I think so, yes, I am cer—I am confident I can cure the child," she said, and if he noticed her confusion of terms he made no comment.

He rose quickly and gripped her arm with his big hand.

"My friend," he said, and his voice was a little shaky, "put my girl right and you shall never regret having come to Tollford."

Sylvia went up alone to the room of her patient, and she seemed to have lost something of the sprightliness of mind with which she had greeted the day.

In a large room chosen for its situation because its windows offered no view of her father's commercial activities, was the center and soul of Jonas Picton's existence.

"Hello, Miss Doctor!" said a cheery voice from the white bed, and Sylvia went across to her patient and took the thin hand in hers.

Fay Picton was seventeen and a prodigious bookworm; books covered the table by the side of the bed and filled two long cases which ran the length of the room. She was a pretty, fairy-like thing who turned big, smiling eyes to the newcomer.

"You're the first interesting doctor I've had," she said, "and I've had a lot. Your name is Sylvia, and it's what I'm going to call you. I couldn't tell you this yesterday because Daddy was here, and I had to appear impressed by all that stuff you were talking."

"And weren't you impressed?" smiled Sylvia, as she sat by the bed.

"Not a dreadful lot," said the girl, with disconcerting frankness. "You see, I know much more about my unhappy case than you or Daddy. I've read a lot about it."

But Sylvia was nettled. To suggest the fallibility of the young is outrageous.

"You ought not to have read any medical books," she said severely.

"Oh, skittles," said the patient contemptuously; "you don't suppose they'd let me have medical books, do you?"

"Well, where did you read about it?"

"In the encyclopædia, of course. Everything's in the encyclopædia, isn't it?"

Sylvia, for the first time in her life, was genuinely embarrassed.

"Well, anyway, we're going to cure you," she said cheerily, and Fay Picton laughed quietly.

"Of course you're not going to cure me," she said calmly. "This thing is more or less incurable. The only remedy is an operation, and there have been just four cases where an operation has been successful. Only Daddy shrieks inside himself at the very idea—poor soul!"

This was not exactly the start which Dr. Sylvia Crest had expected. She was dismayed at the thought that her task was to be doubly difficult and that she had two fights to wage—one against the disease and one against the skepticism of this self-possessed young person.

"You see, doctor dear, the spine and all its eccentricities is terra nova to the poor doctor," the patient went on remorselessly. She stopped suddenly as she saw the look in Sylvia's face. "I'm awfully sorry." She put out her hand and laid it on Sylvia's knee. "Anyway, it doesn't matter; do your best and come every day and talk to me, and I'll pray hard for faith in your treatment."

That was the beginning of the curious and torturing friendship which shook the self-confidence of Sylvia Crest more than the admonitions of professors or the jeers of Alan Brock.

"Fay is quite brightening up under the care of that woman doctor," Picton told his cronies, his managers, and the few who enjoyed the privilege of intimate friendship with him. "Never saw her looking so cheerful, my boy."

One afternoon Sylvia went in haste to her patient, obeying an urgent telephone summons from the nurse, and found the girl lying on her side, haggard and white, with a queer little smile on her face.

"Doctor, darling," said Fay, "send that gaunt female out of hearing and I'll tell you something."

Sylvia dismissed the nurse.

"Bend down as they do in books," whispered the girl, with a little laugh that ended in a grimace, "and I will tell you my guilty secret."

"What is wrong, dear?" asked Sylvia.

She was in a panic—an unreasonable, fearful panic—and there was need to exercise control, lest her voice betrayed her. The girl's bright eyes were fixed on hers, and there was elfish laughter struggling with the pain in her voice.

"If we could have a little slow music," she whispered, "I think it would be appropriate. Sylvia, you won't let that raw-boned creature weep over me, will you?"

"For God's sake, Fay, be quiet," said Sylvia hoarsely. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm going to glory," said the girl. "I sort of know it."

"Let me see."

Sylvia's hand trembled as she examined the spine. The tiny swelling which it had been her daily care to reduce had grown ominously, and there were other certain symptoms which could not be ignored.

Jonas Picton, called from a board meeting, came back to the house and listened in silence whilst Sylvia told the new development.

He seemed to shrink visibly at the telling, and when he spoke his voice was husky.

"I—I had a lot of confidence in you, doctor," he said. "Do you think—do you think there is anything to be done—"

Sylvia was silent for a while. But he might have foretold her answer in the sudden stiffening of her body and the upward throw of her chin.

"I still have faith in my treatment," she said.

He did not speak again, but sat on the edge of his chair, his head bent forward, his fingers twining, and then without a word he rose and went up to the girl's room.

Sylvia did not follow him. Somehow she knew instinctively that he wished to go alone. She waited for ten minutes and then he came back. He did not look at her, but walked to the window and stared out. Presently he turned.

"Who is the best surgeon in this country?" he asked.

"John Wintermere of Mercer's Hospital," she replied.

He nodded and went out of the room. Then he came back and opened the door wide, but he did not come into the room, nor did he look at her.

"You'd better go up and see Fay," he said. "I've telephoned to Dr. Wintermere, and he will be here this evening."

Sylvia Crest walked heavily up the stairs. She had heard the doom of her professional career, as though it were pronounced by a judge.

Fay lay with her face turned to the door, and as the girl entered she beckoned her.

"I had to do it, Sylvia darling," she said. "You don't mind me taking liberties with my staid old family doctor?"

She took the older girl's hand between hers and fondled it.

"Had to do what, dear?" asked Sylvia quietly.

"I had to tell him to send for Wintermere."

"You told him?" said Sylvia in surprise.

The girl nodded.

"You see, I've been thinking things out, and it occurred to me that I might be the fifth case in history, and really, for poor Daddy's sake, I ought to take a chance. You don't mind, do you, not really?"

Sylvia stooped and kissed the girl.

"No, dear," she said.

"It means a tremendous lot to you, in your profession, doesn't it, I mean your—your—" Fay checked the words.

"My mistaken diagnosis," finished Sylvia, with a laugh. "Yes, I suppose it does, but it means more to me that you should have the best treatment, irrespective of my fine feelings, and even though the treatment is contrary to my idea of what is right."

Sylvia waited at the house the whole of that afternoon, and she was alone in the drawing-room when John Wintermere came. She had nerved herself for the meeting, and was in consequence more cold and more formal in her attitude than she intended.

He walked slowly across the room to her, and it seemed as though the passage of six years had made no alteration in the disparity of their relationships. He was still the professor, she was still the student, though she felt she had grown older at a faster rate than he. But he was also the man who had held her hand one sunny day in the hospital gardens and had spoken incoherently of love, urging her to drop the profession to which she had dedicated her life. Perhaps the memory of this added to the awkwardness of the meeting.

"I'm glad to see you again, Sylvia," he said in that soft voice of his. "It is curious I should be called into a case of yours. Won't you tell me about it?"

She did not resent the "Sylvia." It came so naturally and rightly, and, in the detailing of Fay Picton's case, her nervousness wore off. He listened gravely, interjecting now and again a question, and when she had finished he heaved a long sigh.

"Well?" she challenged.

He hesitated.

"It may be what you think," he said, "but it seems to me that the symptoms

suggest a series of complications. Have you"—he hesitated again—"have you offered a definite opinion?"

She nodded.

"Did you tell Picton that the case would yield to your treatment?"

She nodded again, and his face lengthened.

"So if the opinion I give is in contradiction to yours...?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"If that is the case," she said, "I shall regret not having followed the advice you offered to me six years ago."

He was looking at her thoughtfully.

"It would mean ruin for you, of course," he said. "I—I wish I had not been called in."

"That's absurd, Dr. Wintermere," she said sharply. "Personal friendship and that sort of thing—I don't mean friendship," she went on confused, "I mean—"

"I know what you mean," said Wintermere. "Will you take me up to the child?"

Jonas Picton was in the room when they went in, and he remained by one of the windows whilst the examination was in progress. After a while Wintermere rearranged the bedclothes.

"Well?" said Fay, looking up into his face, with a smile; "to be or not to be?"

He smiled back at her and gently twiggled the end of her nose.

"That is the privilege of an eminent specialist," he said gravely.

"To be or not to be?" persisted the girl.

"Fay, Fay, don't talk about such things." It was her father who had come to her bedside and had taken her little hand in his. "Don't talk about things so flippantly, darling. You hurt your old Dad."

Then with sudden resolution he looked across the bed to Wintermere, and asked harshly:

"Is an operation necessary?"

Sylvia held her breath. Her heart was pounding violently, and she felt as though she were going to faint. What would the verdict be? She knew too well what sentence would follow that verdict. She met the grave, earnest eyes of John Wintermere, and there was in hers a momentary plea for mercy. She

hated herself for it. She knew that deep in her woman's heart was only one desire—the health and the life of the frail child who was looking with a quizzical smile from one to the other.

"Well?" asked Picton. "Is an operation necessary?"

Wintermere cleared his throat.

"An operation is not only necessary but imperative," he said steadily, "and it must be performed at once."

Picton, with a groan, turned on his heel and walked from the room.

Sylvia saw the doctor only once again before the operation. At the request of the girl she was staying in the house. Picton had retired to his library and was not visible, and the girl was left alone in the big, cheerless drawing-room to plan her new future. She would have offered to help had Wintermere given her any encouragement, but he had (purposely, it seemed) made her attendance unnecessary by telephoning for an anæsthetist. So Sylvia sat and thought. She told herself a dozen times that every doctor makes a mistake, and the fact that their diagnoses were occasionally refuted does not ruin their career.

But it was not what the world might think of Sylvia Crest that worried her and that drove her to a condition of blank despair. It was the shattering of her own faith in Sylvia Crest.

At ten o'clock that night she went up to see the child and found her cheerful—even gay.

"Sylvia, my duck, sit down here," said Fay Picton, patting the side of the bed with her white hand, "and don't worry, because I'm going to be the miraculous fifth. I like your Dr. Wintermere."

"My Dr. Wintermere?" The protest was forced from Sylvia.

"Your Dr. Wintermere," said the girl coolly. "He's awfully good-looking, isn't he, and not so very old. I should hate having a man with whiskers carving me about. And he's fond of you. I saw him looking at you like the film hero looks at the poor but honest shop-girl. He devoured you—that's the word, my dear."

"Don't talk nonsense, please, Fay. You ought to be preparing yourself."

"For a happier life," the patient laughed softly.

"Now go down and see father, and tell him that I am brave but happy."

She had left the room, and was at the head of the stairs when she met Wintermere. They stopped, facing one another on the landing, and it was Sylvia who spoke first.

"I hope it is going to be very successful, doctor," she said.

"I hope so," he replied drearily. "God knows, this is the most awful end to six years of dreaming that could be imagined. Anybody but you—if it had been anybody but you, Sylvia."

She shook her head.

"If I am wrong, I am terribly wrong," she said. "If you are right, I shall thank God for it all my days."

He bowed his head for a second and walked past her.

To Sylvia's surprise she found Picton waiting for her in the drawing-room. And he was calmer and more friendly than she had expected. She delivered her message in a modified form, and he nodded and turned the conversation to a more general subject. So they talked for half an hour on matters which did not interest them, and their hearts and minds were in the room above.

Unexpectedly the old man turned the conversation to Sylvia herself.

"Doctor," he said, "I know you did your best for my little girl, and you've done all you could to make her happy—to make me happy too," he added, then paused as though he was in some doubt as to how he should proceed. "What I mean is this," he said, with an effort—"that whatever is the outcome of this," he waved his hand to the door, "I do not blame you."

"I shall not need your blame," said Sylvia in a low tone; "if I am wrong, I shall never practice again."

"You'll never practice again," he repeated. "Then this is a tragedy for both of us."

She bent her head. The handle of the door turned, and both sprang up as John Wintermere came in. He wore a long white wrapper, and had evidently come straight from his task. His face was white and drawn, and he looked from one to the other in silence as he closed the door behind him. Picton was shaking in every limb.

"Well—well?" he asked in a curiously squeaky voice.

John Wintermere nodded.

"Your daughter will recover," he said, "and, I believe, will be a strong and healthy girl."

"Thank God for that!" gasped the old man, and falling into his chair, he covered his face with his hands, his shoulders shaking.

"I want to say something else, please."

Picton lifted his tear-stained face to the man in the white wrapper, but John Wintermere was looking at Sylvia.

"I want to say this," he said, "that when the operation was well advanced I discovered that it was unnecessary."

"Unnecessary!" cried Sylvia.

And again he nodded.

"I am satisfied," he said, speaking slowly, "that had Dr. Crest's treatment been continued, your daughter would have made a complete recovery without recourse to the knife."

Then he walked from the room without another word.

It was the anæsthetist whom Sylvia saw just before he left the house that night, and she talked to him as doctor to doctor.

"Yes, he's a wonderful chap, Wintermere," said that medico, with a sigh of admiration and envy. "She'll recover all right. Yes, he's a wonderful fellow. Good-night, doctor." She smiled to herself in the darkness of the porch before the house.

Wintermere was saying good-night to Picton, who was almost hysterical in his relief and happiness. When he came out, Sylvia was waiting for him.

"Send your car on," she said; "I want to walk a little way with you."

It was a slow and a silent walk, and when the time for parting came, Sylvia turned to the man at her side and laid her hands on his shoulders.

"John," she said, "I'm going out of this profession."

"You're mad," he said, and his voice trembled. "You—you were right in this case."

She laughed quietly.

"You dear liar," she said, and kissed him.

4. THE MEDIAEVAL MIND

There can be no question that the D'Ortons were mediaeval minded. Charles, the eldest of the brothers (he was once a doctor), had been twice submitted to the indignity of a police prosecution—once for beating a youthful robber of his orchards; once for an assault upon a serf of his who had expressed political

views which were violently opposed to those held by his master. The Reverend Hubert, that hard-faced curate of souls, was in conflict with his evangelical bishop most of the time, and had created what were locally known as "scandals" by his treatment of parishioners; and Leslie D'Orton, youngest of the trio, had carried his mediaevalism to such lengths that his effigy had been burnt by the enraged villagers of Badleigh-in-the-Moor.

They were men who sincerely hated the spirit of the time, though they were not averse from its conveniences. Electric light and motor cars, and expensive flats in Park Lane—all the advantages which are to be had by pushing buttons and turning switches were tolerable despite their modernity. They loathed the vulgar rich and despised the still more vulgar poor. Charles, white-haired and red-faced, had only French servants at his little palace near Saffron Walden; the Reverend Hubert was the only parson in England who never went about without his walking footman.

It was the D'Ortons' misfortune that Jean Alys D'Orton was entirely devoid of the mediaeval spirit. She was, it is true, only a half-sister, the relic of an unfortunate and indiscreet marriage contracted by their father, in his middle age, with one Mary Jean Potter, a very pretty lady, entirely without historical associations. She brought to the family no coat-of-armor, no lions couchant or leopards rampant; no more of heraldry indeed than was to be found inscribed on the six hundred thousand golden sovereigns which were hers (had she exchanged paper for metal) and which now should have been her daughter's. Miss Potter was literally the daughter of potters, rich Midland potters—but potters.

"I am common clay, Charles," said Jean, when he had remonstrated with her over some low escapade of her teens. "I have nothing that is Plantagenet in my system. When I wish to meet artists and dance with actors, my conscience doesn't prick me a little bit."

She was a slim, tall, pretty girl with yellowish ("clay-colored," said the Rev. Hubert) hair, and she had eyes like her mother's—big and dark and devastating.

That they had entirely devastated one susceptible man was the main reason why the three brothers sat at breakfast in Leslie D'Orton's flat one dull November morning. It was something more than a meal: it was a board meeting of the Mediaevalism Corporation. Something more serious than that even. There was a morning newspaper on the table, folded to display an alarming and a very inopportune column that had thrust itself into notice.

In a sense the news it contained struck at all the ancient privilege of class—those fine rights of acquisition and maintenance which established the castles

of the Rhine and the strongholds of the Komitadjis.

"Very depressing," said Charles, and stroked his trim white moustache thoughtfully. "Deuced unpleasant."

"But these were trustees of a public company," insisted the Rev. Hubert. "I don't think it comes quite into the same category, Leslie? Are we not taking rather a fantastic view of—er—possibilities?"

The thin-faced young man with the deep-set eyes shook his head.

"My dear fellow, I'm a lawyer, or I'm supposed to be one. What is the use of deceiving ourselves?"

The Rev. Hubert picked up the paper again. The column which interested him was headed: "Seven Years for Faithless Trustees." He abominated the word "faithless."

"The responsibility for all this," he said soberly, "lies with that wretched Potter woman. It was a crime to leave the money in... as it were... after all, we have done our best."

"Let me put the matter plainly and a little brutally," said Leslie, as he pushed back from the table. "We three are the trustees of some £630,000. We have administered the money in a way which no court of law would countenance. If Jean marries the right kind of man—that is to say, if we could pick and choose her husband—there could be nothing to worry about. But Jean 1"

They were silent at this, being one in their despair of Jean and her erratic and vulgar predilections.

"You don't think this Mortiboy affair is serious?" asked Hubert.

"Mortimer," corrected Leslie. "Yes, I do. If he were the ordinary type of smug missionary, I shouldn't worry. The kind of fellow who runs an uplift mission in the East End is generally illiterate and usually common. But according to Jean, Mortimer is a Cambridge man, by no means pious, and more interested in teaching boys to box than saving their immortal souls."

"Diabolical!" said Hubert, with a grimace. "I preached a sermon on that very subject last Sunday—"

"We don't want sermons now, Hubert," said Charles testily. "Here is the point: we're in a devil of a mess if Jean decides to run away with this wretched youth. What is he like?"

They both looked at Leslie for information, but he shook his head.

"I haven't met him. Jean wanted to bring him to dinner, but I put my foot

down. The only thing I. know about him is that he has beautiful eyes and a noble character, and that his handicap at golf is some ridiculous figure."

"Four," grunted Charles. "You told me that. I thought it was absurd. I can't understand how any man can keep his handicap at four if he wastes his time running sing-songs for the scum of Whitechapel. What is his profession?"

Leslie looked at him significantly.

"He is a lawyer," he said; "in the solicitors' branch, and that makes it worse."

Another long silence.

"How much of Jean's money is left?" asked Hubert.

The red-faced Charles coughed. He was the financial genius of the family.

"More than a half," he said loudly; "and I am perfectly certain that the Court would accept our explanation—"

"The Court would accept no explanation," said Leslie. "You can make up your mind on that subject. A hundred thousand pounds spent on a treasure-hunting expedition to Cocos Island is not what any Chancery judge would agree as a gilt-edged adventure."

"Tiggerly is honest enough," said Hubert. "A thoroughly reliable man. A little coarse of speech—"

"And a little mad," broke in Leslie. "He is coming up to see me tonight, by the way. He says he knows now where he made his mistake.... If we can finance another expedition..."

It was characteristic of the D'Ortons that such a statement was not received with derision. Bather was their attitude one of regret.

"How far has this affair gone?" asked Charles.

"The Mortimer affair?" Leslie bit his thin lower lip. "Very far, I should imagine. He wrote to me asking for a private interview. That means business. There is... how much left!"

"Nearly three hundred thousand," said Charles D'Orton. "Nearly... quite enough for any girl."

"Three—nearly," repeated the younger brother mechanically. "Now if we could arrange a marriage to anybody but this down-and-out adventurer..."

At that particular moment Jean Alys D'Orton was arranging a marriage with no other assistance than a rather good-looking young athlete could give to her.

She was walking slowly across Green Park, and the man who paced by her

side had none of the appearance which is usually associated with a down-and-out adventurer.

"My dear," he was saying, "how can I meet these formidable brothers of yours?"

She smiled ruefully.

"There is going to be an awful row, Jack; they won't meet you! You don't know the heroic efforts I've made to get an audience of their majesties."

"Will you risk a cold in the head and sit down?" he asked. They were very near to the entrance of the park. "What is the real trouble? They can't object to me personally, because they don't know anything about me. They can't imagine that I'm a fortune-hunter, because I've money of my own. And if they took the trouble to inquire into the beginnings of my obscure family—"

She shook her head.

"My dear, they frighten me sometimes; they're mediaeval." She turned round suddenly and faced him. "You've heard about the old barons who put their young sisters in a turret room and kept them there for years to keep their dowries? They're like that, Johnny. Don't laugh—I'm awfully serious. Fortunately, they haven't the turret room, but they have the turret mind."

"But what is it all about?" he asked, puzzled. "What is their objection? They don't want to keep you single all their lives? And is your dowry a tremendous amount?"

She evaded this question.

"Did you write to Leslie, as I asked?"

He nodded and felt in his pocket.

"I had a letter back from his secretary requesting me to refrain in future from addressing him. I nearly went round and kicked him."

"I wish you had," she said gloomily.

She was silent for a while, and then:

"It is to do with the dowry. I don't know how exactly—"

"Are they your trustees?" he asked quickly. "Your brothers, I mean?"

She nodded.

"When do you have control?"

"When I am twenty-five or when I am married." she answered, and he

whistled.

"I wonder!"

Jack Mortimer knew a great deal more about the aristocratic D'Ortons than they imagined.

"Queer devils!" he said at last. "Are they by any chance your guardians in law? Can they prevent your marriage?"

She shook her head.

"Then what the dickens have we to worry about?" asked Jack Mortimer joyously.

Half an hour later she was passing to her room, when Leslie called her into his study. She shared the flat with her half-brother, but it was about the fourth time in the long years of their association that she had ever been invited into that handsome apartment.

"Charles has gone back to Devonshire," he said, without preliminary, "and he's awfully anxious about you, Jean—about your health, I mean. He wanted to know whether you would like to come down and spend a few weeks in the country."

She looked at him in astonishment.

"Why?" she asked, and then: "Anyway, I couldn't possibly go." It needed a little courage to say. but she got the words out at last. "Leslie, I'm going to be married."

The hand that went up to his upper lip shook a little.

"Really? This is news. You realize you cannot get married without the consent of your guardians!"

"I have no guardians," she replied, so brusquely that his heart sank. Evidently she had been taking advice. At any rate he did not dispute this point.

"When is the interesting event to be?"

The actual date had never been discussed. She made up her mind quickly.

"In a fortnight," she said. "Just before Christmas. Mr. Mortimer and I are going away to Switzerland."

He scratched his chin, his dark eyes never leaving her face.

"This is very... unexpected," he said. "I am not so sure that Charles will approve."

Charles was the senior of the brothers, and theoretically the head of the house.

"And, Leslie"—she was nervous now, on delicate ground, and spoke hurriedly—"Jack—Mr. Mortimer said that when we returned from our honeymoon would be time for him to discuss... business with you... I mean, the question of my money. I told him I came into control on my marriage."

"That interested him, I am sure," said Leslie dryly; it was a tactical error on his part.

"Jack Mortimer has all the money that we shall ever require," she said coldly. "He has an income of his own. If you do not wish him to discuss the matters, his lawyers—"

"There is no reason why he shouldn't discuss it," said Leslie abruptly, and then, with a nod, dismissed her. It was not an unusual method of parting.

Leslie got his elder brother on the phone just before he left his hotel for the country. Hubert was still in London. That afternoon there was a consultation/ at the end of which Leslie went to Lincoln's Inn Fields and consulted a school-friend who was also a lawyer. The solicitor's face lengthened as he heard the frank recital.

"You're not serious?" he asked, when the young man had finished. "Because, if you are, you're in about as bad a position as you can possibly be."

"We've employed the money to the best of our ability " began Leslie, but the lawyer stopped him.

"By your admission you've used enormous sums for your own personal benefit. You have in fact been living on your sister's capital for the past six years. If this went into Court, nothing could save you from penal servitude."

Leslie D'Orton's face went white.

"You mean that seriously?" The lawyer nodded.

"And of course this would affect also your two brothers. You've put yourselves in rather a tight place, my friend, and the only thing I can suggest is that you persuade your sister to postpone her marriage. In other words, postpone your exposure."

Poor comfort was this to carry to his brethren. The three men met in Charles's sitting-room at Paddington, and three mediaeval minds found one solution simultaneously.

"Jean mustn't marry," said the Rev. Hubert; "or if she marries, it must be a man of our finding."

They consulted through the hours that followed, and in the end, when Leslie D'Orton, stiff with sitting, rose and stretched himself, he had one comment to make which was both illuminating and truthful.

"Whichever way the thing goes, it means penal servitude for all of us."

The Rev. Hubert, least perturbed of the trio, offered the sententious observation that one might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. Leslie got back to his flat to find a burly, middle-aged sea-captain waiting for him, and Captain Tiggerly was prepared to talk to the extent of his vocabulary on enormous treasures buried under landslides on Cocos Island.

Even by the lax standard of the sea, he was not a nice man. His earlier adventure in search of treasure had been hampered by a mutiny, which he had quelled single-handed; he narrowly escaped a charge of manslaughter in consequence. But he was an enthusiast.

"Here's the old sloop, ready for another go, my lord." (Invariably he addressed his benefactor by this title.) "I could take in all the stores I wanted in a week... she wants two new yards..."

"Can you find a crew?" asked Leslie.

The seaman grinned.

"Pick 'em up two a penny," he said. "I got a sort of crew now—I've been carrying cement—"

"Where are you lying?"

"In the Pool," said the captain quickly. "You can come over and see her if you like."

Leslie went into the hall and called the maid.

"No, sir," she replied. "Miss D'Orton went out to dinner. A gentleman called for her. He asked for you."

Leslie nodded, closed the door carefully behind him, and fastened the baize door, which further precluded all eavesdropping. Then he sat down at the table opposite the skipper.

"There's a man," he began, "named Mortimer. He runs a boys' club at Wapping..."

Nearly a month later there were peculiar happenings on the edge of Dartmoor. On the morning of the 23rd of December the inhabitants of the villages, within gunshot of Prince-town, heard the boom of a cannon. That deep and awesome sound meant only one thing. Farmers called in their hired men to give

instructions about the locking up of barns, the fastening of windows. Later, big cars loaded with policemen and warders came slowly through the mist that lay on the moor, stopped long enough to tell of the escape of a convict serving a life sentence for murder, and passed on. The mist turned to rain, and a gale blew up from the Channel.

The night that followed was a desperate one for a man who, traveling only by night, was making his way to Exeter. He came in time to a high ridge of ground, felt for a flat-topped boulder, found one passably comfortable, and sat down to recover his breath. He was in excellent condition, but he had not eaten that day, and he had walked sixteen miles since sundown over a country which was largely foreign to him. And now it was very dark, and the road he had chosen was no more than a hillside track. He was wet through, naturally; it had not ceased raining since he made his escape. Almost he had forgotten what it felt like to be dry: "amphibian"—that was the word; he had been trying to think of it all day.

The rain soaked down and he was content. His left heel was blistered, he had torn both hands with brambles, and the little scratches were painful in a sharp, nagging kind of way. There had been compensations both for solitude and hardship: the fragrance of pine smoke trailing in the wind from a cottage chimney; the sound of a child's laughter that came through an open window just before a nurse or mother had closed it; the fairylike lights of a tiny village lying in the fold of the moor and seen from a high crag that jutted up from the hillside like a gaunt monolith.

He wished he had a cigar—one of those long, thin brown things that he loved to smoke. Or a pipe or a cigarette even. But wishes put weight on a man's feet and a new burden to his heart. He got up stiffly and went over the crest, descending gingerly and with great caution the steep slope on the other side.

He had an uncanny feeling that danger was very near at hand; that he was being spied upon, though the night was like ink. Once he imagined he had heard the ring of an iron-shod foot....

The hill sloped steeply on his right, and he walked on the side of his feet most of the time. He could see nothing, hear nothing but the "tipple- tipple" of rain on rock. Far away to the north the low, scudding clouds were dyed salmon pink. A big town there, he thought—Exeter. Or maybe... no, it must be Exeter. And was it north or east? The wind helped him to determine. These storms blew in from the Atlantic—south-west. The glow in the sky was on his left front as he stood with his back to the weather. North.

He went farther down the track, and of a sudden it became smooth to his feet. A made road. He felt leftwards cautiously. A wire fence with cylindrical posts

and concrete. And there was a shallow ditch. A farm or a house perhaps—then unexpectedly lights came into view. He must have rounded a shoulder of rock. A big house. He could see the glow of many windows.

The man called Tom Burt halted to take counsel with himself, and decided to push on. He had gone a dozen paces....

"Hands up!"

The voice was harsh, inhuman. It was more like the bark of an infuriated crocodile.

"Don't you move or I'll put a dose of shot into your stummick.... Joe!"

He must have roared the word over his shoulder, for his voice sounded fainter.

Mr. Burt was startled alike by the command and by the astonishing fact that he could be seen by his invisible enemy.

"Joe... dam' ye!"

A shuffle of footsteps and a squeaky voice came from the darkness.

"Gotcher gun... see him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Shoot him if he don't do as I tell him. Walk, mister—straight ahead."

Burt obeyed.

Now he understood. His challenger was waist-high in a ditch, and the wayfarer had been visible against the gloomy skyline.

"Go on—right up to the house. I'm follerin' you. Don't let him out of your sight, Joe."

"No, sir," said the unseen youth.

Tom Burt was amused in a ghastly way (that was his own description), but he was puzzled too. The house was large, and, as he had seen, three of the rooms were brightly illuminated. There was a white-pillared portico before the door, and under this were two powerful lamps that threw an oblong of light on the yellow-graveled ground.

The door was open and he had sight of a broad, paneled hall; a red fire burnt on an open hearth. The masks of a dozen foxes stared stonily from the walls. He saw a rack of hunting-crops, and behind the glass window of a cabinet, a dozen guns.

"Stop where you are now and turn round. Joe, shut that door!"

Burt swung round.

He had guessed his captor was old; there was no surprise here. He was picturesque with his white beard and bald head shining with moisture. Dark, menacing eyes glared from under the bushy white eyebrows; how he might be dressed was a matter for conjecture—he wore a dark weatherproof that reached to his heels. The long-barrelled army revolver in his hand did not waver as did the shot-gun in the hands of the boy. The youth's teeth were chattering, the eyes in the pale face were scared and fearful. He started the door closing with his foot, and backed up to it until with a bend of his spare body he closed it with a crash.

"Just you wait here: this boy'll kill you sure as God if you move!"

The old man slouched past him. Burt heard the sound of a door open and close. There was a long mirror in the hall and he was standing opposite, he found, when he turned his head.

A ludicrous sight! His sodden overcoat clung to his legs, the brim of his sou'-wester dropped dismally over his ears. He was terribly unshaven, and when he smiled he was hideous.

"A merry Christmas!" he said, and bowed to himself.

The youth breathed heavily.

"Don't you go movin' about, mister!" he warned.

Burt grinned at himself again for the joy of experiencing his own ugliness.

"Be of good heart, my child," he said, and the snub nose of the youth wrinkled in embarrassment.

A door opened behind the prisoner.

"Come on!"

Mr. Burt turned and walked through the open door. He was in a large hall with a high rafted ceiling. Before the stone fireplace two men were standing. One, the younger, was in evening dress; the elder wore a faded golf suit. He was very stout, red-faced, and white-haired, and his eyes protruded like a pug dog's. His companion, a thin-faced man with a black smear of moustache, stood with his back to the fire, his hands behind him.

"Good evening," he said, with ironical politeness. "I hope you have enjoyed your walk?"

"The air was good," replied Burt, "the scenery, I have no doubt, was excellent, but the feeding was exceedingly poor."

The elder of the two turned to the old man.

"Get him some food," he said gruffly.

A little clock ticked musically in some part of the room, and this, and the falling of a log in the fireplace, were the only sounds that disturbed the interval of silence between the old man's departure and his return with a tray.

"All right—leave it, Gald," nodded the younger man, and when the door had closed on the ancient: "Eat, my friend—"

"And drink," suggested Mr. Burt as he sat down at the table, "and, in view of the festive season, be merry? Tell me that tomorrow I die and I shall call you a liar."

"Damn cheek," growled the red-faced man, but his companion silenced him with a look.

The wanderer was very hungry, but he was also very sane. He did not eat ravenously, but slowly, and was still hungry when he pushed back his plate and drained the long glass of beer.

"A full man is a dull man," he said. "Would you of your charity supply me with a cigarette?"

The younger of the two offered a gold case and his unwilling guest took and lit a cigarette.

"Now," he said, "produce your denouement!"

"Who are you?" asked the younger man.

"Haroun al Raschid," smiled Burt. "A prince in disguise wandering about the earth to learn at first hand of the lives and trials of his people."

"You're the man who escaped from Dartmoor Prison last night"—the young man spoke with great deliberation and care. "I haven't had time to discover your name, but I don't think that matters for the moment. Are you married?"

There was an amused glint in Burt's eyes as he shook his head.

"Would you be willing to marry a lady for five thousand pounds and an aeroplane trip to safety?"

"And a new and dry suit of clothes," suggested Burt; "and by clothes I include such indelicacies as underwear."

"Why argue with him?" exploded the red-faced gentleman. "Tell him he's got to do it; tell him you'll hand him over to the police an' all that. Damn it all, Leslie..."

"Be quiet, Charles, please," said Leslie O'Orton. "Let me manage in my own way—"

"Excuse me." Mr. Burt was pardonably intrigued. "Marriages are much easier arranged in heaven than performed on earth. There are certain time- wasting preliminaries, banns, special licences, and so forth, are there not? I hate to suggest—"

"That is arranged," said Leslie.

He walked up and down the broad strip of carpet before the fireplace, his hands behind him.

"I am going to take you into my confidence... by the way, you are a convicted murderer? A life prisoner?"

"Is it necessary to call me names?" asked the other.

"It isn't, of course. You seem to have been a gentleman. That will make things easier. I have—we have a sister. It is not necessary to tell you the kind of foolish trouble she has got into. It is necessary that she should be married. You were our choice from the moment we heard of your escape."

"I am flattered." Mr. Burt showed his teeth in a smile.

""We have been looking for you all day: by the greatest of good luck we heard through the police that you were heading this way. My old groom found you without having the least idea as to our plans."

"Pardon me: is your sister a willing agent in the matter!"

Charles grunted something.

"That is neither here nor there," said Leslie. "There is another man, of course: he is at the moment on a sailing ship bound for the Pacific. You need not consider him."

He saw the eyes of the man open wider.

"Good God! You shanghaied him!"

Leslie smiled.

"That is beside the point. Are you prepared to marry this lady?"

"But I understand that by the laws of the country " began Mr. Burt.

"A marriage is only legal when performed within certain hours. We have a special license dispensing with that formality. Are you agreeable? If so, my brother's car is waiting to take you to London. You need have no fear about detection: we have taken the most elaborate precautions—we believe in

miracles and we anticipated the miracle of your arrival. Do you agree?"

Mr. Burt nodded.

"It is all one to me," he said. "The mystery of it appeals to me."

Leslie went out of the hall and made his way upstairs. There was no turret tower in Charles D'Orton's Devonshire house, but there was an attic chamber which served the purpose. No weak maiden wrung her hands or wept in this lumber room. The girl who sat glowering at the Reverend Hubert was neither subdued nor tearful.

"... it is only because I think you are all mad that I listen to you," she was saying when Leslie entered the room. "You can't imagine that I shall overlook this..."

She looked up at Leslie.

"Have you found my ideal husband?" she demanded, her eyes hard with anger.

To her surprise he nodded.

"You have to be sensible, Jean. This man Mortimer was not the man for you. As I have told you, he was already married—"

"Why did you send a wire in his name saying he was here and wanted to see me?" she asked furiously. "If any harm has come to Jack Mortimer I will never rest until I have put you in prison. Mediaeval? You're prehistoric, Leslie... mad. And as to this man you've got, you can send him away. Or I'll tell him—"

"He knows," said Leslie, and his gravity almost sent her into a fit of hysterical laughter. "As soon as you are married he will leave you," said Leslie, who did all the talking. "We are doing this for your own good, Jean, to protect you against fortune-hunters. In a few years' time you can divorce this man—"

"I'll not marry him—can I see him!" she asked suddenly.

"Please remember, Jean " began the Reverend Hubert in his most ponderous tone.

But she had followed her half-brother from the room. For three days she had paced this little attic room, trying to wrest reality from a situation so fantastic that she could not believe she was waking. She had her moments of panic, too....

She almost ran into the hall. Her husband-designate was sitting at the end of the long table, a second glass of beer before him.

"Is this the lady?" he asked.

"This is the lady," said Leslie.

"She is not favorably impressed by me," said Tom Burt, "and I can hardly blame her."

At the sight of the scarecrow the girl's face had gone the color of chalk. The man rose and bowed.

"In happier times, madame, I was better looking." He turned to Leslie. "Do you anticipate any very strong objection on the part of the lady? I ask because, as you probably know if you have studied my career of crime, I am something of a hypnotist! For example...!"

He snapped his fingers in the air, and the girl stared at him.

"What the devil " began the unimaginative Charles.

"This lady is now completely under control," said Mr. Burt calmly. "Ask her to do anything you wish and she will do it."

Leslie looked from one to the other in amazement.

"Will you marry this man?" he asked.

To his astonishment she nodded.

"Yes," she said dully.

Charles stared open-mouthed as the Reverend Hubert stumbled and blundered through the ancient ritual. Certain provisions had not been made.... Jean Alys D'Orton was married with Leslie's signet ring.

He left her sitting limply in a chair, staring at her husband, and hurried to the telephone in his study.

"Is that the police station?... I am Mr. D'Orton. I have the man you want at my house—the escaped convict—"

"At your house, Mr. D'Orton?" was the surprising reply. "He was caught at Newton Abbot five hours ago!"

Leslie's jaw dropped.

"You mean Burt....?"

"No, sir, Collwood—"

Leslie flew back to the hall. The scarecrow was standing behind the girl's chair.

"What's your name!" he asked breathlessly.

Mr. Burt smiled.

"I have several. When old man Tiggerly got me aboard his dirty little ship he called me Tom Burt—when I jumped overboard off Teignmouth he called me several things that are unprintable. I heard him, because the boat in which he and his son followed me to shore was less than a dozen yards away when I got to land. He chased me on to the moor: if I hadn't gone to sleep and lost myself you would have been in prison hours ago. My real name, by the way is Mortimer—if there is anything in the marriage, that is your sister's name too!"

Charles did not refer to that dreadful night until the train was running along the Lake of Geneva a few days later. They were bound for Italy. Hubert followed as soon as he had disposed of his living—Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer were very reasonable.

"That hypnotism business... by Gad... to keep her quiet... we 'd have smelt a rat if she 'd jumped at him. By Gad, that's a lovely old building!" He pointed to the Chateau Chillon, which is undoubtedly mediaeval.

5. THE LOOKER AND THE LEAPER

Foley, the smoke-room oracle, has so often bored not only the members of the club, but a much wider circle of victims, by his views on heredity and the functions of the hormones—for he has a fluent pen and an entree to the columns of a certain newspaper that shall be—nameless—that one is averse to recalling his frayed theories.

He is the type of scientist who takes a correspondence course in such things as mnemonics, motor engineering, criminology, wireless telegraphy, and character-building. He paid nothing for the hormones, having found them in an English newspaper report of Professor Parrott's (is it the name?) lecture. Hormones are the little X's in your circulatory system which inflict upon an unsuspecting and innocent baby such calamities as his uncle's nose, his father's temper, and Cousin Minnie's unwholesome craving for Chopin and bobbed hair. The big fellows in the medical world hesitate to assign the exact function of the hormones or even to admit their existence.

Foley, on the contrary, is prepared to supply thumb-nail sketches and specifications. When you go to the writing-table in the "Silence" room, and find it littered with expensive stationery, more or less covered with scrawly-wags, it is safe betting that Foley has been introducing his new friend to some wretched member whom he has inveigled into an indiscreet interest.

But Hormones apart, there is one theory of evolution to which Foley has clung most tenaciously. And it is that the ultra-clever father has a fool for a son.

Whether it works the other way round he does not say. I should think not, for

Foley senior is in his eightieth year, believes in spiritualism, and speculates on margins.

Foley advanced his theory in relation to Dick Magnus.

John Seymour Magnus, his father, is popularly supposed to be in heaven, because of the many good qualities and characteristics recorded on the memorial tablet in St. Mary's Church. Thus: He was a Good Father, a Loving Husband and a Faithful Friend, and performed Many Charitable Deeds in This City.

There is nothing on the memorial tablet about his Successful Promotions or Real Estate Acquisitions. He was bracketed first as the keenest business man of his day. A shrewd, cunning general of commerce, who worked out his plans to the minutest detail, he ran his schemes to a time-table and was seldom late. All other men (except one) would comprehend the beginning and fruition of their schemes within the space of months. John Seymour Magnus saw the culmination of his secret politics three years ahead.

There was one other, a rival, who had the same crafty qualities. Carl Martingale was his contemporary, and it is an important circumstance that he supplied, in his son, a complete refutation of all Foley's theories. Carl and John died within twelve days of one another, and both their great businesses went to only sons.

Dick took over the old man's chair, and was so oppressed by his uncongenial surroundings that he sold it for a ridiculous figure to Steven Martingale. The two were friends, so the sale was effected over a luncheon for which Dick paid.

Steven had arranged the lunch weeks ahead, had decided upon the course of conversation which would lead up to the question of sale, and had prepared his reply when Dick was maneuvered into offering the property. For Steven was his parent, and worse. Old Carl was a selfmade boor, with no refined qualities. Steven had the appearance and speech of a gentleman and shared certain views on life with the anthropoid ape.

Ugly stories floated around, and once old Jennifer came into the club in a condition bordering on hysteria and drank himself maudlin. He had hoped to bag Steven for the family, and had allowed his pretty daughter Fay a very free hand.

Too free, it seems. Nothing happened which in any way discommoded Steven. The old fellow owed him an immense amount of money, and Steven knew to a penny the exact strength of these financial legions.

He was a strikingly handsome fellow, the type the shop-girls rave about—

dark, tall, broad of shoulder and lean of flank, an athlete and something of a wit. A greater contrast to Dick could not be imagined, for Dick was thinnish and small, fair haired, rather short-sighted (Steven's flashing eye and long lashes were features that fascinated) and languid.

But he did not develop his left-handedness until after he was married.

Both Dick and Steven courted Thelma Corbett, and never a day passed but that their cars were parked in the vicinity of the Corbett ménage. Corbett being on the danger-zone of bankruptcy was indifferent as to which of the two men succeeded in their quest, and Thelma was in a like case.

She was one of those pretty slender creatures whom, meeting, leave you with a vague unrest of mind. Where had you met her before? Then you realized (as I realized) that she was the ideal toward which all the line artists who ever drew pretty women were everlastingly striving. She was cold and sweet, independent and helpless, clever and vapid; you were never quite certain which was the real girl and which was the varnish and the finishing-school.

To everybody's surprise, she married Dick. Steven had willed it, of course. He half admitted as much one night between acts when we were smoking in the lobby of the Auditorium. Dick had at that time been married for the best part of a year and was childishly happy.

"I can't understand how Dick came to cut you out, Steven," I said. He was feeling pretty good toward me just about then, for I had pulled him through a sharp attack of grippe.

He laughed, that teasing little laugh of his.

"I thought it best," he said, a statement which could be taken two ways. That he was not exposing his modesty or displaying the least unselfishness, he went on to explain:

"She was too young, too placid. Some women are like that. The men who marry them never wake them up. Some go through life with their hearts asleep and die in the belief that they have been happy. They have lived without 'struggle,' and only 'struggle' can light the fire which produces the perfect woman. I figured it that way."

I was silent.

"I figured it that way"—a favorite expression of his—explained in a phrase the inexplicable.

"That is why you find the most unlikely women running away with the most impossible men," he went on; "the heavens are filled with the woes of perfect husbands and the courts shudder with their lamentations. They are bewildered,

stunned, outraged. They have showered their wealth and affection upon a delicate lady, and in return she has fled with a snubnosed chauffeur whose vocabulary is limited to twelve hundred words and whose worldly possessions are nil."

I said nothing, and soon after the bell rang and we went back to our seats. He drove me home that night and came up to my den for a drink, and I reopened the subject of Dick and his wife.

"Dick is one of Nature's waste products," he said. "He has neither initiative nor objective in life. How could old Magnus breed such a son? He was the cleverest, shrewdest, old devil in the City. Dick is just pap and putty—a good fellow and a useful fellow for holding my lady's wool or carrying my lady's Chow, but—"

He shook his head. "No 'struggle' there, Steve?" I asked. "Foley's theory works out in this case."

"Foley is a fool," smiled Steven. "What about me? Aren't I my father's son?"

I admitted that.

"No, Dick lives from breakfast to supper, and could no more work out a scheme as his father did than I could knit a necktie."

"And there is no 'struggle' in the establishment?" I repeated, and he nodded gravely. "There is no 'struggle,'" he said, and although he never said the words I felt him saying "as yet."

Steven became a frequent visitor at the Magnus' house—Dick told me this himself. "He's an amusing person," he said—I met him in the Park, and he stopped his car to talk"—and I can't help feeling that life is a little dull for Thelma."

It was much duller for people who were brought much into contact with Thelma, but I did not say so. She was the kind of hostess who wanted entertaining.

Everybody loved Dick in those days, and he was welcomed wherever he went. Later, when he passed through that remarkably awkward stage, a stage which we usually associate with extreme adolescence, he was not so popular, and I was a little bit worried about him. It grieved me to see a man with all the money in the world making a playtime of life, because people who live for play can find their only recreation in work, and he never expressed the slightest desire to engage himself in the pursuit which had built up his father's colossal fortune. He rode well, he shot well, he played a good game of golf, and it was a case of "Let's get Dick" for a fourth at bridge.

"The fact is," said Dick, when I tackled him one day, "heavy thinking bores me. Maybe if I had to, I would. Sometimes I feel that I have a flash of my father's genius, but I usually work out that moment of inspiration in a game of solitaire.

"One afternoon he took me home to tea, arriving a little earlier than usual. He was evidently surprised to find Steve's car drawn up near the house. He should have been more surprised when he walked through the French windows opening from the lawn to the drawing-room, and found Steve and Thelma side by side on a settee examining Medici prints. It may have been necessary for the proper study of Art that Steve's hand should be upon the girl's shoulder. Evidently she did not think so, for she tried to disengage herself, but Steve, much more experienced in the ways of the world, kept his hand in position and looked up with a smile. As for me, I felt *de trop*.

"Hello, people!" said Dick, glaring benignly into the flushed face of the girl, "do my eyes behold a scandal in process of evolution? Or have I interrupted an exposition on the art of Michael Angelo?"

Steve rose with a laugh.

"I brought Thelma some pictures," he said, "they're a new lot just published; they are rather fine, don't you think?"

Dick looked at the pictures and, having no artistic soul, said that they struck him as a little old-fashioned, and I saw the girl's lips curl in disdain of her husband, and felt a trifle sad.

Another time (I have learnt since) Dick found them lunching together at Madarino's, a curious circumstance in view of the fact that she had said she was going to spend the day with her mother.

Then one afternoon Dick went home and sounded his motor-horn loudly as he swept up the drive, and discovered his wife at one end of the drawing-room and Steve at the other, and they were discussing Theosophy loudly.

After tea Dick linked his arm in Steve's and took him into the grounds.

"Steve, old boy," he said affectionately, "I don't think I should come and see Thelma unless somebody else is here, old man."

"Why in Heaven's name shouldn't I?" asked Steve. "What rubbish you talk, Dick! Why, I've known Thelma as long as I've known you."

Dick scratched his chin.

"Yes, that seems a sound kind of argument," he said. "Still, I wouldn't if I were you. You know, servants and people of that kind talk."

But Steve smacked him on the back and told him not to be a goomp, and Thelma was so nice that evening that, when during a week-end Dick surprised his wife and Steve one morning walking with linked hands along an unfrequented path through the woods, he did no more than give them a cheery greeting, and passed on with a grin.

It was about this time that Dick started on his maladroitness career. He became careless in his dress, could not move without knocking things over, went altogether wrong in his bridge, so that you could always tell which was Dick's score by a glance at the block. There was usually a monument of hundreds, two hundreds, and five hundreds erected above the line on the debit side, and when men cut him as a partner they groaned openly and frankly.

Harry Wallstein, who is a lunatic collector, gave him a rare Ming vase to examine, and Dick dropped it, smashing the delicate china into a hundred pieces. Of course he insisted upon paying the loss, but he could not soothe Harry's anguished soul. He had a trick too, when he was taking tea with some of his women friends, of turning quickly in a drawing-room and sweeping all the cups on to the floor. In the street he escaped death by miracles. Once he stood in the center of a crowded thoroughfare at the rush hour to admire the amethystine skies. A motor lorry and two taxicabs piled themselves up on the sidewalk in consequence, for it had been raining and the roads were slippery.

Dick footed the bill for the damage and went on his awkward way. It is extraordinary how quickly a man acquires a reputation for eccentricity. People forgot the unoffending Dick that used to be, and knew only the dangerous fool who was. When he called on Mrs. Tolmarsh, whose collection of Venetian glass has no equal in the country, the butler was instructed never to leave his side, to guide him in and out of the drawing-room, and under no circumstances to allow him to handle the specimens which Mrs. Tolmarsh invariably handed round for the admiration of her guests. Nevertheless he managed to crash a sixteenth-century vase and a decanter which had been made specially for Fillipo, Tyrant of Milan, and was adorned with his viperish crest.

And in the meantime Steven gave up his practice of calling three times a week on Mrs. Magnus and called every day.

Dick did not seem to mind, although he took to returning home earlier than had been his practice. I might have warned Dick. I preferred, however, to say a few words to Steven, and I got him alone in a corner of the library and I did not mince my words.

"I shall not moralize, Steven," I said, "for that is not my way. You have your own code and your own peculiar ideas concerning women, and so far you've got away with it. I do not doubt that you will get away with this matter

because Dick seems to be drifting down the stream towards imbecility—but there are, thank Heaven, a few decent people in this town, and if you betray Dick you are going to have a pretty thin time. I won't commit the banality of asking you to look before you leap, because I know you're a pretty good looker!"

"Leaper!" he corrected. "No person who looks very carefully leaps at all. The world is divided into those two classes—lookers and leapers. Anyway, I am not very greatly concerned by what people think of me. If I were, I should have entered a monastery a long time ago. You've been straight with me, Doctor, and I'm going to be straight with you. My affairs are my affairs and concern nobody else. I shall do just as I think, and take a line which brings me the greatest satisfaction."

"Whosoever is hurt?" I asked.

"Whosoever is hurt," he said, and meant it. "I know just what is coming to me. I have figured it out."

There was no more to be said. To approach Dick was a much more delicate matter, for he was impervious to hints.

A week after I had talked to Steven I met Hariboy, who is a banker of standing and the president of my golf club. I met him professionally, for I had been called into his house to perform a minor operation on one of his children, and I was cleaning up in his dressing-room when he strolled in, and after some talk about the child he said:

"Steven Martingale is going away."

"Going away?" I repeated. "How do you know?"

"I know he has taken steamship accommodations for Bermuda. My secretary and his secretary are apparently friends, and she told my girl that Steven is doing a lot of rush work, and that he is leaving for a long holiday on the 18th."

"Do you know by what line?" I asked, and he told me.

Luckily the manager of the shipping office was a patient of mine, and I made it my business to call on him that afternoon.

"Yes, the ship leaves on the 18th," he said, "but I haven't Mr. Martingale on my passenger list."

We went through it together, and I traced my finger down the cabin numbers and their occupants.

"Who is this in No. 7 suite?" I asked. He put on his glasses and looked.

"Mr. and Mrs. Smith. I don't know who they are. It's not an uncommon name," he added humorously.

So that was that!

I do not think I should have moved any further in the matter if I had had the slightest degree of faith in Steven's honesty. But Steven was not a marrying man. He had once told me that under no circumstances would he think of binding his life with that of any woman, and had expounded his philosophy with that cold-blooded logic of his, which left me in no doubt at all that whatever fine promises he might make to Thelma Magnus, only one end of that adventure was inevitable.

I sought Dick all over the town, and ran him to earth in the first place I should have looked—the card-room of Proctor's Club. I entered the room in time to hear the peroration of a violent address on idiocy delivered by Dick's late partner. His opponents were too busy adding up the score to take any interest in the proceeding.

Dick sat back in his chair, his hands in his pockets, a little smile on his thin face.

"Fortunes of war, old top," he murmured from time to time.

"Fortunes of war be—" roared Staine; who was his victim. "You go four spades on the queen, knave to five, and not another trick in your hand...!"

"Fortunes of war, old top," said Dick again, paid his opponents and rose, upsetting the table and scattering the cards in all directions.

"Awfully sorry," he murmured; "really awfully sorry!"

That "awfully sorry" of his came mechanically now.

"Now, Dick," said I, when I'd got him into my car, "you're coming straight home with me, and I'm going to talk to you like an uncle."

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned. "Not about Thelma?" I was astounded, and I suppose looked my astonishment. "Everybody talks to me about Thelma," said Dick calmly. "She's a dear, good girl, and as honest as they make 'em. I'm not a very amusing chap, you know, Doctor," he said mournfully, "and Steven is the kind of fellow who can keep a room in roars of laughter."

"But, my dear, good man," I said impatiently, "don't you realize that a man of Steven's character does not call daily on your wife to tell her funny stories?"

"I don't know," said Dick vaguely. "Thelma seems to like him, and I've really no grudge against old Steve. He's a leaper too," he said, with a quick, sidelong glance at me, "and that makes him ever so much more interesting to the

women." he chuckled at my astonishment. "He was telling us the other night about that amusing conversation he had with you."

"He did not tell you the whole of the conversation, I'll swear," said I dryly, but Dick showed no curiosity.

"Old Steven is a good fellow," he repeated. "I like him, and I tell everybody who comes to me with stories about him and Thelma that he is my very best friend."

I groaned in the spirit.

"Then," said I in despair, "it is useless telling you that Steven has booked two berths by the steamer which leaves on the 18th for Bermuda."

He nodded. "I know; he is taking his aunt," he said. "I got the same yarn from Chalmers, and I asked Steven, and he told me, yes, he was going away—"

"In the name of Smith?" I asked pointedly.

"In the name of Smith," repeated Dick gravely. "After all, he's a big power in the financial world, Doctor, and it is not good business for him to advertise his comings and goings."

After that there was no more to be said.

"We're having a little party on the 17th at the house. I wish you would come along," said Dick before I left him. "I've particularly asked Steve to come. It will be a send-off for him, though of course nobody must know that he is going abroad."

The dear, simple fool said this so solemnly that I could have kicked him. What could I do? I had a talk with Chalmers, who is as fond of Dick as I am, and he could offer no advice.

"It's hopeless," he said, "and the queer thing is that Dick has arranged to go out of town on the night of the 17th. So we can't even drag him to the ship to confront this swine!"

"Do you think he'll marry her?" I asked after a long pause in the conversation.

"Marry her!" scoffed Chalmers. "Did he marry Fay Jennifer? Did he marry that unhappy girl Steele? Marry her!"

It was a big party which Dick gave. His house lay about twenty miles out of town and is situated in the most gorgeous country. It was a hot autumn day, with a cloudless sky and a warm gentle breeze, the kind of day that tempts even the most confirmed of city birds into the open country.

I do not think it was wholly the salubrious weather that was responsible for the

big attendance. Half the people, and all the women who were present, knew that on the following day Steven Martingale was leaving for Bermuda, and that Thelma would accompany him.

I saw the girl as soon as I arrived, and noted the bright eyes, the flushed cheek, and the atmosphere of hectic excitement in which she moved. She was a little tremulous, somewhat incoherent, just a thought shrill.

All Dick's parties were amusing and just a little unconventional. For example, in addition to the band and the troupe of al fresco performers and Grecian dancers, he usually had some sort of competition for handsome prizes, and the young people, particularly, looked forward to these functions with the greatest enjoyment. On this occasion there was a revolver-shooting competition for ladies and gentlemen, the prize for the women being a diamond bangle, and for the men a gold cigarette case.

Most men imagine themselves to be proficient in the arts which they do not practice, and nine out of ten who have never handled a gun boast of their marksmanship.

Dick sought me out and took me into the house and upstairs to his own snuggery.

"Doctor," said he, as he dropped into an easy chair and reached for his cigarettes, "spare a minute to enlighten me. What was the Crauford smash? I only heard a hint of it last night, and I'm told that dad was positively wonderful."

It was queer he had never heard of Ralph Crauford and his fall. Old Man Magnus and he were bitter enemies, and whereas Crauford must nag and splutter from day to day, Magnus was prepared to wait. As usual he laid his plans ahead, and one morning failed to turn up at his office. The rumor spread that he was ill, and there was suport for the story, because you could never pass his house without seeing a doctor's waiting car. It was a puzzling case, and I myself was fooled. So was every specialist we brought in. For weeks at a time Magnus would be well, and then he would have a collapse and be absent from his office for days.

And all the time the Crauford crowd were waiting to jump in and smash two of the stocks he carried. We had advised a trip abroad, but it was not till the end of a year of these relapses and recoveries that he consented. He went to Palermo in Sicily, and after a month it was announced tffat he had died. Then the fun started. Crauford jumped into the market with a hammer in each hand, figuratively speaking. Tyne River Silver fell from 72 to 31, and all the time the executors of the estate were chasing one another to discover their authority to act. This went on for three days and then the blow fell. Old Man Magnus

appeared on 'Change, looking a trifle stouter, a little browner, and infinitely cheerful.

Crauford had "sold over." It cost him his bank balance, his town house, and his country estate plus his wife's jewelry to get square with Magnus.

Dick listened to the story, his eyes beaming, interrupting me now and again with a chuckle of sheer joy.

"Wonderful old dad!" he said at the end; "wonderful old boy! And he was foxing all the time. Kidding 'em along! The art of it, the consummate art of it! Specialists and sea voyages and bulletins every hour!"

He stood up abruptly and threw away his cigarette.

"Let's go and see the women shoot," he said.

There was the usual fooling amongst the girls when their end of the competition started. In spite of their "Which-end-shall-I-hold-it?" and their mock terror, they shot remarkably well.

I had caught a glimpse of Steven, a silent, watchful, slightly amused man, who most conspicuously avoided Thelma, but came down to the booth and stood behind her when she fired her six shots for the prize. Incidentally not one bullet touched the target, and the wobbling of her pistol was pitiful.

Steven's shooting was beautiful to watch. Every bullet went home in the center of the target and the prize was assuredly his.

"Now watch me, Steve," said Dick, and at the sight of Dick with a gun in his hand even his best friends drew back.

He fired one shot, a bull's-eye, the second shot was a little bit to the left, but nevertheless a bull's-eye, the third shot passed through the hole which the first had made, the fourth and fifth were on the rim of the black center—and then he turned with a smile to Steven.

"My old pistol is much better than the best of the new ones," he said.

He had refused to shoot with the weapons provided, and had brought a long ungainly thing of ancient make; but as he was not a competitor in the strict sense of the word, there had been no protest.

The sixth shot went through the bull and there was a general clapping.

"How's that?" said Dick, twiddling his revolver.

"Fine," said Steven. "The Looker shoots almost as well as the Leaper," laughed Dick, and pressed the trigger carelessly. There was a shot and a scream. Steve balanced himself for a moment, looking at Dick in a kind of

awed amazement, and then crumpled up and fell.

As for Dick he stood, the smoking revolver still in his hand, frowning down at the prostrate figure.

"I'm sorry," he muttered, but Steven Martingale had passed beyond the consideration of apologies. He was dead before I could reach him.

That old-fashioned revolver of Dick's had seven chambers, and people agreed both before and after the inquest that it was the kind of fool thing that Dick would have.

"He ought to have seen there were seven shots when he loaded the infernal weapon," said Chalmers. "Of course, if it was anybody but Dick I should have thought that the whole thing was manoeuvred, and that all this awkwardness of his had been carefully acted for twelve months in order to supply an excuse at the inquest and get the 'Accidental Death' verdict. It is the sort of thing that his father would have done. A keen, far-seeing old devil was John Magnus."

I said nothing, for I had seen the look in Dick's eyes when he said "leaper."

At any rate, the shock wakened Dick, for his awkwardness fell away from him like an old cloak, and Thelma Magnus must have found some qualities in him which she had not suspected, for she struck me as a tolerably happy woman when I met her the other day. But I shall not readily forget that hard glint in Dick's eyes when he spoke the last words which Steven Martingale was destined to hear. I had seen it once before in the eyes of John Seymour Magnus the day he smashed Crauford.

Maybe some of the old man's hormones were working. I should like to ask Foley about it.

6. THE CHRISTMAS PRINCESS

There were times when John Bennett Watson (abbreviated for office purposes to "J.B.") wished he were not the Managing Director of the Western Commercial Corporation; moments when he envied the manager of the Broad Street branch of the Southern & Eastern Bank. This in spite of the fact that he was a normal man of thirty-something, without any business worries whatever, enjoying the best of health and an income which, at a moderate estimate, was twenty times larger than the hard-worked bank manager.

J.B. was a man who in no circumstances interfered in other people's affairs; meddlers, he loathed; outside folks who knew how things could be done

better, he abominated, and yet there were certain domestic arrangements of the Southern Bank that he would alter.

Gray, the manager, a harassed little man with a straggling beard, came over to see him about a draft, and John made an awkward dive to the matter that at once intrigued and irritated him.

"You are very busy at the bank, Mr. Gray?"

"Yes," sighed Gray, rising and gathering up his documents, "too busy! With the annual audit coming on, the slump in industrials, the heavy cash balances I must carry to meet end-of-the-quarter demands, I look like having a happy New Year! Good morning!"

"I was working late in my office the other night," said John hastily, arresting the official's departure, "and, looking across the road, I saw a girl working at eleven o'clock—she was still working when I left, and the next morning I saw her at her desk when I arrived."

The manager scratched his beard.

"Who can that be, now?" he asked absently. "Oh yes, that is Miss Welford. She was secretary to our late accountant. Poor fellow! He died leaving things in a terrible muddle, and if it wasn't for the fact that she has an instinct for banking and has got his department work at her finger-tips, I should be in a fearful muddle. She is the only member of my staff that I would leave on the premises by herself, I assure you!"

"I thought I'd met her somewhere," said John carelessly and most untruthfully.

"I dare say," said the bank manager. "She is the sort of girl who has moved in a very good set. Her father lost his money in the rubber slump. By the way, rubber is a market that looks like reviving, Mr. Watson."

"I dare say," said John, to whom the fluctuations of the rubber market meant less than nothing. "I think I remember her—Annie Welford, isn't it?"

The manager shook his head.

"I don't know—'F. G.,' her initials are." He frowned. "I never trouble about the names of people. Oh yes, it's Frances; that's the name. I've often thought she's quite a good-looking girl."

"You've often thought that, have you?" said John scornfully.

The man was scarcely human, and yet he was loath to let him go, and searched around in his mind for some excuse for detaining him.

"Where do you go for Christmas, Mr. Gray?"

"Home," said the other, showing the first sign of animation. "The two days in the year I look forward to are Good Friday and Christmas Day. Christmas is the one day I can't work and can be really a perfectly happy man! I sit in front of a fire, and my children read to me or tell me Christmas stories, and that's my idea of a perfectly happy day."

"Great heavens!" said John, aghast. "You are human, after all! Though I confess that, if anybody tried to tell me a Christmas story on Christmas Day, I should go and look for a hatchet. And your staff—do they work?"

"I'm sorry to say that headquarters won't allow that," said the manager regretfully. "It would add to my enjoyment considerably if I knew that somebody else was working."

John took an instant dislike to him, had thoughts of changing his bank.

"Do you mean to tell me you would let her—them, I mean—work on Christmas Day? Why, it would be disgraceful!" he said hotly.

When the bank manager had gone, John strode over the carpeted floor of his office and stood, staring across at the trim figure visible—more visible than he had hoped—from the window.

"Quite a good-looking girl!"

He smiled at the impertinence of the man. She was beautiful, the complete satisfaction of all his uncatalogued requirements. If he could only hear her speak! He shrank from the possibility of disillusionment. What would she do on Christmas Day? he wondered. Hold revel in her suburban home, possibly in the company of her sweetheart. He made a little grimace at the thought.

Yet it was perfectly ridiculous to suppose that such a girl would be without admirers, and that from their hosts she should not have given preference to one over all the rest.

If Gray had been just a little more human, it would have been possible to secure an introduction, though he shrank even from that prospect.

He was staring at her when the girl looked up, saw his dim figure behind the window-pane, and, as though conscious that she had been the object of his scrutiny, got up quickly from the table, switched on the light, and pulled down the shade. It was the first time she had ever noticed him, he reflected glumly, and it was not very pleasing that her acknowledgment of his admiration should be so emphatically resentful.

John Watson went back to his bachelor flat in St. James's with a feeling that the day had not been well spent, and that something in this one-sided intimacy had gone out of his life. He could no longer picture himself speaking to her,

could weave no more dreams in which she played a complacent and agreeable part. Drawing the blind seemed to shut out even the visions that a pipe and a fire and a sprawling terrier bring to the most unimaginative. He must needs fall back upon the Princess.

Her Serene Highness had been a figure of speculation from the day when old Nurse Crawley, who attended his infant needs, and was locally credited with being possessed of the devil, predicted that he would inherit a great fortune and marry a princess—a faith from which she never wavered all the days of her life. Fortune had come unexpectedly and vastly, and had been doubled and trebled by his own peculiar genius. But the Princess remained amongst the glowing and shadowy shapes of the fire, less tangible than the blue smoke that curled from his pipe.

And now the Princess bored him. He wanted to meet "F. G. Welford." He wanted badly to meet her: first, to apologize for his rudeness, and then to ask her... well, just to ask her if life held any greater attraction than the balancing of a late accountant's books.

The blind was drawn the next morning when he looked out. It was drawn on the morning of Christmas Eve. He had brought his bag to the office and lost two trains in the hope that she might relent. She was inexorable. He always traveled to Tatterdown by train because the cottage (it had been his father's before him) had no accommodation for a car, and somehow his big limousine did not attune with the atmosphere of that faded and fragrant place.

The taxi-cab that took him to the station was half-way up Broad Street when he saw her. She was walking toward the office; had evidently been out to tea; and his cab was near enough to the sidewalk to give him the nearest view of her face he had yet had. He drew his breath at the sight of her, and for a second was seized with an insane desire to stop the cab, get out, and, on some desperate excuse or other, speak to her. But before he could commit that folly, she was gone.

Gray was a slave-driver, he decided, a sweater, a man of no sensibility or feeling. Christmas Eve! And to allow a girl to work.... Perhaps the cunning devil had lied to him, and she was working on Christmas Day. He hated the unhappy Mr. Gray, hated his baldness, his beard, and all that was of him. Such a man had no soul, no proper appreciation of values. He was a cold-blooded exploiter of all that was best and noblest in humanity.

By the time he had reached Bullham Junction, John Bennett Watson was better balanced in mind, could chuckle at his own extravagances without wondering at them, which was ominous.

There was no conveyance at the station, and he walked through the one street

of Bullham to the Red Lion.

"Excuse me, Mr. Watson."

He turned, to see the rubicund countenance and the blue coat of a policeman.

"Happy Christmas, Mr. Watson. You going out to Tatterdown?"

"Why, yes, sergeant, as soon as I can get a cab."

"Likely you'll see my dog Mowser round about the village; he's a rare fellow for Tatterdown. There's a dog there he's always fighting. Will you send him home with a flea in his ear? Give him a whack and he'll go. Getting into bad habits, that dog. Comes home in the middle of the night and scratches the door till I let him in."

J.B. smiled and promised.

Mowser, a bedraggled wire-haired terrier, he found literally on the doorstep of the cottage, and Mowser's feud had evidently found expression in violence, for he was slightly tattered.

John took him in and fed him. The hour was late, and he decided to send him back in the morning—an arrangement wholly agreeable to Mowser, who finished his scrap and went to sleep under the kitchen table.

So small was Tatterdown Cottage that the man and his wife who acted as caretakers had no accommodation and slept at the village—a risky proceeding, as an insurance company had told him, but one which he preferred, for there were memories about this little house with its thatched roof and Elizabethan chimneys which were very pleasant, and the presence of strangers was insufferable. Here, for ten years, John Watson had wakened to hail the Christmas morn and listen to the silvery bells of the parish church, and had spent the morning in the sheltered garden, tending those hardy plants that reveal their treasures in bleak December. For ten Christmas Eves he had sat, huddled up in the big, chintz-covered chair, with a pipe and a book and his pleasant thoughts, listening to the drip of rain or the thin whine of the wind, or watching, on one never-to-be-forgotten Christmas Eve, the snowflakes building white cobwebs in the corner of every pane.

It was half-past eleven, and he had risen with a yawn to stretch himself preparatory to going upstairs to bed, when there came to him from outside a sound which was familiar. He passed down the little passage, unbolted the front door, and stepped into the garden.

Out of the darkness came the peculiar and distinctive sound of an aeroplane's engines that were not running sweetly, and presently, peering overhead, he saw the shadow of great wings. Suddenly a blinding white light showed in the

skies, illuminating fields and road, so brilliant that Tatterdown Parish Church, a mile away, was visible. The light swooped in a circle, coming lower and lower, and finally vanished behind the privet fence of the Hermitage field, its radiance throwing the trim boundary hedge into silhouette.

Going back into the cottage for his coat, Watson ran through the garden, across the road, and, vaulting the gate, stumbled over the frozen plough-land to the place where the landing lights of the big machine were flickering to extinction.

"Hello!" called a voice, and John answered the hail, and presently came up with the two men who were standing by the under-carriage. One was lighting a cigarette, and the newcomer caught a momentary glimpse of his face, long, white, and blackly bearded. The other he could not see, but it was he who spoke.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"Tatterdown, six miles from Pelworth," Watson answered. "You got down without accident?"

There was no reply for a few seconds, and then the bearded man laughed softly.

"We got down, but not without accident," he said, a dry note in his voice. "Is there a house where...."

Here he stopped and said something to his companion in an undertone. The short man grunted an inquiry in the same tone, and:

"I'll ask," he said. "Are we near to a village?"

"No—not nearer than a mile," said Watson. "I have a cottage, but it is rather isolated."

"Wife and family?"

John laughed quietly.

"No," he said; "I am all alone."

Again the whispered colloquy.

"It may sound a little—unusual and impertinent, these questions," said the tall man at last, "but we have a passenger who, for State reasons, is traveling incognito. I must take you this much into my confidence and tell you that she ought not to be within a thousand miles of England. May I therefore rely upon your discretion?"

Dumbfounded, John Watson listened, his sense of adventure piqued.

"Certainly, you may rely upon me," he said. "I am a bachelor and live alone—I usually come to Tatterdown to spend Christmas—and I haven't even a servant in the house. I was born here, and have a certain sentimental feeling towards the place. I am giving you confidence for confidence. My name is Watson, by the way."

"Thank you," said the other simply. "My name is James—Colonel Alfred James."

He walked towards the machine, and John heard him speak.

"You may descend, Highness," he said.

His eyes now accustomed to the darkness, J.B. saw a slim figure descend, and waited whilst the two men and the woman spoke together in a whisper. So far as he could gather, the lady said little, but the conversation continued for so long that John began to feel the cold.

"Will you come this way?" he called.

"Lead on," said the gruff voice of the smaller man, and the owner of Tatterdown Cottage led the way to the gate, and, after some delay, opened it and ushered them across the road into the cottage.

The tall Colonel James followed, carrying two heavy bags; then came the girl; and thirdly, the shorter of the two, a round, red-faced man with a slight moustache and a pair of small eyes that were set a trifle too close together.

The big man deposited the bags on the floor of the sitting-room.

"I present you, Mr. Watson, to Her Serene Highness, Princess Marie of Thurgen," he said. "Her Highness has a very dear friend in London, but owing to the War and the restrictions which have been placed upon Germans visiting England, it has been necessary for Her Highness to make a surreptitious and in some ways unauthorized trip to London. Whilst we realize that to land in England without a passport and without the necessary authority from the Home Office constitutes a technical offense, my friend and I have gladly undertaken the risk to serve one to whose father we are under a heavy debt of obligation."

All the time he had been speaking, John's wondering gaze had never left the girl's pale face. She stood with eyes downcast, hands lightly clasped in front of her, and only once during the interview did she look up. Presently John found his voice, though he spoke with extraordinary difficulty.

"I shall be happy to place my room at the disposal of Her Highness," he said.

"You have no telephone here?" asked the little man suddenly.

John shook his head.

"No," he said, with a half-smile, "we have nothing quite so modern at Tatterdown Cottage except a very modern bathroom leading from my room. May I show Your Highness the way?"

The tall man inclined his head gravely.

"Will you go first, please?" he said.

Lighting a candle, John went up the narrow stairs, opened the door of his chamber, a cozy room with its old four-poster and its log fire smouldering in the grate.

"This will do very well," said the tall man, who had followed him. "In here, Your Highness."

He put his hand on the girl's arm and led her into the room. Then, coming out quickly, he closed the door behind him. At the foot of the stairs stood the little fat man, grotesquely huge in his leather coat and as grotesquely ridiculous in his leather headgear.

"Her Highness is comfortable," said the bearded man. "You can go to work on the machine. Do you think you can get it right by the morning?"

"I ought to have it right in two hours," said the other, "but we couldn't possibly take off in the dark. I don't know the size of the field. It's plough-land, too, and that'll make it a bit more difficult, but I'll certainly be ready for you at daybreak."

With that he was gone, leaving John alone with the colonel.

"Will you come into the sitting-room?" asked John.

"I think not," replied James. "You see, Mr. Watson, my responsibility is a great one. Certain things have happened in London which have reduced Her Highness to the verge of despair. She has enemies—personal enemies, you understand?—who would not hesitate to take her life."

He pulled up his leather coat, and from his pocket slipped out a long-barrelled Browning and snapped back the jacket.

"I will not detain you any longer, Mr. Watson. You may go to bed with the full assurance that you have rendered an inestimable service to what was once the greatest ruling house in Germany."

John laughed softly.

"Unfortunately," he said, "I have no bed, and if you mean that you are going to sit up all night, you have relieved me of a great embarrassment, for I should

have had no place to offer you but the settee in my sitting-room. You are welcome to that."

James shook his head.

"I will remain here," he said, and sat on the lower stair. Suddenly he got up. "Is your sitting-room beneath your bedroom?"

John nodded.

"Should I hear any—any noise above?"

"Undoubtedly," said John. "Every floor in this old house creaks."

"Then I will join you. It is inclined to be draughty here."

He accompanied his host into the sitting-room and stripped the leather coat he was wearing, pulled off his helmet, and sank, with a luxurious sigh, into the deep arm-chair that John had vacated when the sound of the aeroplane's engines had come to his ears.

"Christmas Eve, eh?" said the colonel. He extracted a cigarette from the case and tapped it thoughtfully on his thumbnail. Then, seeing John's eyes resting on the pistol that lay on the table by his elbow, he asked: "Looks a little theatrical, don't you think? I suppose firearms are not in your line, Mr. Watson?"

"I have an automatic at my London flat," said John, with a smile, "but I can't say that I get a great deal of pistol practice. Do you seriously mean that you would use that in certain extremities?"

The big man blew a cloud of smoke to the ceiling and nodded.

"I mean that," he said curtly.

"How fascinating!" said J.B. "And how un-Christmaslike!"

The other smiled broadly.

"There are one or two things about you that puzzle me," J.B. went on slowly.

"Such as—?"

"Well," he hesitated, "did the Princess come to where the aeroplane was? I presume it was somewhere outside of London?"

"We picked her up in a car," said the other shortly.

"I see," said J.B. "How queer!"

"What is queer?" frowned James.

"The whole thing," said J.B. Watson. "You can't say that it is a usual experience for a bachelor to have a princess drop on to him from the clouds. And, for a reason which you won't want me to explain, I am especially interested in princesses. It goes back to a very old prophecy that was made by my nurse."

There was a slight movement above their heads.

"Excuse me," said James, and, rising quickly, ran up the stairs.

The sound of a low-voiced conversation floated down to John Watson, and, after a while, the footsteps of James upon the stairs. When he came in he was looking a little worried.

"Did Her Highness require anything?"

"Nothing." This time the man's voice was curt. "She wanted to know when the machine would be ready, that is all."

They sat in complete silence for half an hour till John rose.

"I'll make some coffee, or I shall go to sleep. And you would like some coffee too?"

James hesitated.

"Yes, I think I should. I'll come with you and see you make it," he said.

A sleeping Mowser lifted his wiry head inquiringly as the two men came into the kitchen, and watched them with unconcern, till, realizing that nothing in the shape of food was imminent, he tucked his head between his paws and went to sleep again.

James took a chair and watched the percolator working without comment, and J.B. could not escape a feeling that he stood in relationship to the man as a convict stands to a prison guard, and this impression was strengthened when, the coffee made, his guest walked behind him to the sitting-room again. It was some time before the steaming cups had cooled sufficiently to drink, and John took a sip and made a wry face.

"Do you take sugar?" he asked. "Because I do."

He went back to the kitchen, but this time the man did not accompany him. But he was standing in the doorway when J.B. returned.

"You took some time to find it," he said gruffly, and saw that his tone was a mistake, for he went on, with a laugh and a return to his old suavity: "Forgive my infernal cheek, but this little adventure of ours has got on my nerves."

"I couldn't find it," said John. "My caretaker discovers a new place to hide her

stores every visit I make to the cottage."

He dropped two lumps into his coffee and stirred it, and, finding that the bearded colonel desired to do nothing more than to smoke an endless chain of cigarettes, he took down a book from the shelf and began to read.

Presently the heavy boots of the smaller man sounded on the paved pathway outside the cottage, and John jumped up.

"That must be your friend," he said, and went to admit him.

The pilot, for such he seemed to be, came in, grimy of face and black of hands.

"I've put it right," he said. "You can be ready to move as soon as you like. I have explored the field, and there's plenty of room to take her off."

"Go back to the machine and stand by," said the other sharply. And then, to John: "I am extremely obliged to you for courtesy, and I'm glad we have not had to trespass longer on your hospitality than was necessary. And may I add the thanks of the Princess to mine?"

"You may," said John.

James ran up the stairs and knocked at the bedroom door.

"I am ready, Your Highness."

There was a pause, and then the key was turned and the door opened. It closed again upon the man, and all that John Watson could hear was the murmur of voices through the ceiling.

He laughed softly, pure joy in every note. So old Nurse Crawley had been right, after all, and a princess had come into his life, and the prophecy might yet be fulfilled.

The door was opened, two pairs of feet descended the stairs, and presently James stood in the light of the table-lamp, which flowed through the open door of the sitting-room into the passage. In each hand he carried a bag, and behind him was a muffled figure in a fur coat, who kept her face steadily averted from John's eyes.

"I thank you again, Mr. Watson. If I have put you to any expense—"

"None whatever," said John politely.

He stood with his back to the fire and watched. He heard James put down his bag and turn the handle of the door, but it did not move. He tried again, feeling for the bolts, and finding that the door was of stout oak and the lock of ancient solidity, he came back to the sitting-room.

"I can't open your door, Mr. Watson."

"Very true," said John pleasantly, "very true!"

The man's brows gathered in a frown of suspicion.

"What do you mean—very true?" he asked harshly.

"You can't open it because I've locked it, and the key is in my pocket," said John.

Instantly the automatic appeared in James's hand.

"Give me that key," he said coldly, "or there'll be a village tragedy that will mystify the reporters. I ought to have shot you anyway," he said, "and, by God, if you don't—give me that key!"

John shook his head. His hands were still behind him, and, with a smothered exclamation of rage, the man pressed the trigger. There was a dull click.

"I took the precaution of unloading your pistol when you went upstairs an hour or two ago, Mr. James, or Colonel James, as the case may be," said John in his conversational tone. "I have also sent, attached—via the back door—to the collar of a small and intelligent dog, an urgent message to the Bullham police to put in as early an appearance as possible. I've been expecting them for the last five minutes."

With a roar of rage the big man sprang at him, and, as he did so, John withdrew his right hand and struck at his assailant with the poker, which it had held throughout the interview. Quick as a cat, the man dodged the blow, and in another instant he had gripped the other in his powerful hand. John wrenched his left arm free and struck twice at the man, but his padded coat softened the blows, and it was not until a lucky blow caught Colonel James under the jaw that he went floundering to the ground. There was the sound of voices outside. John took the key from his pocket and flung it at the foot of the terrified girl.

"Open the door, quick, Miss Welford!" he hissed, and turned to leap on his half-maddened adversary, who had thrown open his coat and was groping for a second pistol. Before it could be drawn, the room was full of people, and he went down under the weight of two policemen and the local blacksmith.

"This is the real miracle-play," said John. "But to make the miracle complete, you've got to stay here and have dinner, Miss Welford."

"But what I can't understand is, how you recognized me?" asked the puzzled girl.

"I not only know your name, but I know the whole story," said John. "You were working at the bank late, and these two gentlemen, who must have long

planned the coup, broke into the vault to secure the very large sum in ready cash which would be on the bank premises on Christmas Eve. They then discovered that you were among the treasures that the bank contained—"

"I heard the noise and went down. They took me away with them in the car because they were afraid that I should identify them. I had no idea that, when the machine came down, they swore that, if I betrayed them, they would not only kill me but kill you also. They had to explain me, so I became a princess. But how did you know that I was not?"

"I knew you were a princess all right," said John. "I've known you were a princess ever since I started peeping into your palace window."

She drew a long breath.

"Oh, were you the man?" she said. "I've often wondered since. I never knew you."

"You know me now, and you will know me much better. Will you stay and have Christmas dinner with me?"

She looked at him quickly, then dropped her eyes.

"I think I will," she said. "I owe you so much, Mr.—"

"On Christmas Day," he interrupted, "I am 'John,' even to my enemies," and she smiled.

"I don't feel like an enemy," she said.

7. THE TREASURE OF THE KALAHARI

Romance may come on the heels of tragedy.

So it came to Mirabelle Maynard at Red Cot farm in Sussex; for when the shock of her brother's death had passed, she found a certain tender interest in the letters which arrived, sometimes from Bulawayo, sometimes from Kimberley, but as often as not bearing the postmark of the mail-sorting van. They were well expressed letters in a crabbed handwriting, and they told her of things that left her a little breathless; and when she had read them through she would sit down and indite epistles almost as voluminous, and these she addressed to the Rev. George Smith at a little store in Mafeking. She did not know that it was a little store, but the Reverend George very kindly told her so.

He did not tell her that it was a Kaffir store, and that the letters, by arrangement, were sent on to him, since his own addresses were uncertain and shifting. But he did hint that he was young and single and that he was good-looking. He said, amongst other things, that he had left the ministry and was devoting his life and energy to securing justice for her and punishment for the venal officials who were endeavoring to rob her of her inheritance.

Upon a certain day, Mirabelle Maynard mortgaged and let her farm, booked a first-class passage to Capetown on the Dover Castle, and disappeared from England. She was destined never to meet the romantic clergyman whose summons brought her feet to the corridors of adventure...

There was a time, in the queer days following the rising and the subsequent rush to the diamond diggings westward of Fourteen Streams, when the citizens of a certain Bechuanaland town decided that one Walter Vellors, who was awaiting execution at the fine and new stone gaol for the murder of a storekeeper, was not really a bad fellow as fellows went; and anyway, these damned storekeepers... Peruvian Jews most of them... too bad that a fellow like Walter... or was it Jim...? should swing, eh, boys?

They got up a petition, and they had a meeting, and they telegraphed the legislature at Capetown, and finally they held up Zeederberg's coach eighteen miles outside of Geelow, and took therefrom the official and only hangman the country possessed. Him they made so gloriously drunk that his name appears first of the signatories to another petition, which begins:

"We free men of Bechuanaland, holding capital punishment in abhorrence—etc.," and may be seen to this day framed in the office of the Minister of Justice.

Then the same free men seduced from their lofty duty the chief warder (who was Governor) and three common warders (two half-colored), so that the Governor and warders and condemned prisoner fraternized in maudlin fashion.

Into this electric atmosphere rode Captain Bill Stark, a lean, brown, expectant man.

He came into Adderley Street (so they had christened a strip of dust that divided one line of tin shanties from the other), and they turned out of the Grand Hotel in such a great hurry to tell the news that the Grand Hotel swayed crazily.

They told him, all speaking at once.

"Poor feller, he's suffered, Sheriff... damned storekeeper robbed him, you bet.... Why, one feller I know robbed another feller I know.... Anyway, everybody's against it, that's all."

"Is that so?" said Bill Stark. "And the gaol staff, you say?"

"Everybody," doggedly, but not without triumph.

"And the hangman?"

"That's God's truth.... Now, Captain..."

But the Captain was riding for the gaol. He was Chief Constable, Sheriff, and Tax-Collector. He rode through the gate, and the warder held the rein as he flung off and into the guardroom.

"Properly speaking, Captain Stark," said the chief warder, on his dignity and in that falsetto which the illiterate regard as a tolerable imitation of high-class conversation, "properly speaking, you have no status in this. I am responsible, sir, to the High Commissioner..."

"Turn round," said Stark wearily. "You colored men go first. Open the door of the first cell.... In you go. Now your keys, Schultz—all of them. Thank you."

They did not argue, not even the chief warder, partly because the long barrel of a service Webley was sticking into his belt, and partly because it was not until he subsequently indicted his "Report on Outrageous Happening in Geelow Gaol" that he thought of appropriate repartee.

So Stark locked the men in the cell and went in search of Walter Vellors. Him he found, and Walter protested indignantly.

"My dear man," said Captain Bill Stark testily, "if you go shooting up storekeepers and robbing their safes, you can't complain about being punished."

"I refuse to be hanged until I have an accredited minister of the Gospel," said Walter Vellors, within his rights.

"Why argue?" pleaded Bill, as he strapped the man. "You'll be seeing Peter in a second or so."

"Half a minute," said Vellors, his unshaven face twitching. "There's something I want to get off my chest. It is about a mine and a girl—"

Bill Stark's lips curled until he looked like an angry dog.

"If you get sentimental I'll cry," he said, "and crying never did improve my appearance—"

"There's no sentiment about it," said Vellors, surprisingly cool. "I did up this Peruvian, and I was the fellow that killed Jan van Rhys at Laager Sprint. I shot Pieter Roos down in the Lydenberg district, and —oh, I've done a lot and I guess I'm fully entitled to the company of the saints. But this girl's in the

Kalahari by now. I sent her a fake plan—all jumbled up... got an idea she's come up to Bulawayo to see me, because, from what her brother said and her picture, she's a good looking, and... I'm a lady's man myself."

"Get on to the mine," snarled Stark, "and remember that serial stories bore me stiff."

But Mr. Walter Vellors was not to be hurried. He and a man named Maynard had located a "pan" in the Kalahari desert—a ten-mile stretch of alluvial gold.

"I'm willing to admit that it was a miracle," he confessed. "I met Maynard, who was a new chum just out from England, looking for a new home for him and his sister. I told the tale about the alluvial. I've told it a hundred times to suckers, and some have fallen and some have passed me by. But Maynard took up the idea, and him and me went out into the bush country for a two days' trip. It lasted a month because we lost ourselves, and if it hadn't been for striking a Hottentot village I'd have died natural. And then we found the 'pan.' Maynard found it and took samples—we had no water to wash it, but he said there was a new way of dealing with that kind of stuff. Anyway, we got back to Vryburg and washed the samples, and then Maynard got a heat stroke and pegged out. That looked as if I'd got an easy job, but it wasn't. He'd registered the claim in his own name, and that damned Commissioner wouldn't listen to me when I told him I was Maynard's partner. It appears that in a will he'd left everything to his sister.

"It was tough luck on me, Sheriff—there was a million, or maybe ten, and I couldn't touch it. The chief of police at Vryburg gave me twenty-four hours to get out of town, so I dodged up to Mafeking and got a grand idea. I wrote to the girl and told her all about the gold claims me and her brother had, and asked her to come out to Bulawayo. I called myself Smith—George Smith."

"Well?" asked the Sheriff coldly, as the man paused.

"Give us a gasper, Sheriff," begged Mr. Vellors. "This story is worth the makings... I'm not kidding you. I told the girl not to go to the Government office at Vryburg—I said there was a plot to swindle her. I wanted to see her first, you understand, to get my share. Well, she wrote a lovely letter thanking me for my kindness, and said she'd meet me, not at Bulawayo, but at Kibi Cubo—that's a 'tot' village near the supposed property. You see"—the prisoner drew the smoke into his lungs and paused before he exhaled—"you see, I had to give her a second place where we could meet, but I never dreamt that she would go into the desert. Being young, maybe, and romantic..."

"When is she due?" asked Stark quickly.

"Today."

Again the Sheriff's lips curled back.

"You're lying, I guess—"

"If I die this minute—" protested the other indignantly.

The Sheriff looked at his watch. "In five minutes," he said tersely, "whether you speak the truth or lie..."

And when it was all over he went down town and rode his horse to the group before the Grand Hotel—silent, uneasy, fearful.

"I've hanged your friend," said Bill, staring coldly down on them, "and he's completely dead. Got anything to say?"

Somebody had, after a long and speechless while.

"No good crying over spilt milk, Captain."

"That's so," said Bill Stark. "And now, you miners and loafers, get back to your huts; and whilst I'm in my best admonitory mood, I want to tell the gentleman who is buying diamonds from the natives working the Boyson field, that if I catch him or any other man engaged in I.D.B., I'll put him on the Breakwater at Capetown for seven years."

He rode away.

"Bullying swine," said a voice. Captain Stark did not turn in his saddle. He rode at a hack canter to the telegraph office, and found the operator drinking neat whisky and cheating himself at patience.

"Get me a through line to Vryburg," he said, and the operator, who knew him, did not argue.

"Ask this..." said Bill, and waited until the answer came:

"Gold claims registered in Maynard's name. No sign of sister. Ask Brakpan Halt, nearest railway stop to claims."

Brakpan Halt was more difficult to reach. No answer came for half an hour, and then:

"Young lady detrained, bought Cape cart, three horses from Tyl, and trekked west this morning."

"Tell him," said Bill, "to send somebody out to bring her back to the rail."

And, when that message had gone through:

"Get Masabili and tell the stationmaster to hold the Bulawayo mail for me—"

"You won't get any mail train at Masabili," interrupted the operator, with the

satisfaction of one possessing superior information. "It's thirty-five miles from here to Masabili halt, and the train goes through at midnight."

Bill Stark scratched his long nose thoughtfully.

"I may make it with two horses," he said.

Riding the one and leading the other, he cantered out of town, watched by resentful citizens. He was ten miles on his road before he remembered that, in his capacity as Coroner, he had not held the necessary inquest on the late Mr. Walter Vellors.

The road was bad, and half-way one of his horses fell lame and had to be left at the mule station where the coaches changed teams. He reached the brow of the hill overlooking Masabili in time to see the faint red lights of the mail dimming in the desert.

At four in the morning a leisurely goods train drew in, and he made the journey northward in a truck which was carrying a huge dynamo for a new power station at Bulawayo.

"It is the only covered truck, Sheriff," said the train guard apologetically. "My caboose is full of parcel mail."

"It will do," said Stark. The sleep he enjoyed in that car nearly cost him his life.

He was turned out at Brakpan Halt at two o'clock on a blazing afternoon.

"No, mister, she hasn't come back. As a matter of fact," said the stationmaster frankly, "I didn't rightly get your instructions. And if it comes to that, I can't take no orders from Geelow—where in hell is Geelow anyway?"

"Did you send out to search for this lady or didn't you?" asked Bill Stark, and the slightly, but only slightly, colored official told the truth.

"I didn't. I've got enough trouble of my own. There were four cases of cigarettes stolen from the 17-down yesterday, and I've been worried to death about it. They couldn't have been pinched at this siding. How could they have got 'em away—the thieves, I mean? And I get reported twice a week because the Bulawayo mail can't get water. She sits here and hoots for hours, and I live four miles away and have to come in. Why don't they take their water at Mahagobi? That's what I say... settin' here hooting all night for water... I have to come in and set the pump going..."

Bill Stark cursed him evenly but fearfully.

"Damn you and your pump and your hooting locos," he snapped. "You'll have a life on your hands, you coffee-colored son of a Hottentot. Get me a horse

and don't argue, or I'll skin your head!"

The station premises adjoined an ancient farm belonging to the Dutchman from whom the girl had secured her Cape cart and horses. The Sheriff interviewed Mr. Tyl, and learnt little save that the girl had paid twice the value for her purchases.

"Ach! She seemed a capable young woman. She said she was going to meet friends, and, man, she could drive. She had a little farm in England and she sold it to come out.... I told her where the water holes were..."

"I want two horses, baas," said the Sheriff briefly.

He stopped long enough to load one animal with biscuit and biltong and two great waterbags, and as the sun slipped down behind the dwarf thorn trees, he headed westward, following the tracks of wheels.

He went on till darkness failed, and then, lantern in hand and leading his horses, he followed on foot until the tracks grew more difficult to read. Before daybreak he was on the trail, and when daylight came at last he extinguished his lantern, snatched a hasty meal, and rode on at a jog-trot. A minor cause for annoyance was the discovery that his watch had gone dead. Thereafter he had to judge the time by the position of the sun.

He had passed the thick belt of wachteinbitje bushes, and had come to sheer, unadulterated desert, where the tracks no longer appeared. There had been a gale of wind in the night—he had heard it with something like fear in his heart—and fine sand had drifted over the wheel tracks. After two hours' search he picked up the trail, only to lose it again. Once he passed a solitary Hottentot woman tramping unerringly to her kraal. She had seen no white girl, nor Cape cart.

On the third day he halted finally and definitely. His horses were exhausted, and his stock of water was running low.

And then, at the moment when he was taking a compass bearing for the first stage of his retreat, there came over a low ridge of sand a weary horse and rider. At first he thought it was a boy—she sat astride, a slim figure in white, her head bowed dejectedly on her breast.

He stood staring at her, and she would have passed unnoticed if he had not found his voice. At the sound of his yell she reined in her horse, and, shading her eyes, looked toward him.

Another second, and she turned her horse's head in his direction, and the half-dead animal made an heroic effort to trot.

"Thank God I've found you, Mr. Smith!" she called hysterically as she slipped

from the saddle. "Oh, I'm so frightened of this place! I've been two nights... I missed the village... If I had only gone on to Bulawayo..."

She stumbled and would have fallen, but his arm was about her.

"Sit down, Miss—er—Maynard," he said awkwardly.

It would have been an awkward meeting in any circumstances. He had never troubled to think what she was like. She was just a woman—somebody's sister. He certainly had never thought of her as pretty, with a mop of golden hair and a skin like milk and peaches.

"Everybody thought I was mad to come out, but of course I didn't tell them about the horrible way the Commissioner at Vryburg had behaved," she went on a little breathlessly. "And I've done a whole lot of desert travel—my poor brother and I spent every winter in Algeria before things went wrong, and we... You are Mr. Smith, aren't you?"

Bill Stark blinked like a man waking from sleep.

"To be perfectly honest, I'm not," he blurted. "Smith, whose real name is Vellors, is dead—hanged. I hanged him. I'm the Sheriff of Geelow..."

He cursed himself when he saw the horror in her face. In an instant she was on her feet, staring at him, terrified. "Hanged... oh no! Mr. Smith was my friend—how horrible!"

"I'm a dam' fool for telling you," said Bill Stark, a trifle incoherently. "Excuse the language.... Yes, Vellors was a murderer and he had to go. He told me all about you and the fake mine—there's a real mine somewhere, but the Commissioner at Vryburg will tell you all about that—told me just before—just before his"—he coughed—"untimely end."

This time she really fainted, and Bill Stark, in a panic, dashed to his pack horse, and, unstrapping the last water-bottle, poured an improvident quantity over her face.

"You must forgive me if I'm a little shaken," she said unsteadily. "I think I am—what called yourself just now. Hadn't we better be getting back?"

Bill nodded slowly.

"Mr. Smith said that they would stop at nothing to get the claims," she said. She seemed to be speaking her thoughts aloud. "I suppose you have told me the truth?"

He did not answer. He was looking at her in amazement.

"That is why he asked me to meet him without letting anybody know," she

continued listlessly. "So you have killed him!"

Bill cleared his throat, but before he could protest she went on:

"I don't for a moment imagine that you want to kill me, though if you would kill a clergyman—"

"A what?"

"You know Mr. Smith was a missionary," she said. "That is how he came to meet my brother."

"Good God!" gasped the awestricken Sheriff. "Did Wally tell you that?"

"Don't let us talk about it," she said. "Shall we go back?"

"One moment." Bill Stark was aroused. "This Vellors was a notoriously bad character and a triple murderer. I hanged him because there was nobody else there to do it—and he wanted hanging badly!"

She sighed and looked across the waste of bush and sand, and it hurt him to read the scepticism in her drawn face.

"I didn't believe him when he started telling this story—about the gold-pan and you and your brother. It was the only decent thing he ever did—to tell me, I mean."

She was not convinced; such is the contrariness of women, she could smile when he asked her what had happened to her Cape cart.

"I don't know. One of the horses died. And then my riding horse died too. I think they must have been sick. I saddled the other."

"Oh!" said Bill, and then, gravely: "I think we'd better get back."

They rode side by side almost in silence. Twice he halted to consult the map he had borrowed from the stationmaster, and set a course with the help of his compass. And on the second occasion, when they had stopped to eat a frugal meal and drink sparingly of the rapidly diminishing stock of water, she saw him frown and shake a little instrument.

"That's funny," he said.

"What is funny? I should like to be amused."

She looked over his shoulder as he laid the compass on the map. "That isn't the north," she said. "Look! The needle is pointing to the west!"

"So I observe," he said quietly. "I've been using this infernal thing by night, otherwise I should have seen it was wrong."

He took out his watch and looked at the dial.

"That went wrong the day I left the rail," he said, "and—"

He stopped suddenly.

"I traveled up in company with a big dynamo that was being shipped up to Bulawayo—Miss Maynard, do you know what a dynamo is?"

"I know what a dynamo is," she said. "It is a machine for making electrical current."

He nodded. "It is also a powerful magnet," he said, "and my compass isn't worth three grains of sand."

They looked at one another in dead silence.

"Is that so?" she said mechanically, and then: "I think I believe you. Mr.—Mr. —" "Stark," he suggested.

"About Smith—ugh!" she shuddered. "I'm glad... in a way. What shall we do now?"

He had already considered that problem and had found no satisfying solution.

"We will strike east," he said. "You haven't a compass, of course?"

She shook her head.

"Nothing so intelligent," she said, and there was a note of bitterness in her flippancy. "Nothing but unlimited faith in humanity and a taste for adventure. Did it... was he hurt? How dreadful that you had to do it!"

Her mind was still on the hanging.

"We'll go east," he said. "We can judge roughly, but where we'll land eventually, the Lord He knows!"

Morning brought them to the end of the water. He dug down into the sandy soil, using his broad-bladed hunting-knife, and she stood holding her horse's head, watching him curiously.

"We're lost, aren't we?" she said, and with her words there came to him in full force the terrific danger in which she stood. The hanging sheriff sat down with a groan as he realized that the real treasure of the desert stood before him, a white-faced girl in whose eyes was dawning the fear of death.

"No, no, not lost," he said huskily, and struggled to his feet. "Over there..."

He pointed with a hand that shook, and somehow his momentary weakness gave her courage.

That night they lay down side by side, their tongues parched, their throats harsh and dry. He heard her soft weeping in the darkness, and, putting out his arm, drew her toward him until her head was pillowed on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry," he muttered.

"I'm sorry, too," she said, with a little catch in her voice. "And I'm not sorry... though I wish we could... could die less thirstily!"

She sat up suddenly.

"What was that?" she gasped.

There came to his ears a faint and eerie wail of sound.

"I'm glad you heard it," he said in a low voice. "I thought I was imagining things—listen!"

They stood up, straining their ears. And then it came again—a thin, sobbing shriek. With trembling fingers the Sheriff lit the candle in his lantern.

"What is it?" she asked in an awful whisper, but he did not answer, striding ahead, his lantern throwing long shadows on the gray sands and revealing the yellow blossoms of the dwarf trees. An hour, two hours passed, and she was ready to drop with exhaustion, when suddenly she found herself climbing the steep sides of an embankment, and she stumbled over a long obstruction.

"The railway!" she gasped.

But he did not speak. Standing in the center of the track, he was waving his lantern to and fro, and presently she was blinded by the glare of a head-lamp as the engine of the Bulawayo mail came round the shoulder of a sandy hill, and the howl of her siren, heard nearer at hand, was very pleasant music.

"It was the engine hooting for water at the halt," he said.

He sat by her side, one arm about her, her head again on his shoulder. "And of course we walked in a circle. I'll start you off for Vryburg in the morning, and then what will you do?"

"I don't know." She looked up at him. "What are you going to do?"

He considered a moment.

"I've got something to clear up at Geelow, and then I'm at your service," he said.

He had remembered his duties as a coroner.

8. INDIAN MAGIC

When love comes barging into a man's business there's generally trouble for everybody. That is the opinion of people with knowledge and education.

There was a schoolmaster—and a real gentleman—who used to work next to me in the shoe-making shop at Dartmoor, who told me that love is responsible for more crime than drink. He gave me the figures, and with a bit of chalk he drew what he called a "grarf" on the sole of Wigman's boots—Wigman, that shot the policeman in the Harrow Road. A very nice fellow—Wigman, I mean. I never met the policeman.

There used to be a warder at Dartmoor whose wife ran away with a soldier. You ought to hear him talk about women!

There's another thing I despise—foreigners. It stands to reason that foreigners are different to us Christians. There's no sense of, what I might term, honor amongst them. They keep things back like Dhobi, the Indian, kept things from young Sam Baring. Love and foreigners was Sam's ruin, and deny it who can.

Sam is as smart a fellow as you would find between here and... well, anywhere. Quite the gentleman, and well educated. He can read and write, and you can't ask him anything about geography that he couldn't tell you.

He is always well dressed—why, I've seen him mixing with the swells at Ascot like one of themselves. High collar, spotted tie, long-tailed coat, and a handsome brown bowler with a Beatty tilt—he was my idea of what a lord should look like.

Sam and me and an American, named Bisher, made a lot of money out of the electric racing saddle. You put it on a horse and touched a button—and he moves! I've seen experienced trainers watching the effect of the saddle with their mouths wide open. There was a coil inside and a small battery. "When you touched the button, the horse got a shock, and naturally went a bit faster. It cost about £150 to make, and we took orders for ninety at £50 apiece. I needn't tell you that when we didn't deliver the goods, some unpleasant letters came to the office, but, as Sam said, they were out to defraud the Jockey Club by artificial stimulants, and he was doing a good turn to the sport by besting them. Anyway, they couldn't squeal, and that was something.

Sam had high notions about racing, and we'd hardly packed our parcel before he saw an advertisement of a farm for sale, and he got the idea of training a horse or two. He bought a couple out of selling races at Gatwick and Lingfield: Early Worm was one, and the other was called String of Beans. Sam got a license to train without much trouble. He had never been before the Stewards, and he hadn't tried to sell electric saddles to the swell trainers at Newmarket, so, as the song says, the breath of scandal ne'er sullied his fair name. And he hadn't been in the hands of the police either.

Luck is a funny thing. Both those horses he bought were pretty good. We used to run 'em down the course for a bit. They wouldn't be trying a yard. Then, when the money was down, we let loose the head of String of Beans, and the way he won was both exciting and cheerful.

We might have gone on, and packed enough money to live like princes, if it hadn't been for this girl I've been referring to.

Her name was Virginia, the same as the country in America, but she was English. Personally, I never saw anything in her, and when one day I heard her say to her father, "Who is that funny little man with the big red nose?" referring to me, she passed out of my life, and I lost all respect for her. Her father's name was Major Rice, and he had a stable near ours. He trained a few horses, mostly his own, but he had a couple belonging to a young gentleman named Tarbot, Captain Harold Tarbot.

Sam got quite friendly with them, and used to go over to late dinner all dressed up in evening clothing, which was swank.

Well, to cut a long story short, he fell in love with this girl, and meeting her out one day on the Downs, he up and told her that she was the only girl in the world, and that all he had, including the house and furniture, Early Worm, and String of Beans, was hers, which wasn't right, because me and Bisher had a share in the horses, and all the chairs in the dining-room I bought with my own money.

I don't exactly know what happened, but Sam came home with bits of Sussex sticking to his clothes and a black eye. Sam was wrong, but he was always a bit rough with women, and I gather that this captain happened to be handy.

"This comes of lowering yourself to the level of common people," said Sam, when he told us all about it. "I thought I was doing her a favor, which, considering her father is in debt, and this captain hasn't got two shillings to rub together, I certainly was. I'll give him Blue Rat!"

"I shouldn't give him anything if I were you, Sam," I said, and Bisher agreed with me. "If the young woman won't let you walk out with her, she's got bad taste. As to a blue rat—well, I've never heard of it, but I've seen pink ones in my time, especially in the United States, where good alcohol and lives are cheap."

"Blue Rat is his horse," said Sam, who was putting a bit of sticking-plaster on his cheek in front of the looking-glass. "He has been saving it all the year to win a selling plate at Newmarket. And to think," he said bitterly, "that I have been giving him advice and helping, so to speak, to get the horse together!"

Knowing how he felt, I was a bit astonished the next day when he went over to

Major Rice's, saw the young lady and the captain, and apologized. He didn't tell us what his object was, and my own opinion then was that it was sheer gentlemanliness, for Sam Baring is as polite a fellow as ever drew the breath of life.

Anyway, everything must have been all right, for Major Rice came over to look at String of Beans. It was the first time he had ever been in our house, and Sam made a great fuss of him. The young lady didn't come, but I saw her, that same week, strolling across the Downs with the captain, and I must say that they looked on affectionate terms, so far as it is possible for a man of the world to judge.

One night Sam came in to where me and Bisher were playing a quiet game of bezique and he said:

"I have entered String of Beans for a mile selling plate at Newmarket. It is the same race that Blue Rat is entered for, and I want to warn you fellows that if the major asks you if String of Beans is any good, you've got to say no. I am going to give that captain the shock of his life."

We had a couple of lads that Sam had picked up, to look after the horses, and he gave these boys instructions that String of Beans was only to be exercised at full strength when Major Rice wasn't on the Downs. Therefore, it was more remarkable still when Sam told us one day at lunch that Major Rice was bringing Blue Rat across the following morning, to give him a trial spin with String of Beans.

"Oh, boy!" said Bisher, who, being an American, used strange expressions.

"There's going to be nothing funny about it," said Sam seriously. "I am putting a bit of extra weight on String of Beans, my idea being to know just how I stand with this Blue Rat. I've told the lad to ride him out."

The next morning the trial came off, and, to Sam's astonishment. Blue Rat made rings round String of Beans. Led him all the way, and won the trial in a hack canter; and the time was good, as I know, because I had my watch on the spin from start to finish.

Sam looked down his nose when he came back to the house.

"That Blue Rat horse is going to win," he said.

"What about the weight you gave String of Beans?"

Sam shook his head.

"It doesn't matter," he said; *4f String of Beans had a stone less, he couldn't have won that trial. This is horrible. Nosey." (I might remark that that was the

name by which my intimate friends called me.)

Anyhow, Sam wasn't quite satisfied, and he persuaded the major to give the horses another trial, and this time they carried the weights they were set to carry in the race, and Blue Rat did just what he liked with String of Beans - - waited on him to the distance, and then came away and won his race, dancing.

"All my best laid plans are dissolving in smoke," groaned Sam, who was a very high-class talker when he liked to give his mind to literary conversation. "I have been kidding Rice all along that his horse was the best, and quite unexpectedly I have been telling the truth."

"If you don't want Blue Rat to win, why not get at the other horse!" said Bisher. "It is dead easy to give him a pill a couple of days before the race."

"Not so easy," said Sam. "You don't suppose," he asked contemptuous, "that I have been going in and out of that house without knowing the lay of the stables? Besides, if you gave him poison he wouldn't run, and if he wouldn't run, that way the captain wouldn't lose his money, would he?" which is common sense and logic, as we all agreed.

It was a week before the race when we met Mr. Dhobi. He was an Indian person—I will not call him a gentleman—a little fellow, very thin, with a high forehead and gold spectacles. Sam had met him somewhere in town, where he used to run a fortune-telling business, in a little turning off Regent Street.

I never saw a man wear a frock-coat and a top-hat on a hot day so elegantly.

Nobody expected him.

"The fact is, gentlemen," he said in his foreign way, "I happened to know that Mr. Baring was down at Luscombe, and as Mr. Baring has been a very good friend of mine, I couldn't very well avoid giving him a chance of securing the golden harvest, which the brave and the fortunate alike deserve,"

I've got a good memory for words, even if I don't know the meaning of them, and that was what he said.

"I am glad to see you, Dhobi; how is the crystal fake going?"

Dhobi shook his head.

"The constabulary of London have interfered, tyrannously and arbitrarily," he said. "Because I am a stranger to your land, being an Indian, as you will notice by the pigmentation of my countenance, I have been victimized by a trick of brutality. But knowing that Mr. Baring was in the racecourse business, I have brought to him the discovery of a fellow-countryman of mine, hoping that a suitable honorarium will reward me for trouble taken and traveling expenses

incurred."

And then he told us the most wonderful story. Personally, I didn't believe it, being by nature suspicious, and by profession a teller of the tale. But this Dhobi had a drug which was called Indian Magic. He brought out a big packet and showed us. It looked like dried tea leaves, but it was the dried leaf of a certain Indian bush which only grew on the high mountains, and it had the effect of increasing the stamina of any human being or horse that ate it. Whether or not there are high mountains in India, I don't know. Sam said there were certain hills called the Emma Layers or Hindoo Push, and geography was his passion.

Naturally, being experienced tale-pitchers, and having behind us a record of ninety electric saddles sold and paid for, we didn't exactly fall upon his neck.

"It sounds all right, Dhobi," said Sam.

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating," said Dhobi, highly enthusiastic. "I do not ask you to buy a pig in a poke, or make a leap in the dark. Give one handful to any horse you have before he goes out to exercise, and then tell me if I am indulging in fairy stories or fantastic exaggerations."

That seemed fair.

We put Dhobi up for the night and brought him into a game of Solo with the idea of testing his intelligence. He was more intelligent by three pounds ten and sixpence than Sam and me when we got up to go to bed.

"We will try it on String of Beans," said Sam. "He has always struck me as being a horse liable to take kindly to intoxication."

So, before the sun was up, we all went to String of Beans's stall, and Dhobi mixed with the horse's corn a handful of the Indian Magic.

String of Beans ate off all right. He'd eat anything. He had a special partiality for mutton bones and cabbage stalks, which is strange, considering that most of his ancestors were vegetarians.

The only thing we had to try him with was Early Worm, who wasn't a bad horse by any means; moreover, he had been in the trial spin with Blue Rat, and he had been up sides with String of Beans all the way, and had only been beaten a neck.

So we went out to the Downs, and String of Beans was the liveliest member of the party. The way he tiptoed and pranced and walked sideways and backways was both alarming and instructive. I've never seen a horse get jovial before, but String of Beans was all that; he did everything except laugh. I don't know whether people will believe what I'm going to tell them.

String of Beans jumped off at the start, made all the running, and beat Early Worm by the length of the street. There was nothing wrong about the gallop, because three of us put the clock on him and he did the mile in one- forty dead.

Sam drew a long sigh, and his eyes shone with a soft light.

"Thank you, Dhobi," he said, "you are indeed a welcome guest."

But he wasn't parting with any money until we had seen how String of Beans got over his jag. The wonderful thing about Indian Magic was that it showed no sign on the horse's coat. He didn't break out in a sweat or go mad, and when the race was over he was just as lively as he was before it started. In fact, Indian Magic had no effect at all upon him, except when we galloped him a few days after the trial he didn't go any faster than Early Worm. To make absolutely sure, we tried a handful of Indian Magic on Early Worm, and then put the two horses together in a fast mile spin. Early Worm went ahead and stayed there, and when it was over, and we clicked down our watches, Sam said:

"Boys, this Captain What's-his-name is going to get a jar."

He had quite recovered his position with the Rices: he used to go over there regular, and the captain couldn't do enough for him. Especially when Sam gave him advice about Blue Rat. I heard him one day when we were up on the Downs exercising our two animals. The captain and the young lady rode up to us just before we left.

"Are you running yours at Newmarket, Mr. Baring?" says the captain.

"Yes, I shall run him," says Sam, shaking his head mournfully. "But what's the use? Your Blue Rat is going to put it all over us."

"I wonder whether I shall get a good price?" says the captain thoughtfully.

"If you don't advertise it, and nobody knows anything about the trial, you'll get six to one for your money," says Sam. "I shall back mine," he went on, "for old association's sake. String of Beans has been a good friend of mine, and I don't think he'd like to know that I let him run without having fifty on him. In fact," he says, "I shouldn't be surprised if my horse wasn't favorite, but don't you take any notice of that, Captain. The public always dash in and back the wrong horse."

"I have been looking at the entries," says the captain, pulling a paper out of his pocket. "Do you see anything there that is likely to beat mine, Mr. Baring?"

He handed down the paper and Sam took it.

"No," he says, "there is nothing there to beat yours. String of Beans will head most of them; but, of course, the poor old String won't see the way your horse is going."

"I hope not," says Miss Virginia, in an absent-minded kind of way, and she looks at the captain with a kind of scared look. "It is an awful lot of money to risk on a selling plater, Harold," she says. "Daddy doesn't like the idea at all."

"Believe me," says Sam, very earnest, "and I speak as a sportsman of experience and a man of the world, backing Blue Rat is like picking up money. It is like taking pennies from a child," he says. "If I wasn't an honest man—which, thank God, I am," says Sam, "and not a word has ever been spoken against my character, and no stain of dishonor has blotted my coat-of-arms, which is a lamb crouching before a lion ramping, if I wasn't—well, anyway, I'm not going to back your horse, not for a penny," he says. "I wouldn't spoil your market. It would be almost caddish," he says.

"Do you think the trial was right?" says the captain.

"Right?" says Sam scoffingly, "why, of course it was right; you took the time, the clock cannot lie. No, poor old String of Beans can't win, and if you would rather I didn't run him—"

"Not at all," says the captain hastily, "especially if he is likely to become a public favorite. That will make the price of Blue Rat a better one."

Walking home to the farm, Sam was a bit remorseless.

"When that dud goes broke, I am going along to the sale of his goods to buy some of his heirlooms," he says. "I won't half tell him what I think of him, either! As to the girl, I wouldn't marry her if she threw herself at me. I'm finished with women. Nosey. They are just vampires and bloodsuckers. Besides," he says, "what's beauty I If I was the Prime Minister I would have a law passed stopping women from showing their faces. It would give the plain ones a chance. The only difference between the plainest woman in the world and the ugliest woman, is her face. Has that ever struck you. Nosey?"

I told him it had. It was curious how Sam was able to put into words thoughts that had been in your mind for years without your being able to express them.

"I don't suppose I shall ever be Prime Minister, " said Sam. "Politics I have never understood, and never shall."

"You won't miss much," says I.

"I don't suppose I shall," says Sam, "but it must be rather wonderful being a Prime Minister and having all the swells tell you when their horses are going to win, and when they're not trying."

He got String of Beans to Newmarket, or rather at a little place between Royston and Newmarket, and on the day of the race we walked him over to the course.

Sam had made his plans. He was going into Tattersalls' ring, wait for the market to be formed, and then sail in and back String of Beans with all the money we had. Bisher was going to look after the horse in the paddock and give him his feed, whilst the previous race was being run and nobody was about; and I was going into the "silver ring" to put on as much money as I could bet before the price came tumbling down.

We were walking across the Heath when we overtook the captain and Miss Virginia; I thought she was looking very worried. Sam took off his hat like a gentleman.

"Good morning, Mr. Baring," she said; "perhaps you will help me to try and persuade Captain Tarbot—"

The captain was a bit annoyed, I think, but she went on.

"Captain Tarbot is going to put a thousand pounds on his horse; I think that is madness, don't you, Mr. Baring?"

"Not at all," said Sam, very firm. "If he had two thousand pounds he ought to put it on that horse; it is one of the finest horses that I have ever seen in a selling plate. The only danger is, that he may not be able to afford to bid up at the auction to buy it in. That horse," he says, "will fetch at least a thousand pounds—"

"If it wins," says the girl. "But suppose it doesn't win—"

Sam sort of smiled.

"It is humanly impossible for that horse not to win, Miss Virginia," he says. "I speak as a sportsman and a man of the world, and I tell you that though funny things happen in racing, I never expect to see anything so comic as that horse not winning. I have been looking up his pedigree, and I say that it is a sin and a shame that a horse of that class and character should be running in a selling plate. But be that as it may, miss," he says, "you couldn't stop him winning unless you built a wall across the course, and even then he'd jump it."

"You hear, my dear?" says the captain. "Mr. Baring understands these things."

"So does father," she says obstinately, "and he says that Blue Rat is only a moderate horse, and if there is anything in the race that can gallop, your horse will be beaten."

"With all due respect to the major," says Sam, "and a nicer man and more

perfect gentleman I have never met, and highly educated too—he is not up to date if he says that this horse, Blue Rat, isn't the best performer he has ever trained. I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll give you a thousand pounds for that horse as he stands, if you will let me run him and give me the market for myself."

It was very handsome of Sam, but he knew that the captain wouldn't accept. Even the young lady was impressed.

"Very well," she says; "I suppose you know best," and that was the end of the conversation, for soon after we left them.

At the last minute Sam changed his plans and sent Bisher into the ring to back the horse, whilst he went into the paddock to give String of Beans his final preparation. I was in the "silver ring" when String of Beans went down to the post. He went down, first on his hind legs, then on his front legs, then all his legs together, and I could see by the way he was doing circles in the middle of the course that the Indian Magic was worth all the fifty pounds that Sam had given to Mr. Dhobi.

String of Beans was a good favorite; by the time I had finished backing him, he was at five to two; I had the curiosity to inquire the price of Blue Rat before I went into Tattersalls and joined Bisher and Sam. Blue Rat was at six to one, and was still six to one when I climbed the stand to where Sam and Bisher were standing.

"How did he go down?" says Sam.

"Fine," I says. "Look at him, he's still waltzing."

"I gave him a double dose," says Sam in a low voice. "We can't afford to take any risks."

"He certainly went down like a high-spirited thoroughbred," says Bisher.

"Have you got the money on?" I asked.

Sam nodded.

"This is money from home, Nosey," he says. "You have never in your life had a chance of collecting wealth so easily. "When I look down at those bookmakers," he says, "I have a sort of feeling of sorrow for them. Little do they know as they stand there, howling their blinking heads off, that in a few minutes their vast and capacious pockets will be emptied into my hat. I think we'll go to London tonight to celebrate," he says. "There's a new show on at the Palladium, and I have engaged the Royal box."

It was a very long time before the race started. String of Beans, being slightly the worse for Indian Magic, thought the winning-post was in the other

direction, and wouldn't turn his head to the tape. And when he did, he started teaching the other horses a new classy step he 'd learnt, and they began imitating him. Then he tried to walk about on his hind legs, like one of those horses you see in the British Museum, but at last they got his head right and up went the tape.

You could see Sam's blue-and-pink jacket very plainly, for the sun was shining, and before the field had gone a furlong. String of Beans was lobbing along in front, about ten lengths ahead of anything.

"There ought to be a statue put up to the man who found this Indian Magic," says Sam, and we both agreed with him.

Before they got to Bushes Hill, String of Beans was twenty lengths in front, with Blue Rat about five lengths in front of anything else.

I looked round the stand, not expecting to find the captain, because he, being a swell, should have been in the members' enclosure; but there he was, and the young lady, and her face was the color of chalk.

Coming down Bushes Hill, String of Beans, striding out like a lion, was a half a furlong in front, and even if he dropped dead, the speed he was going would have carried him past the winning-post. But he didn't drop dead. He sailed past the winning-post at forty miles an hour, and the smile on Sam's face was a pleasure to see.

We waited, and we had to wait a long time, for the second, which was Blue Rat, to get past the judge's box, and then Sam says:

"Come on, boys, let's lead him in."

"Wait a minute," says Bisher; "he hasn't stopped yet."

String of Beans ought to have turned off to the left and gone into the paddock, and we could see the jockey pulling his head off, but the reins weren't made that could hold String of Beans that day. He went over the heath, and we watched him on the skyline as he sud-deny swerved to the right, and went galloping across the heath in the direction of Cambridge. Then he swerved again, and came back toward Newmarket town. After that we didn't see him. By all accounts he went through Newmarket town, turned down a side street, dashed through a kitchen garden on to a tennis lawn, taking the net like a steeple-chaser, through a field, back to the Royston Road, and about half an hour later was stopped by two policemen in Cambridge.

I must say the Stewards were very decent. They waited twenty minutes for String of Beans to come back, and it was only after somebody had telephoned that he had been seen racing a Ford car on the Cambridge Road, that they

disqualified him and gave the race to Blue Rat.

It was the double handful of Indian Magic that had done it. "We reckoned afterwards that with one handful the jockey would have pulled him up within a mile of Newmarket, and he'd have got back in time for the jockey to have weighed in.

Dhobi promised to meet Sam after the race, but he didn't turn up. Sam spent all the evening looking for him.

THE END



Liked This Book?

For More FREE e-Books visit Freeditorial.com