

# **Nig-Nog and Other Humorous Stories**

**by  
Edgar Wallace**

*Freeditorial* 

## **Nig-Nog And Other Humorous Stories**

### 1. "NIG NOG!"

This story is about a matter which, in itself, is ancient history. It is only told now because Mr. Cymbeline Smith (his real name is something which is almost as outrageous) has placed himself under a fifty-thousand dollar bond that he will not "associate in any way whatsoever" his name or his preparation with those which occur in this story, "providing a genteel account of the aforesaid affair be put into writing by a newspaper man." This is that genteel account.

Cymbeline Smith is an American citizen who made a deal of money in the traveling circus business before he took up the serious study of medicines. It had been an asset of his that he might have stood as a model for any artist who desired to draw Uncle Sam. He had a long, somewhat dissatisfied face, a

fringe of amber and gray whisker at his chin, he always wore a top hat of antique shape and trousers which were strapped under Wellington boots. In the circus days he affected a blue cut-away swallowtail and a high stock, but these he abandoned when he gave his mind and money to medical science, and produced in conjunction with a drummer (who afterwards drank himself to death) the preparation which is known commercially as "Nig-Nog!" I have little space to dilate upon the pharmaceutical values of "Nig-Nog!" You have read the full page and the double page ads., and you know (or you disbelieve) that "Nig-Nog!" cures all nervous ailments, builds up nerve forces, clears the dazed and dopey brain, and restores to its vie—, to its grateful and delighted purchaser that roseate outlook upon life, that balance of reason, that clarity of vision which the brainworker, the cigarette-fiend, and the chronic pessimist cannot enjoy.

It was described as being compounded from a prescription which had been in the family of a Royal House of Europe for five hundred years, but this may not have been true. Now it is a fact that an advertised patent medicine which does not produce most of the results it claims brings ruin to its proprietor, for it costs more money to put the first supplies on the market than it is humanly possible to get back even if every bottle is sold. But "Nig-Nog!" was a success from the beginning. It sold in the United States of America by the million. It did build up nerve forces and clear the dazed and dopey brain. It did restore the balance of reason and the clarity of vision. And its delighted patrons told other sufferers that "Nig-Nog!" was according to specification, and in consequence Cymbeline Smith grew rich and lived in a suite at Knickerbocker House and drove a machine which was something between Cinderella's Fancy Coach and a Band Wagon.

And then he crossed the waters to conquer Europe. He flooded the London market with "Nig-Nog!"; he added a new tone to the English landscape; in car and train, on omnibus, on house-side, in druggist window, in printed page he spoke earnestly, violently, almost convincingly of "Nig-Nog!"—its virtues, its amazing qualities, and, still more, amazing cheapness.

And then he did that which of all things was unpardonable. Overlooking the weald of Sussex was a long and wooded ridge, and at its highest point was Weald Lodge, the country home of the Rt. Hon. Gregory Thessiger, Minister of Ordnance, an irritable, intolerant man who had a mild dislike for most Americans and a violent dislike for that type of American which Cymbeline Smith represented. Because he was a great man and people trembled at his nod, and because he was almost godlike to the villagers of Adfriston, he had never seriously considered the building possibility of the nine-acre lot which lay on the slope of the hill between his estate and the village. He woke one

morning to discover that Mr. Cymbeline Smith had purchased that "estate" through a soulless agent at Eastbourne.

To say that Mr. Thessiger was annoyed, was to put the matter with amusing moderation. He endeavored to cancel the sale. He offered to buy the ground, but Cymbeline Smith was first and foremost a showman, and the thought that he was to be a neighbor of the powerful Minister of a most powerful British Cabinet was not wholly abhorrent to him. So he built a dwelling which was a tactful compromise between the White House and the Tower of London, thus reconciling in one spasm of architecture the ideals of the new and the old world. But the culminating point of his infamy came when he took possession and added his final improvement.

The newspaper reporters who saw Mr. Thessiger step from his car at the door of the Treasury reported him as looking ill and worried, and drew conclusions which were wholly erroneous. The Prime Minister also noted the haggard face of his colleague, and his conclusions were almost as wide of the mark as the reporters'.

He walked across to where the Minister sat, and dropped his hand upon his shoulder.

"I think you are worrying too much about this business, Thessiger," he said; "the outlook is not as bad this morning as it was. I think Baremia will climb down."

Thessiger looked up.

"It's not that, Prime Minister," he said irritably; "It's that infernal Yankee! Confound his impertinence!"

The Prime Minister was secretly relieved. He had heard about the infernal Yankee before.

"Is his castle finished!" he asked.

"Finished!" spluttered the other. "Do you know what the rascal has done? On the roof of his house, sir, right under my nose so that I cannot miss it, he has had an electric sign put up: 'NIG-NOG FOR THE NERVES.' It is illuminated at night. He has made it impossible for me to live in my own house. By-heavens, I'll sue him!"

"An electric sign?" said the Premier; "but surely he will take it down if you ask?"

"Ask!" roared the other. "I have demanded, I have pleaded—I didn't go

myself, of course, but I sent Grey, my man; but the scoundrel says it is good advertising, for it can be read from the trains six miles away. 'Nig-Nog!' for the nerves," he repeated, grinding his teeth. "Good heavens, if I had only known that he was coming!"

"Why not sue him in the court? He seems to be a nuisance within the meaning of the Act," said the Prime Minister soothingly.

It was very necessary that he should calm his violent colleague, for certain matters were coming up for consideration which called for Thessiger's support on a measure to which, as the Prime Minister knew, the Minister of Ordnance was bitterly opposed. His worst fears were realized when that measure was brought forward. If Thessiger had been violent at previous sittings of the Cabinet, he was now wholly unmanageable; and the Prime Minister walked down to the House of Commons with the Minister of Finance.

"Thessiger is going to make a split," he said moodily, "and at a time when we all ought to stand together and drop petty differences. I'd hate to lose him, but he has things all wrong. He doesn't seem to realize Baremia's object. I wish this infernal American had not come to bother him. He was unmanageable enough without that added cause of irritation. You are a suave sort of devil, Ralph," he said suddenly. "Why don't you go to this 'Nig-Nog!' man and see if you couldn't persuade him to drop his electric sign?"

The other laughed.

"One has to be a very suave kind of devil," he repeated, "to persuade a patent medicine advertiser to surrender a good position. My acquaintance with the press, which is fairly extensive, does not encourage me to believe that Mr. Smith is amenable to reason, but I will try if you like."

So Cymbeline Smith, sitting on his broad verandah, with his red-slipped feet elevated to the rail and with a long cigar between his strong white teeth, had a visitor.

"Why, it's very good of you," said Cymbeline, who had reached that point of prosperity where he accepted the unexpected visits of Cabinet Ministers as an ordinary event of life. "I would like to oblige Mr. Thessiger, Sir Ralph, but I am a business man. I am, sir," he went on in his finest oracular style, "not only a business man, but a humanitarian, a benefactor of the human race, a man to whom the sufferings of his fellow-creatures is a clarion call to duty.

It is my opinion, sir, and it is the opinion shared by the faculty of the United States of America, that there is no more pernicious act that a man can permit than to deny to a suffering world a knowledge of this sovereign remedy. 'Nig-

Nog!', sir, may be found in the medicine chests of royal and imperial personages. It may be seen, a bright and pleasant sight, on the shelves of the humblest cottages. Until that miraculous compound, which is at once a prophylactic, a refreshment, and a cure which secures the palingenesis of the atrophied nerve centers and the reintegration of the frazzled brain, is known to every man, woman, and child of your ancient country, I cannot, without reproaching myself with my treachery to humanity, relax in the slightest degree my effort to bring 'Nig-Nog!' to the notice of the world."

"But, my dear Mr. Smith," said Sir Ralph smoothly, "surely it would serve your purpose if the electric sign were placed at our expense nearer to the railway line."

Mr. Cymbeline Smith shook his head.

"No, sir," he said, "the very remoteness of these golden words twinkling against the dark and mysterious background of the immemorial hills produces in the mind of the sufferer the impression of hope—for hope, sir, is a distant prospect. Hope, sir, is the Uranus of the psychological sky."

That night Mr. Thessiger was sitting at his desk in the big library of his house in Chepstowe Place. To be exact, he alternated between the table and the fireplace, for he had half written six letters of resignation which had been consigned to the flames, and the seventh had been begun when his butler came in, closing the door discreetly behind him.

"What is it, Carter?" asked the Minister, looking up.

"The Countess Castlavera. She wishes to see you on a very important matter."

A look of surprise came to Mr. Thessiger's face and he pulled out his watch. It was nine o'clock.

"Ask the Countess to come in, please, Carter."

He half crossed the room to meet the beautiful woman who was ushered in by the butler.

"My dear Countess," he said, "this is a great surprise and a great pleasure."

"I am afraid you are fearfully busy," she said, with a quick glance at the table. "What curious blotting paper you use!"

He smiled as he pulled forward a chair for his visitor.

"All Ministers use black blotting paper," he said; "It tells no stories."

"And you have so many secrets to hide—what a wonderful thing it is to be a Minister!"

The envy and admiration in her tone was particularly flattering to this lonely man, and, indeed, his friendship with the Countess, which had begun in a small Algerian hotel where they had found themselves in the most unfashionable season of the year, the only people of consequence amongst the guests, had been a source of the greatest comfort to him.

They had met in Paris once, and then the Countess, who was a widow, had come to London and had established her little salon in Curzon Street, and Mr. Thessiger had been an occasional visitor. That she was a fascinating woman is well enough known. Absurdly young for a widow, her eyes had that quality of blue which is found only in the eastern skies at sunset. They were that rich, cloudy blue that particularly appealed to him. Her hair he had likened in his one poetical indiscretion to "a mane of daffodils." Her mouth was small and delicately shaped—her chin, her poise, her air, were all adequately described in that "Memory of Algiers" published in the Saturday Review over the initial "T," the authorship of which was ascribed by none to the somewhat forbidding Minister of Ordnance.

"I have come to see you on rather an important matter," she smiled, "and it is because I know I can trust you that I have come at all."

He inclined his head, at once gratified and curious.

For the moment all thought of the Cabinet crisis, of the grave issues which were pending in the country, even of the exasperating vendor of patent medicines vanished from his mind, and his attention was concentrated upon this fragrant, delicate thing who already occupied too large a portion of his thoughts for his comfort.

"My late husband was, as you know, the agent for an armament firm. He had invented a wonderful howitzer—that is the word?"

Mr. Thessiger nodded.

"And most of the specifications were deposited in a Paris bank. The very secret parts of the gun he confided to me; they were never put on paper."

Mr. Thessiger raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"A somewhat complicated thing to remember, my dear Countess."

She smiled a little sadly.

"And yet by memorizing day after day I had the whole particulars here," she tapped her forehead, "except one, and that has escaped me. I am anxious to sell the gun to a certain government—you need have no fear, it is a government very friendly to yours," she laughed, "and I have recalled everything except the exact mixture in the recoil cylinders."

Mr. Thessiger shook his head.

"I am afraid I cannot help you," he said.

"You can," she said emphatically; "if I were to see another gun, I am sure it would all come back to me. I mean, if I saw it in the process of making; and I want you to help me to this extent, that you give me a permit to visit one of your great gun factories."

The minister made no reply. It was rather a delicate position. The big gun factory, and particularly that section in which the recoils were made, was inaccessible to the general public.

"I cannot answer you straight away," he said. "I do not know what objections there are."

In this he did not speak the truth, for there were many objections. For example, the new 9:6 was in process of creation, and it would be impossible for a visitor with any knowledge of guns to overlook this fact. She seemed to divine what was going on in his mind, for she said quickly:

"Please understand that I know nothing of guns, and that my technical knowledge is confined to just one tiny bit of their construction."

"I cannot give you permission yet. I will let you know in the morning," said Mr. Thessiger; and in a few minutes the conversation had drifted off into more conventional channels, and the Minister was listening with an inward purr of satisfaction to divers things which had been expressed about his genius, all of which views were conveyed to him in the most subtle fashion.

She left him with a sense of longing and an additional feeling of irritation. He slept badly, and in the morning he decided upon his line of action. Incidentally he had decided that there was no valid objection to issuing the permit which the Countess had asked for. He would only be another few days in the Cabinet and he might at least utilize his power to grant her that favor.

As for the other matter, he would oppose the breach with Barmia—for that was what the new Defense Bill would involve.

On that he was determined. He knew that his opposition to the Government

would split the Cabinet, for he had enjoyed something of a following in the House, sufficient at any rate to turn the scales against the Government. Once resolved, every hour brought a new argument, which justified to himself the attitude he had adopted. Baremia was bluffing. War was incredible, and being incredible was impossible. Before lunch he had worked himself up to a condition of smouldering anger against his colleagues. To make matters worse, a tactless member of the Cabinet called upon him before the House sat to urge a point of view which could only be described as crassly ignorant.

As the day advanced he grew more and more irritable, more and more unbearable. He snapped and snarled at his secretaries, he declined point-blank to attend the extraordinary meeting of the Cabinet which was summoned for two o'clock, and refused with equal vehemence a luncheon party with the Prime Minister. He walked down to the House that afternoon, a raw man all on edge.

To his alarm he found the hand he put up to return the salute of a passing acquaintance was shaking, and turned into a druggist's shop. The man behind the counter knew him.

"I want something to steady me, Mr. Bolsover," said the Minister. "I am a little nervy."

"I think I know the very thing," said the man. He went behind the little partition and presently came out with a glass containing a white mixture that fizzed and spluttered.

"Drink this quickly," he said, and Mr. Thessiger, with a growl at doing anything he was told, drank the mixture.

"It's not very unpleasant to take," he said in surprise.

"No, sir," smiled the chemist, "It is rather palatable. We have a great demand for that particular medicine. It has really a marvelous effect upon the jaded nerves."

"Is it your own prescription?"

The chemist shook his head.

"I wish it were. I should be a rich man," he laughed. "As a rule I do not recommend proprietary drugs, but this is out of the ordinary. It is called 'Nig-Nog'—"

"It is called what?" roared Mr. Thessiger.



"'Nig-Nog,' sir."

"If I had known that!" said the Minister between his teeth. "If I had only known that!"

He turned quickly and walked from the store boiling with rage. This was the last straw.

The House was crowded, but the Ministerial bench was empty. Ministers had gathered in the Premier's room, and they were not happy.

"Well, gentlemen," said the Prime Minister at last. He stood balancing himself upon the stone fireguard, his hands behind him and his big, harsh mouth curved in a little smile. "I think we must reconcile ourselves to going out—that doesn't matter so much. What does matter is the fact that we are likely to land this country in a pretty unholy mess."

"Don't say 'we,' " said Ralph Yerne grimly; "say Thessiger."

"He is wholly impossible," said the stout and florid Minister of the Interior. "I went to him, my dear Prime Minister, with arguments which were absolutely unanswerable, and he had the audacity to tell me to go to the devil, sir! I have never been so insulted in my life."

"I don't think arguments are much good for Thessiger," said the Prime Minister, regarding the ceiling with minute interest. "He is determined to oppose our measures of National Defense, and there is an end to it."

"What I can't understand," said Sir Ralph, "is that an intelligent man like Thessiger runs around with that infernal Castlavera woman. Everybody knows she is an agent of The Big Embassy, and I have tried in a delicate way to hint as much. She is a very dangerous woman, particularly when one knows that The Big Embassy have been trying to get some particulars of our new 9:6 guns. Thessiger is in a position to supply the information."

"Thessiger is not a fool," said the Prime Minister. "He is—"

At that moment the door opened and Thessiger came in. The Prime Minister looked at him and gasped. For the first time in his life, Thessiger's unhappy face was wreathed in smiles and he chuckled as he entered.

He nodded round genially.

"Had a most amusing experience," he said, and laughed again. "You remember that infernal American?"

"The 'Nig-Nog' man?" said the Prime Minister, relieved to find that his

colleague was capable of taking a cheerful view of anything.

"The 'Nig-Nog' man," said Thessiger. "Do you know that ten minutes ago I was inveigled into drinking some of his noxious preparation. The joke is on me with a vengeance," he laughed this time with rare heartiness, and they stared at him. "I have been thinking things over on my way up. Prime Minister," he went on, "and I believe I have taken rather a narrow view of your proposal, in fact I do not think I have been very normal lately. How do you do. Coulter?" he waved a cheerful hand to the astounded Minister of the Interior. "No," he went on, "I am going to support that measure of yours. I think it is a very wise and very sound measure. One has to look at things clearly and drop the purely personal view."

"I am delighted " began the Prime Minister.

"Not a bit, sir," said the jovial Thessiger; "but the 'Nig-Nog' story is quite a good one, don't you think?"

He strolled out of the room humming a tune and entered his own private bureau, crossed to the desk, and pressed a bell-push. His chief clerk entered a little apprehensively.

"Oh, by the way," said Thessiger, "that pass I issued to the Countess Castlavera, has it been sent?"

"No, sir, not yet," said the clerk quickly; "but I will send it by special messenger. I am very sorry—"

"Oh, don't bother about it," said Thessiger. "You can cancel it. Perhaps it was rather indiscreet to issue a pass of that character. And—wait, please," the clerk was at the door and turned back; "send down to the druggist and get me a dozen packages of—er—'Nig-Nog' I think they call it."

"Which druggist, sir?"

"They sell it everywhere," said Thessiger. "Surely you have heard of 'Nig-Nog'!

"The speech of the Minister of Ordnance," wrote the leader writer of The Times, "was a masterpiece of constructive eloquence, though it is not wholly clear what the Right Honorable gentleman meant when he referred to the Defensive Bill as being a dose of 'Nig-Nog' for nerve-shattered Europe..."

If the readers of The Times did not understand, Mr. Cymbeline Smith grasped the allusion with remarkable rapidity, and was only prevented from adding this wonderful testimonial to the already inflated list by the eloquent persuasion of

a combined Cabinet and a promise which I have endeavored to fulfill.

2.

## **JIMMY'S BROTHER**

I feel I should like to know Jimmy's brother. I picture him not unlike Jimmy, though leaner and a thought more wiry, with an air of profound profundity and wisdom, and the softest of Scotch accents which need not be reproduced.

I fancy, too, that the whole of his regiment must be wiry, solemn men, either possessed of a sense of humor and jealousy concerted or else void entirely of that virtue and most earnest in their several contemplations of things.

Jimmy himself gives you the impression that he is forever on the verge of laughter, yet is repressing that natural and proper desire lest he waste valuable time which might be employed in telling you a good story.

He has a flat in town, somewhere in the Temple I should imagine, for just as ballast is counter to buoyancy and even balloons are associated with sandbags, so does the joyous heart seek for bleakness of habitation.

Jimmy's brother is, as I say, very serious, as all young Scotsmen are, and looks upon life with solemn eyes, conscious of the beauties of vision and at the same time apprehending all the wastage of its undeveloped natural resources.

He is such a man as would stand speechless before the glories of Niagara Falls, frozen solid in a bitter winter, and would make rapid calculations as to the amount of ice that could be cut, the cost of its transportation, and its profit when delivered c.i.f. New York.

He is like all earnest men, a soldier, paying fleeting visits to town, where he discusses the army in a way which would make the scant hair of the high command rise up like little anti-aircraft guns pointing menacingly to the heavens.

Jimmy got a phone message the other day and recognized the voice of his brother.

"I'd like to come round and see you on a very important matter," said the voice, and Jimmy said, "Come along," albeit cautiously, being prepared for the worst.

Jimmy would never be surprised if his brother came to his flat leading an elephant that he had found wandering about, for he was notoriously fond of

animals, and, indeed, the request which the brother had to make when he eventually arrived was startling enough.

Jimmy's brother, burnt of face and wearing the soiled khaki of a blameless life, came into Jimmy's office.

"And where the devil do you come from!" asked Jimmy in his most elderly brotherly tone.

A man, a wicked soldier, had gone on leave and spent many days beyond those specified on Army Form B.260 in riotous and possibly licentious living, and he had been arrested by an unsympathetic constabulary in the act of giving a gratuitous display of bomb-throwing, the improvised grenade being a quart pot, and the entrenched enemy being a somewhat terrified landlord crouching behind the counter. Therefore, Jimmy's brother had been sent up "with a lance-corporal to bring the criminal back to judgment.

"Well?" said Jimmy, on guard.

"Well," repeated Jimmy's brother, impressive to the last degree. "We have got him in London, but we were allowed three days to bring him from Liverpool to the camp, and we have done it in one."

He paused as though expecting Jimmy to read into this bald and uninspiring statement all that was in his mind.

"Well" said Jimmy again. "I suppose you are taking him back to camp?"

"We were allowed three days, and we have done it in one," said Jimmy's brother deliberately, "which means we have two days to spare, and we don't get many spare days in Kitchener 's army; so we have decided to stay in town."

"But," protested Jimmy, the horrible truth dawning upon him slowly, "what is going to happen to the prisoner!"

"That's just it," said Jimmy's brother. "We have got to do something with him." He leant across the table and... "Do you mind looking after him for a couple of days?" he asked, with the nonchalance of one who was demanding a light for a cigar.

Jimmy gasped and said many things which he probably regretted at a later stage, but he told his relative where he would see him before he took charge of this youthful delinquent.

"He is quite a nice chap," protested Jimmy's brother, "when he's sober. Keep

him away from the drink. He'll do little jobs around the house." He grew enthusiastic. "He cleans silver," he said suggestively.

But Jimmy would have none of it, for he had no silver that required cleaning.

"Where is your prisoner, now!" he said.

"He's with the corporal," parried Jimmy's brother.

"But where f" insisted Jimmy.

"They're at a picture palace in Regent Street," pleaded this emissary of the crown. "Be a sport and lend us your coal cellar for a couple of days."

But Jimmy was adamant, nor was another friend whom Jimmy's brother was able to beat up any more willing, though it was discovered, in the course of skillful cross-examination conducted by Jimmy's brother, that the friend had an available bathroom.

"What do you want a bathroom for?" urged the young military gentleman passionately.

"To keep my coals in," said the other sardonically.

Eventually Jimmy's brother went down disconsolate, and spent the whole afternoon searching for his prisoner and his superior officer, the two having left the picture palace before he arrived. They were eventually run to earth in a music hall near Piccadilly Circus, and the imprisonment difficulty was got over by taking a couple of rooms in a small temperance hotel in Bloomsbury, the prisoner being locked in one, and his two comrades occupying the other.

The next morning the prisoner protested.

"All the time I am away from the regiment," he said truculently, "I am losing my pay. I want to go back to camp at once."

"You shut up," said Jimmy's brother.

"Haven't you any sense of decency?" demanded the corporal.

"We are going round sight-seeing," explained Jimmy's brother, "and if you behave yourself you can come along, but you will have to pay your own bus fares."

Whereupon the prisoner broke into such a wealth of vile and violent language that they compromised on the question of fares.

Jimmy's brother is a sentimentalist. No less was the corporal, for I gather that

they were both Scots.

They found a great tenderness of mind in the vast spaces of St. Paul's Cathedral, though the prisoner, who was a southerner, could do no more than stand with a cynical sneer on his lips, passing remarks about statues and tombs, sarcastic and uncalled for.

It was in the crypt that the man's baseness was finally revealed. Before the grave of Nelson stood Jimmy's brother and the lance-corporal, reverent—almost liquid in their emotions. Jimmy's brother stretched out his hand and laid it upon the tomb of the great admiral.

"Nelson," he murmured, and repeated his oath of allegiance right down to "So help me!" and the corporal, quivering with emotion, followed suit.

They turned to the prisoner. "This is Nelson's tomb," murmured Jimmy's brother urgently.

"To hell with Nelson!" snarled the prisoner. "I'm losing a bob a day!"

So they took him back to camp that very day.

"You don't deserve a holiday," said Jimmy's brother severely.

"An' I don't want one," said the prisoner, "not unless you make it worth me while."

"Men like you ruin the army," said the lance-corporal.

They were still wrangling when the train drew out of the station, leaving Jimmy with tears in his eyes. Yet he was not unhappy.

### 3. **SENTIMENTAL SIMPSON**

According to certain signs, the Amateur Detective thought his French window had been forced by a left-handed man who wore square-toed boots, the muddy print of the latter against the enamel of the door seemed to prove this beyond doubt. The direction of the knife-cuts in the putty about the window-glass supported the left-handed view.

Another point:

Only a left-handed man would have thought of sawing through the left fold of the shutter.

The occupier of Wisteria Lodge explained all this to the real detective, who sat stolidly on the other side of the table in the occupier's dining-room at three o'clock in the morning, listening to the interesting hypothesis.

"I think if you look for a left-handed man with square-toed boots—or they may be shoes," said the householder quietly, even gently, "you will discover the robber."

"Ah," said the real detective, and swallowed his whisky deliberately.

"The curious thing about the burglary is this," the sufferer went on, "that although my cash-box was opened and contained over £400, the money was untouched. The little tray on top had not been even lifted out. My dear wife kept a lock of hair of her pet pom 'Chu Chin'—the poor little dear was poisoned last year by those horrible people at 'The Limes.' I'm sure they did it —"

"What about this lock of hair?" asked the detective, suddenly interested.

"It was damp, quite damp," explained the householder. "Now, as I say, my theory is that the man wore square-toed boots and a mackintosh. He was undoubtedly left-handed."

"I see," said the real detective.

Then he went forth and took Sentimental Simpson out of his bed, not because he wore square-toed shoes (nor was he left-handed), but because there were certain tell-tale indications which pointed unmistakably to one man.

Mr. Simpson came blinking into the passage holding a paraffin lamp in his hand. He wore a shirt and an appearance of profound surprise.

"Hullo, Mr. Button," he said. "Lor' bless me, you gave me quite a start. I went to bed early tonight with the toothache, an' when I heard you knock I says to myself—"

"Get your trousers on," said Detective-Sergeant Button.

Simpson hesitated for just a fraction of a second and then retired to his sleeping apartment. Mr. Button bent his head and listened attentively for the sound of a stealthily opened window.

But Simpson did not run.

"And your coat and boots," said Button testily. "I'm surprised at you, Simpson—you never gave me this trouble before."

Simpson accepted the reproach with amazement.

"You don't mean to tell me that you want me?" he said incredulously, and added that if heaven in its anger deprived him of his life at that very moment, and on the spot, which he indicated with a grimy forefinger, he had been in bed since a quarter to ten.

"Don't let us have an argument," pleaded Mr. Button, and accompanied his guest to the police station.

On the day of the trial, whilst he was waiting in the corridor to go up the flight of stairs that leads to the dock, Simpson saw his captor.

"Mr. Button," he said, "I hope there is no ill-feeling between you and me?"

"None whatever, Simpson."

"I don't think you are going to get a conviction," said Simpson thoughtfully. He was a round-faced, small-eyed man with a gentle voice, and when he looked thoughtful his eyes had the appearance of having retreated a little farther into his head. "I bear no ill-will to you, Mr. Button—you've got your business and I've got mine. But who was the \* snout'?"

Mr. Button shook his head. Anyway, the informer is a sacred being, and in this case there was, unfortunately, no informer. Therefore, there was a double reason for his reticence.

"Now what is the good of being unreasonable?" he said reprovingly. "You ought to know better than to ask me a question like that."

"But what made you think it was me?" persisted Simpson, and the sergeant looked at him.

"Who got upset over a lock of hair?" he asked significantly, and the eyes of his prisoner grew moist.

"Hair was always a weakness of mine," he said, with a catch in his voice. "A relic of what you might call a loved one... somebody who has passed, Mr. Button, to... to the great beyond (if you'll forgive the expression). It sort of brings a... well, we've all got our feelings."

"We have," admitted Button kindly; "and talking about feelings, Simpson, what are my feelings going to be if I get a ticking off from the judge for bringing you up without sufficient evidence? I don't think you'll escape, mind you, but you know what juries are! Now, what about making a nice little statement, Simpson? Just own up that you 'broke and entered' and I'll go into



the box and say a good word for you. You don't want to make me look silly, do you?"

"I don't," confessed Simpson; "at the same time, I don't want to make myself look silly by owning up to a crime which, in a manner of speaking, is abhorrent to my nature."

"You read too many books," said his captor unpleasantly; "that is where you get all those crack-jaw words from. Think of what my poor wife will say if I get it in the neck from the judge... it'll break her heart..."

"Don't," gulped Mr. Simpson. "Don't do it... I can't stand it, Mr. Button."

What he might have done had the conversation been protracted is a matter for speculation. At that instant the warders haled him up the steps that lead to the dock.

And such was the weakness of the evidence against him that the jury found him Not Guilty without leaving the box.

"I cannot congratulate the police on the conduct of this case," said the judge severely, and Simpson, looking upon the crestfallen face of Sergeant Button, thought of Mrs. Button's broken heart, and had to be assisted from the dock.

So Mr. Simpson went back to his little room in Castel Street. He had an uncomfortable feeling that he had failed a friend in the hour of his need, and he strove vainly to banish from his mind the thought of the shattered harmony of Detective Button's household.

It drew him just a little farther from contact with the world in which he lived, for he was not a popular partner and had few friends. One by one they had fallen away in consequence of his degrading weakness. Lew Saffron, who had openly and publicly stated at the "Nine Crowns" that Simpson was the greatest artist that had ever smashed a safe, and had as publicly challenged the American push to better Mr. Simpson's work in connection with the unauthorized opening of Epstein's Jewelry Emporium, even Lew eventually dropped him after a disastrous partnership.

"It would have been a success and we'd have got away with the finest parcel of stones that ever was taken in one haul," he said, relative to a certain Hatton Garden job which he had worked with Simpson; "but what happened? He got the safe open and I was downstairs, watching the street for the copper, expecting him to come down with the stuff. I waited for ten minutes and then went up, and what did I see? This blank, blank Simpson sitting on the blank, blank floor, and crying his blank, blank eyes out over some old love-letters

that Van Voss kept in his safe! Letters from a blank, blank typist that Van Voss had been in love with. He said they touched him to the core. He wanted to go and kill Van Voss, and by the time I'd got him quiet the street was full of bulls... we got away over the roof... no more Simpson for me, thank you!"

Mr. Simpson sighed as he realized his lonely state. Nevertheless his afternoon was not unprofitably spent, for there were six more chapters of Christy's Old Organ to be read before, red-eyed, he returned the book to the free library which he patronized.

He had an appointment that evening with Charles Valentino, the keeper of a bar at Kennington and a man of some standing in the world-beneath-the-world.

He was a tall man with a drooping moustache (though his appearance is of no importance), and he was fattish of figure, heavy and deliberate of speech. He greeted Mr. Simpson reproachfully and in his heaviest manner.

"What's this I hear about the job you did, Simpson? I couldn't believe my eyes when I read it in the newspaper. Got acquitted, too! You ought to have had ten years!"

Mr. Simpson looked uncomfortable.

"Left four hundred and thirty pounds in treasury notes in a box that you had opened, that wasn't even locked? What's the matter with you, Simpson?"

Charles Valentino's tone was one of amazement, incredulity, and admonishment.

"I can't help it, Mr. Valentino." Tears were in Sentimental Simpson's eyes. ""When I saw that lock of 'air on the tray and I thought perhaps that it was a lock of the 'air of his mother, treasured, so to speak—"

Here Mr. Simpson's voice failed him, and he had to swallow before he continued:

"It's me weakness, Mr. Valentino; I just couldn't go any farther."

Mr. Valentino puffed thoughtfully at his cigar.

"You owe me seventy pounds; I suppose you know that?" he asked unpleasantly. "Seventy pounds is seventy pounds."

Simpson nodded.

"It cost me thirty pounds for a mouthpiece," Valentino continued, and by

"mouthpiece" he referred to the advocate who had pleaded Simpson's cause: "twenty-five pounds for that new lot of tools I got you, when you came out of 'stir' last May; ten pounds I lent you to do that Manchester job, which you never paid me back—the so-called jewelry you brought down was all Birmingham stuff, nine carat, and not worth the freight charges—and here you had a chance of getting real money... well, I'm surprised at you, that^s all I can say, Simpson."

Simpson shook his head unhappily.

Mr. Valentino, thinking that perhaps he had gone as far as was necessary, beckoned the Italian waiter (the conference took place at a little brasserie in Soho) and invited his companion.

"What will you have, Simpson?"

"Gin," said the wretched Simpson.

"Gin goes with tears." Mr. Valentino was firm. "Have a more manly drink, Simpson."

"Beer," corrected Simpson despondently.

"Now I'll tell you what it is," said Mr. Valentino when their needs had been satisfied. "Things can't go on as they are going. I am a commercial man, and I've got to make money. I don't mind taking a risk when there's loot at the end of it, but I tell you, Simpson, straight, that I am going to chuck it up unless some of yon hooks pay more attention to business. "Why," went on Mr. Valentino indignantly, "in the old days I never had this kind of trouble with you boys! Willie Topple never gave me, what I might term, a moment's uneasiness."

It was always serious when Mr. Valentino dragged Willie Topple from his grave in Exeter Gaol and set him up as a model of industry, and Sentimental Simpson moved uncomfortably in his velvet chair.

"Willie was always on the spot, and if he did a job, there was the stuff all nicely packed up," said Mr. Valentino reminiscently. "He'd just step into the saloon bar, order a drink, and shove the stuff across the counter. 'You might keep this box of chocolates for me, Mr. Valentino,' that's what he'd say, and there it was, every article wrapped in tissue paper. I used to compare them with the list published in the Hue and Cry, and never once did Willie deliver short."

He sighed.

"Times have changed," he said bitterly. "Some of you boys have got so careless that me heart's in me mouth every time a \* split' strolls into the bar. And what do I get out of it? Why, Willie Topple drew seventeen hundred pounds commission from me in one year—you owe me seventy!"

"I admit it is a risk being a fence " began

Mr. Simpson.

"A what?" said the other sharply. "What was that word you used, Simpson?"

Mr. Simpson was silent.

"Never use that expression to me. A fence! Do you mean the receiver of stolen property? I mind things for people. I take a few articles, so to speak, in pawn for my customers. I'm surprised at you, Simpson."

He did not wait for Mr. Simpson to express his contrition, but bending forward over the table, lowered his voice until it was little more than a rumble of subterranean sound.

"There's a place in Park Crescent, No. 176," he said deliberately. "That's the very job for you, Simpson. Next Sunday night is the best time, because there will only be the kid in the house. There's lashings of jewelry, pearl necklaces, diamond plaques, and the father and mother are away at Brighton. They are going to a wedding. I have had a \*nose' in the house, a window- cleaner, and says all the stuff is kept in a little safe under the mother's bed. The best time is after eleven. They go to bed early... and a pantry window that you can reach from the back of the house, only a wall to climb, and that's in a mews. Now, what do you say, Simpson?"

Mr. Simpson scratched his chin.

"I'll have a look round," he said cautiously. "I don't take much notice of these window-cleaners. One put me on to the job at Purley—"

"Let bygones be bygones," said Mr. Valentino. "I know all about that Purley business. You'd have made a profit if your dam' curiosity hadn't made you stop to read the funeral cards in the cook's bedroom. And after we'd got the cook called away to the north so that you should have no trouble and an empty house to work in! The question is, will you do this, or shall I put Harry Welting on to it? He is not as good a man as you, I admit, Simpson, though he hasn't your failings."

"I'll do it," said Mr. Simpson, and the other nodded approvingly.

"If a fiver is any good to you...?" he said.

"It will be a lot of good to me," said Mr. Simpson fervently, and the money was passed.

It was midnight on the 26th June, and it was raining—according to Mr. Simpson's extravagant description—cats and dogs, when he turned into Park Mews, a deserted and gloomy thoroughfare devoted to the storage of mechanical vehicles. He had marked the little gate in the wall by daylight. The wall itself was eight feet in height and surmounted by spikes. Mr. Simpson favored walls so guarded. The spikes, if they were not too old, served to attach the light rope he carried. In two minutes he was over the wall and was working scientifically at the pantry window. Ten minutes afterwards he was hanging up his wet mackintosh in the hall. He paused only to slip back the bolts in the door, unfasten the chain, and turn the key softly, before he mounted the thickly carpeted stairs.

The house was in darkness. Only the slow tick of the hall-clock broke the complete stillness, and Mr. Simpson walked up the stairs, keeping time to the clock, so that any accidental creak he might make might be confounded by a listener with the rhythmic noise of the timepiece.

The first bedroom which he entered was without occupant. He gathered from the richness and disposition of the furniture, and the handsomeness of the appointments, that this was the room occupied by the father and mother now participating in the Brighton festivities.

He made a thorough and professional examination of the dressing-table, found and pocketed a small diamond brooch of no enormous value, choked for a second at the silver-framed picture of a little girl that stood upon the dressing-table, but crushed down his emotions ruthlessly.

The second bedroom was less ornate, and like the other, untenanted. Here he drew blank. It was evidently a room reserved for visitors; the dressing-table was empty as also was the wardrobe. Then he remembered and went back to the room he had searched and flashed his lamp under the bed. There was no sign of a safe. It may be in the third room, thought Mr. Simpson, and turned the handle of the door softly. He knew, the moment he stepped inside, that the big four-poster bed he could dimly see was occupied. He could hear the regular breathing of the sleeper and for a second hesitated, then stepping forward carefully, he moved to the side of the bed, listening again.

Yes, the breathing was regular. He dare not put his lamp upon the sleeper. This must be the child's room, he guessed, and contented himself with stooping and showing a beam of light beneath the bed. He gasped. There was the "safe". A

squat, steel box. He put out the light and laid the torch gently upon the floor, then groping beneath the bed, he gripped the box and slid it toward him. It was very heavy, but not too heavy to carry.

Drawing the treasure clear of the bed, he slipped his torch in his pocket and lifted the box. If it had been the safe he had expected, his success would have been impossible of achievement. As it was, the weight of this repository taxed his strength. Presently he had it well gripped and began a slow retreat. He was half-way across the room when there was a click, and instantly the room was flooded with light. In his natural agitation the box slipped from his fingers; he made a wild grab to recover his hold, and did succeed in putting it down without noise, but no more. And then he turned, open-mouthed, to the child who was watching him curiously from the bed.

Never in his life had Sentimental Simpson seen a child so fairylike, so ethereal in her loveliness. A mass of golden hair was tied back by a blue ribbon, and the big eyes that were fixed on him showed neither fear nor alarm. She sat up in bed, her thin white hands clasping the knees doubled beneath the coverlet, an interested and not unamused spectator of Mr. Simpson's embarrassment.

"Good evening, Mr. Burglar," she said softly, and smiled.

Simpson swallowed something.

"Good evening, miss," he said huskily. "I hope I haven't come into the wrong house. A friend of mine told me to call and get a box he had forgotten—"

"You're a burglar," she said, nodding wisely; "of course you're a burglar. I am awfully glad to see you. I have always wanted to meet a burglar."

Mr. Simpson, a prey to various emotions, could think of no suitable reply. He looked down at the box and he looked at the child, and then he blinked furiously.

"Come and sit here," she pointed to a chair by the side of the bed.

The dazed burglar obeyed.

"How long have you been a burglar?" she demanded.

"Oh, quite a long time, miss," said Mr. Simpson weakly.

She shook her head reproachfully.

"You should not have said that—you should have said that this was your first crime," she said. "When you were a little boy, were you a burglar?"

"No, miss," said the miserable Simpson.

"Didn't your mother ever tell you that you mustn't be a burglar?" asked the child, and Simpson broke down.

"My poor old mother!" he sobbed.

It is true to say that in her lifetime the late Mrs. Simpson had evoked no extravagant expressions of affection from her children, who had been rescued from her tender care at an early age, and had been educated at the rate-payers' expense at the local workhouse. But the word "mother" always affected Mr. Simpson that way.

"Poor man," said the child tenderly. She reached out her hand and laid it upon Mr. Simpson's bowed head. "Do your little children know that you are a burglar?" she asked.

"No, miss," sobbed Simpson.

He had no little children. He had never been married, but any reference to his children always brought a lump into his throat. By spiritual adoption he had secured quite a large family. Sometimes, in periods of temporary retirement from the activities and competition of life, he had brooded in his cell, his head in his hands, on how his darling little Doris would miss her daddy, and had in consequence enjoyed the most exquisite of mental tortures.

"Are you a burglar because you are hungry?"

Mr. Simpson nodded. He could not trust himself to speak.

"You should say—I'm starving, miss!" she said gently. "Are you starving?"

Mr. Simpson nodded again.

"Poor burglar!"

Again her hand caressed his head, and now he could not restrain himself any more. He fell on his knees by the side of the bed and, burying his head in his arms, his shoulders heaved.

He heard her slip out of bed on the other side and the shuffle of her slippared feet as she crossed the room.

"I am going to get you some food, Mr. Burglar," she said softly.

All Mr. Simpson's ill-spent life passed before his anguished eyes as he waited. He would reform, he swore. He would Live an honest life. The influence of

this sweet, innocent child should bear its fruit. Dear little soul, he thought, as he mopped his tear-stained face, she was down there in that dark, cold kitchen, getting him food. How brave she was! It was a long time before she came back bearing a tray that was all too heavy for her frail figure to support. He took it from her hands reverently and laid it on the table.

She was wearing a blue silk kimono that emphasized the purity of her delicate skin. He could only look at her in awe and wonder.

"You must eat, Mr. Burglar," she said gently.

"I couldn't eat a mouthful, miss," he protested tearfully. "What you said to me has so upset me, miss, that if I eat a crumb, it will choke me."

He did not mention, perhaps he had forgotten, that an hour previous he had supped to repletion. She seemed to understand, and sat down on the edge of the bed, her grave eyes watching him.

"You must tell me about yourself," she said. "I should like to know about you, so that I can pray for you, Mr. Burglar."

"Don't, miss!" blubbered Mr. Simpson.

"Don't do it! I can't stand it! I have been a terrible man. I used to be a lob-crawler once. You don't know what a lob-crawler is? I used to pinch tills. And then I used to do ladder work. You know, miss, I put ladders up against the windows whilst the family was in the dining-room and and got away with the stuff. And then I did that job at Hoxton, the fur burglary. There was a lot about it in the papers—me and a fellow named Moses. He was a Hebrew gentleman," he added unnecessarily.

The girl nodded.

"But I am going to give it up, though, miss," said Simpson huskily. "I am going to chuck Valentino, and if I owe him seventy pounds, why, I'll pay him out of the money I earn honestly."

"Who is Valentino?"

"He's a fence, miss; you wouldn't know what a fence is. He keeps the \* Bottle and Glass' public-house down Atherby Road, Kennington."

"Poor man," she said, shaking her head. "Poor burglar, I am so sorry for you."

Mr. Simpson choked. "I think I'll go, miss, if you don't mind." She nodded and held out her hand.



He took it in his and kissed it. He had seen such things done in the pictures. Yet it was with a lightened heart, and with a knowledge of a great burden of crime and sin rolled away from his conscience that he walked down the stairs, his head erect, charged with a high purpose. He opened the door and walked out, literally and figuratively into the arms of Inspector John Coleman, X. Division; Sergeant Arthur John Welby of X. Division; and Detective Sergeant Charles John Smith, also of X. Division.

"Bless my heart and soul," said the Inspector, "if it isn't Simpson!"

Mr. Simpson said nothing for a moment, then:

"I have been visiting a friend."

"And now you are coming to stay with us. What a week-end you are having I" said Sergeant Smith.

At four o'clock in the morning, Mr. Simpson stirred uneasily on his wooden bed. A voice had disturbed him; it was a loud and an aggressive voice, and it came from the corridor outside his cell. He heard the click and clash of a turning lock.

"So far as I am concerned," said the voice, "I am a perfectly innocent man, and if any person has made a statement derogatory to my good name I will have the law on him, if there is a law."

"Oh, there's a law all right," said the voice of Detective Smith. "In you go, Valentino," and then the door was slammed.

Mr. Simpson sat up and took notice.

Valentino!

The next morning, when he was conducted by the assistant gaoler to perform his ablutions, he caught a glimpse of that respectable licensed victualler. It was the merest glimpse, for the grating in the cell-door is not a large one, but he heard Mr. Valentino's exclamation of annoyance, and when he returned, that worthy man hissed at him:

"So you're the nose, are you, Simpson, you dirty dog!"

"Don't say it, Mr. Valentino," said Simpson brokenly, for it hurt him that any man should think him guilty of so despicable an action.

That their crime was associated was proved when they stepped into the dock together, with policemen between them, the constabulary having been inserted for the sake of peace and quietness. Yet, despite his position, Mr. Simpson was

by no means depressed. His heart sang a song of joy at his reformation. Perhaps he would see the girl, that angel child, again; that was all he hoped.

Looking round the court eagerly, a wave of joy swept through his being, for he had seen her. That was enough. He would serve whatever sentence was passed, and tears of happiness fell from his eyes and splashed on the steel rail of the dock. The assistant gaoler thoughtfully wiped them off. Rust spots are very difficult to eradicate, unless they are dealt with immediately.

And then to his delight she came forward. A sweet figure of childhood, she seemed, as she stood in the witness stand. Her eyes rested on him for a second and she smiled...

"If you want to cry, cry on the floor!" hissed the assistant gaoler, and rubbed the rail savagely with his handkerchief.

A lawyer rose in the body of the court.

"Your name is Marie Wilson?" he said.

"Yes, sir," she replied in a voice of such pure harmony that a thrill ran through Simpson's system.

"You are professionally known as "Baby Bellingham?"

"Yes, sir," said the child.

"And you are at present engaged at the Hilarity Theatre in a play called The Child and the Burglar?"

"Yes, sir," she answered, with a proud glance at the dazzled Simpson.

"And I thinly I am stating the fact," said the lawyer, "that your experience last night was practically a repetition of the action of your play?"

"Yes, sir," said the child, "except that he wouldn't say his lines. I did try hard to make him."

The magistrate was looking at a paper on his desk.

"I see there is a report of this occurrence in this morning's newspaper," he said, and read the headline:

"CHILD ACTRESS REDUCES HARDENED BURGLAR

TO TEARS BY HER ARTISTRY"

Miss Wilson nodded gravely.

"After I had gone downstairs to get him his supper and had rung up the police on the telephone," she said, "I also rang up my press agent. My papa says that I must always ring up my press agent. Papa says that two lines on the news page is worth two columns amongst the advertisements. Papa says—"

It was ten months after this when Mr. Simpson and Mr. Valentino met. They were loading coke into a large cart drawn by a famous old blind horse which is the pride of Dartmoor GaoL. The warder in charge of the party was at sufficient distance away to allow a free interchange of courtesies.

"And when I get out," said Mr. Valentino, tremulous with wrath, "I am going to make Kennington too hot to hold you, Simpson. A chicken-hearted fellow like you oughtn't to be in the business. To think that a respectable tradesman should be herded with common felons because a babbling, bat-eyed hook gets sloppy over a kid and gives away his friends—an actress too... stringing you along, you poor turnip! Doin' her play with you as the 'ero! My God, you 're a disgrace to the profession!"

But Simpson was standing erect, leaning on his shovel and staring across the yard.

In the angle of two high walls was a mound of loose earth which had been brought in to treat the governor's garden, and on the face of the dun-colored heap were vivid green shoots tipped with blue; they had come, it seemed, in a night, for this was the month of early spring.

"Bluebells!" quavered Mr. Simpson. His lip trembled and he wiped his eyes with the cuff of his yellow coat.

Bluebells always made Mr. Simpson cry.

#### 4.

#### **CHUBB OF THE "SLIPPER"**

No doubt about Chubb's gift of oratory. When he was a sprat of twelve, a chubby midget filling his neat cadet uniform, he had orated to the Commander of H.M.S. Britannia to such purpose (it was on the subject of messing) that, recovering from his trance, the outraged officer had stopped his shore leave and threatened him with expulsion.

People thought it was cheek, but really it was a natural gift for oratory. The Britannia boys called him Demosthenes Junior, but that was too long and it was "Chubb" that stuck, and rightly so, for "Chubb" fitted him as well as he

fitted his clothes.

He orated his way from Hong-Kong to Chatham, from Benin to Sydney. He addressed Admirals, Captains, Commanders, Navigators, and—at rare intervals—the Lords of the Admiralty themselves.

He talked of himself soberly and gravely, as though he held the wheel of Destiny, and those who met him for the first time began by sniggering openly or secretly (according to their rank), and ended in a condition of awe-stricken reverence.

If Chubb hadn't been a good fellow, a splendid seaman, one of the best torpedo officers of his day, he would have been a bore. As it was, men sought him out to learn of his wisdom, and even Admirals, called up to respond at local functions for the Navy, came to Chubb to pick up the wrinkles of rhetoric.

On a day in July, Chubb Church came down to the quay, driving his little yellow two-seater. His suit was aggressively brown, and perched above his round, red, cherubic face was a gray top hat. He had a long cigar between his teeth and a look of settled melancholy in his eyes.

He drew the car up with a jerk by the edge of the landing-stage and slowly descended.

A waiting petty officer touched his cap.

"Flagship's made a signal. Get up steam, sir," he said.

"The Flagship's made a signal. Get up steam," repeated Chubb absently. "Oh, it has, has it?"

He inspected his small car with a bleak stare and shook his head.

"Never again, O car of fate," he said.

The chief petty officer twiddled his bare toes in embarrassment.

"Beg pardon, sir?" he said.

Chubb brought his eyes to his subordinate.

"Is your name Carr, my lad?" he asked.

"No, sir—Samson, sir."

"Then you are not the car I was addressing, Samson."

He returned to his contemplation of the machine.

His chauffeur had climbed out of the little well at the back of the car, and was regarding its mechanism anxiously and not a little resent-fully.

Chubb twirled his cane, and pushed his gray hat further on the back of his head and sighed.

"Son," he said, "take the car to Plymouth—I may be there, who knows the strange and beneficent workings of Providence? If I do not come, you will call every morning at Drake's Lodge and tell Miss Gillander that the car is entirely at her disposal mornin', afternoon, and evenin'—at any hour of the day or night. Tell her—"

Here he stopped. Even Chubb felt the delicacy of delivering tragic messages by a chauffeur, and moreover in the presence of a hard-footed and eager-eared sailor who would repeat the conversation for the benefit of his favored members of the Petty Officers' Mess.

Also there was a chance of the battleship going into Devonport, where he might deliver the message himself.

"Recall signal flying, sir," said the petty officer.

"Blow the recall signal!" replied Chubb mutinously.

He turned and walked slowly down the steps and stepped nimbly into the bobbing pinnace.

"Cast off," he said and settled himself in the tiny cabin as the pinnace danced over the sunlit waters of Falmouth to the Ironside.

"What the devil were you waiting for, Chubb?" asked a justly annoyed Captain, who had been watching the scene ashore with his telescope; "I jolly nearly recalled the pinnace without you."

Chubb took off his hat.

"Sir," he said, "there are moments in life when the premonition trembles upon one edge of sordid actuality."

"Hurry up and get out of that kit," interrupted the skipper briefly. "Come on to the bridge, I want to speak to you."

"We are going into Devonport," said Captain Benson ten minutes later, when they stood side by side on the bridge of the battleship; "I suppose you've heard the news?"

Chubb bowed his head.

"She sails on Wednesday next," he said, with splendid resignation. "You may think, sir, that I'm a sentimental ass—well, sir, as dear old Socrates or Plato or one of those officers said—"

"Who sails?" asked his astounded superior. "I'm not talking about anybody sailing."

"I thought you referred to Miss Gillander, sir," replied Chubb, redder than ever.

The Captain's lips twitched.

"Nothing so important," he said gravely, "merely a question of European complications, and you're gazetted to the Slipper for special service."

And so it came about that Chubb saw Jo Gillander again.

He saw her in the big and fragrant drawing-room that overlooks the Head, and there was pleasure unmistakable in her eyes.

She was the tiniest of girls, so perfectly and beautifully proportioned that you forgot she was under the height of the average woman. Her face was delicately modeled and delicately colored. There was a dancing imp of laughter in her eyes, yet so tender a laughter that tears seemed near at hand.

"I saw your big fat ship come in," she said, and patted the settee by her side most invitingly.

No doubt but that Chubb prepared a rapid survey in language of overpowering vividness. From the world to this little lady was a natural transposition.

"It is not for me," he finished gravely, "to forecast the enormous and cataclysmic consequence to a situation already workin' to its ordained and fearful end. What spark of rhetoric, what brand of eloquence will eventually fire the magazine, changin' the destinies of men, and casting into the melting-pot the fortunes of nations—but, Miss Gillander, I can say with great earnestness and sincerity that I love you."

She raised her hand gently to stop him, but there was kindness in her eyes and the laughter had gone.

"For you," he went on, "I am prepared at any given moment—so far as the exigencies of the Service admit—to throw down the gage of war to all the world; refuse me, as you have done not once, but many times, and let the world grow apprehensive in the face of a heartbroken and reckless man."

Of course it was absurd. She explained the absurdity in a very few words. It

wasn't the disparity in their fortunes, because, although the American heiress was credited with millions, yet Chubb was very well off indeed. It wasn't that her parents objected, because she had no parents. It wasn't even that she disliked Chubb—but (here was the truth, and she could not tell it) Chubb was without the heroic qualities. He was less like the hero of tradition than anybody she had met. He was fat—there was no getting away from his girth; he was plump, he was babylike.

She was a worshipper of tall men, with sad, clean-cut features, powdered gray at the temples. Chubb threatened to go bald on the slightest provocation.

She explained, getting round the subject as best she could, why it was impossible for her to marry him.

Chubb went back to the dockyard to superintend the revictualling of H.M.S. Slipper with a heavy heart.

It was his first important command, but it gave him no pleasure. It was a dream of a ship, could pull out twenty-eight knots; a lightly armed, unprotected cruiser designed for the protection of shipping—a sleek, swift, deadly little ship, such as Chubb could handle better than any man in the Service.

But his heart was at Drake's Lodge, with a girl whose packing he interrupted from day to day.

She was very definite at last, being humanly annoyed, not so much at his persistence as from his having called at 11 a. m. and caught her immersed in the prosaic task of making a cubic yard of wearing apparel fit half a cubic yard of box.

The Steamship Company had sent her a frantic warning that she must reduce her baggage to its smallest limit, for war was in the air, and the holds of S.S. Germanie were needed for passenger accommodation.

"Understand finally. Captain Church," said she, still kind, but this time unpleasantly so, "I cannot marry; you are not the kind of man I want—"

There—she had said it!

Chubb stood comically, tragically bewildered.

What kind of man could she want?

"The hot weather has perhaps affected you, Miss Gillander," he said gently; "the psychology of weather in its relation to human affairs has often—in short,

what's wrong with me?"

"I don't want you," she said, biting her lips.

There was a long and painful silence.

"Oh," said Chubb, and groped for his cap; "all right." He walked to the door and turned upon her a face charged with portent. "For all that happens hereafter," said he, "you are responsible."

She ignored the unfairness of the threat.

"You are not going to—" she began in agitation.

"You will see the map of Europe changed," said Chubb and walked out.

From that moment, in Chubb's mind, war was inevitable.

The Slipper came slowly through the darkening seas, all her lights out, a blur of gray on a gray ocean. Behind her, scarcely visible, was the coast of Ireland.

Chubb stood on the bridge, and by his side was his First Lieutenant. The telegraph marked "Slow ahead." Chubb looked at his watch, snapped the case cover, and took from his pocket an envelope heavily sealed. He handed it without a word to his Number One, who examined the seal and passed it back to his superior.

Chubb tore the envelope of his sealed orders and read the contents.

"Convey the Germanie to latitude..." he read aloud;..."wireless me when you have opened this... keep an eye open for the enemy's torpedo boats; there are four in your area..."

There were other instructions concerning a certain collier which would be found waiting at a rendezvous—of other ships suspected of acting as colliers to the enemy. Chubb knew all about the Germanie, Its immense speed, its crowded accommodation, and, most important item of all, the fact that it carried two million pounds of gold had been set forth in the columns of the Press.

"What the deuce are they sending gold to America for!" he asked fretfully. "It seems to me that this is the time of all times when the auriferous metal is most needed at the seat of war."

"Shipment purchased months ago by the U.S. Treasury, sir," said his Number One. "Dash it all—we can't pinch the gold of neutrals!"



"But why not send this damned stuff on an American ship!" protested Chubb. "Are you aware that the Studtgardt and the Altona are in these waters—two of the fastest cruisers the Dutchmen have? Are you aware that on the Germanie are delicately nurtured ladies to whom the very thought of war is abhorrent? By Heavens!"—he raised a dramatic fist to the sky—"rather would I see the vexed boundaries of Europe twist in serpentine convulsions than that one spasm of fear—"

"Wireless from the Flagship, sir."

The operator came on board with a bit of paper.

Chubb looked at the paper.

"Candour, devoted, Portsmouth, tempted," it ran.

"Decode that," he said, and in three minutes the message was in his hands.

"Destroyers covering Studtgardt are crossing you."

Chubb nodded.

He was dressed in gray flannel trousers and gray sweater, a grim, workmanlike suit for the task in hand.

He was the seaman now, cautious, alert, and tense.

The engine telegraph went over to "Full ahead," and the swift Slipper gathering speed tore through the water, cutting the heavy seas with her knife-like bows. The day was failing but there was no mist. Officers searched the seas ahead through their binoculars, but there was no sign of craft. Darkness fell, and then far away on the starboard bow Chubb saw something.

It was no more than a patch of foam on the water, but it was moving.

It was for all the world as though a big white feather was being trailed on the sea at the end of an invisible swing.

"Submarine on the starboard bow," he shouted, and the Slipper heeled over as though she was turning turtle as she came bow on to the danger.

"Bang!"

From the starboard gun of the forward battery flicked a straight rod of flame. Instantly the white beams of two searchlights played upon the feather.

Chubb's finger touched a button and two seconds later a long fish-like shape leapt from the bow to the water—a shape that seemed alive as it swam straight

and swift to its prey.

"Bang!"

The shell from the second gun threw up a column of water to the rear of the feather, now moving in a circle preparatory to launching her death-dealing messenger.

She was half turned when the British torpedo struck her. Up into the air jumped a great column of water sprinkled with black wreckage. A deafening explosion and then silence.

"A-way cutter!" roared Chubb, and the boat went over the side to pick up what was left of the luckless crew.

"Phew!" said Chubb and wiped his forehead as the boat came back from its fruitless search.

The boat was hardly inboard when the second attack came. The two destroyers came into the white beams of the searchlights as the Slipper was gathering way. The four starboard guns of the Slipper spoke together, and there, came across the waters a sound like the emptying of a sack of old iron.

"That's got her," began Chubb, when the bridge on which he stood was raked by a mad twirling shell, which carried away rail and port telegraph, and almost carried Chubb with it. It was the last shot the destroyer fired. Again the fish-like shape leapt joyfully to its work from the torpedo tube in the bow.

It met and passed another, which just missed the swinging stem of the Slipper... the torpedo boat went down by the head in a swirl of water.

But the second was intact though lamed.

The aft guns of the Slipper pumped shell into her, but at an ever-increasing distance.

"Wireless the Flagship," said Chubb; "they can send a couple of T.B.D.'s to pick her up."

He was bothered. He was working blindly. Somewhere beyond the rim of the sea men were playing a game with the Slipper as a pawn. Somewhere in a big building in the very heart of London the players watched him dispassionately—condemning him, perhaps, that from his sacrifice they might gain some advantage of which he knew nothing.

He searched the seas again through his night-glasses. It was not a hostile cruiser he sought; the Studtgardt was a thousand miles away. It was Germanie

he was looking for. The fact was the panic-stricken Germanie was running at top speed to the New England coast with her precious cargo.

He parted from the cruiser fleet at Brow Head and had taken his instructions from the gray-haired young Admiral.

"Here are your orders," he said, handing the sealed package; "you won't have much trouble, I fancy—keep to the south of the Germanie's course. Coal at Halifax, and report to the C.I.C, North Atlantic."

"Far be it from me, sir," said Chubb, "to discuss or question the high strategists of war, but a great passenger steamer carrying huge quantities of gold demands much greater protection than I can give her."

"Don't make speeches at me, you insubordinate devil," said the Admiral.

"You're not likely to be bothered, and if you are you can run up to the Germanie, take off Miss Gillander, and set a course for a desert island."

Chubb blushed and went down the ladder, cursing all high officers who gossiped about his private affairs.

So the fleet sailed eastward, and a man who had been lying out of sight of the coastguards on the Irish coast carefully noted the direction it took, and making his way to the nearest post office telegraphed to London a tender inquiry after his mother's health.

An hour later the German North Atlantic Squadron received news via Togoland that the rich prize Germanie was on her way to America escorted by one insignificant, unprotected cruiser.

Wireless messages went left and right, and while two destroyers and a submarine moved from their secret base to cut off the Slipper, the cruiser squadron made its preparations for the rapid transference of gold.

There was on board the Germanie a certain air of tension which communicated itself by some remarkable method from the ships' officers, who knew the peril, to the passengers, who knew nothing.

Jo Gillander, stretched in a big deck chair her grave eyes on the horizon, found a certain melancholy pleasure in the nervousness of her fellow-passengers. For she needed diversion. There lingered in her mind the unheroic figure of a stout young naval officer and in her ears his sombre eloquence. She smiled faintly, but the smile soon passed.

She had not realized how big a place he held in her heart and in her thoughts.

She looked up with half a frown as the dapper figure of the middle-aged von Sedlitz dropped into the chair by her side. She had known him for some years. He was attached to the Embassy at Washington an automatically smiling man, with a clean skin and a carefully brushed moustache.

"Now you shall soon be back in your free land," he smiled, "away from horrid war, hein. Soon we shall make wars impossible and police all Europe—Europe in peace under our High Kaiser!"

"Do you think you will win?" She looked at him curiously, and he laughed.

"Cer-tain-ly—why not? First to crush France, then to crush Russia, and all the time we weary the English fleet—picking off one ship here and one ship there."

He stopped and hesitated.

"Already," he said impressively, and his hand swept to the sea, "In this circle of water there has been one such ship— pouf!—gone! I know."

He nodded wisely.

She looked at him with resentment in her eyes. That he could smile amidst such horrors! That he could be so complacent in the face of tragedy! And she remembered that stout man of hers—yes, of hers, she told herself defiantly, and enveloped him in that second of time in the heroic qualities which had never been his. At this moment the Captain of the Slipper was very precious to this dainty little lady.

"Yes, it went out," von Sedlitz went on, unconscious of the storm that was gathering; "one moment a proud ship—the next moment our friend the Slipper —"

"The Slipper!"

She was on her feet, white and shaking.

"Jawohl!" he said jocularly—he was a dense man and saw only the sensation he had made. "Such is my knowledge. You saw a fishing-boat pass yesterday—you saw a man waving little flags—he told me everything."

She confronted him, pale as death, that rosebud mouth set in a straight line.

"If the Slipper is sunk," she said in a low voice, "I hope this ship sinks, and you and I wath it."

He stared at her, but he was never destined to utter what was in his mind...

they felt the ship slow down, without realizing what was happening, then—"Gott!" cried the exultant von Sedligtz; "Look!"

Right ahead, barring the way, were four great ships painted gray, and from their main fluttered the white-and-black flag.

"For the gold, you understand," he cried, beside himself with joy—"for twenty million marks on this ship. Hoch!"

Nearer and nearer they came, then the Germanie's engines reversed and stopped, and a little steamboat came rocking from the Flagship of the squadron. It got half-way when under its bows came a fountain of water, and dully across the sea came the shock of the explosion.

Jo Gillander turned her head and gasped. Coming at full speed, the water, creamy white at her sharp nose, raced the Slipper,

It was madness—she realized that. She saw the German picket-boat turn, then of a sudden it flew to splinters before her eyes.

Simultaneously the squadron ahead moved left and right and came into action.

"Crash! Crash! Crash!"

The guns were thunder; the whizzing, shrieking shells indescribably terrifying.

With clasped hands and gray face she saw the Slipper turn almost on her side as she changed her course, saw a black cavity yawn in her upper works.

The Slipper was showing her teeth now. Her four-point-two guns were not to be despised, and she hit back, spitting fire, fore, aft, and amidships.

Worse than this, the lean gray devils were being loosened from their forward tubes.

The Studtgardt was suddenly enveloped in flame and smoke and listed heavily to port.

Then a shell carried away mast and fore-funnel of the Slipper, and she went over again, to recover almost immediately.

But the cruiser squadron was showing unusual activity. Smoke belched from their stacks and there was a flurry of water astern...

They saw the British fleet long before the hysterical folk on the Germanie had seen her.

They came up in two divisions, marvelously appearing over the rim of the sea

—eighty mighty vessels of war, throwing steel farther and heavier than any cruiser that was ever built.

The end came in a horrible whirlpool of water that marked a vanished cruiser.

"It was a ruse, of course," said von Sedlitz, his mouth working pathetically; "they sent the Slipper, and followed her up."

She said nothing, waiting at the end of the gangway, up which there ran a beautiful man in a gray sweater, his red face grimy with powder, a most unlovely cut across his cheek—he got that from a splinter of shell which all but missed him.

"The Admiral's compliments to you, and can you go ahead, sir?" said Chubb. "I—"

Then he saw the girl.

"I told you what would happen," he said reproachfully, and indicated a battered cruiser; "all this might have been avoided."

And as he saddled her with the full responsibility for a European war, she came laughing and crying to his arms.

## 5.

## 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 "graf" 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; "if 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 backwards 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.

## 6. ESTABLISHING CHARLES BULLIVANT

"There's a new doctor at "Willough Lodge," said Sir James Colebroke, Lord of the Manor of Kingsbeach and acknowledged sovereign of the town of Saxmonleigh.

"Poor devil!" said his son. "Is he anybody I—"

Sir James, an arbiter in such matters, shook his head.

"He has bought Tillingworth's practice," he said ominously—and really little more need be said.

For Tillingworth had been an eccentric man who had no practice. Tillingworth, with his long, untidy beard and his long, untidy hair, had occupied the dilapidated Willough Lodge, a stuccoed edifice at the unfashionable end of the High Street, for fourteen years, during which period he may have seen a few casual patients of the lower or agricultural orders, but certainly he had never been called in by the aristocracy and the no less exclusive bourgeoisie of Saxmonleigh.

Neither Dr. Walford-Sole, that prince of county physicians, nor Dr. Green-Sanders, a profound and learned man who was a justice of the peace and reputedly wealthy, nor yet Mr. Salicon, the surgeon (who was also a consultant in Harley Street), had ever called Dr. Tillingworth in consultation.

They had been called by him on two occasions when the disease requiring diagnosis was delirium tremens, and the patient was the unfortunate Tillingworth himself. One of these, Walford-Sole, had signed the death certificate of the late Tillingworth and had only refrained from certifying the cause as "chronic alcoholism" for the honor and the dignity of the profession.

Tillingworth had a sister and a brother, the latter a sober but unscrupulous man

who offered "an old-established practice which needs working up" at a sacrificial price.

It was purchased by a young man who was content to pay cash down and was loftily contemptuous of such mundane matters as "books." He had supreme confidence in himself—a confidence which survived his arrival in Saxmonleigh by exactly forty-eight hours.

A tall, good-looking young man, tanned brown with tropical suns—he had served for three years as surgeon in the Oriental mail-boat fleet—he gazed approvingly upon the picturesque but insanitary cottages which flank the station road. They appealed at once to the artistic side of him and to his proper professional instincts.

Willough Lodge was a shock. The furniture of the house (at valuation) left him gasping, and the disorder of the weed-grown garden and the ragged lawns had brought him to the edge of despair. But he was very young and possessed immense reserves of enthusiasm.

There was a girl in London for whom these lawns must be mowed, these rank beds of dandelion cultivated, these damp walls made sound and beautiful.

For three weeks, aided by discouraging plumbers, tragic paper-hangers of uncertain quality, and a most pessimistic collection of jobbing gardeners, he labored at Willough Lodge. He hoped nobody would call until his work was finished; he prayed that the distraction of consultation and minor operations would not intervene between him and his task, and his prayer was answered.

It never left off being answered.

Two months passed, and the garden was a riot of flowers and sweet-scented herbs; the windows blazed red and yellow with geranium and calceolaria; but the imported brass knocker never trembled to the touch of the wealthy invalids of Saxmonleigh, and there came to him no greater sustenance than a few precarious shillings drawn at rare intervals from fustian pockets.

The aristocracy did not call, though the tradespeople did—but chose the servants' entrance, conducting their business in their proper sphere. And although they sold or endeavored to sell their wares, varying between corn for the horse he did not possess and printing which he did not require, they never invited him to sell them any portion of his seven years' experience at University College Hospital.

"It is absolutely hopeless—hopeless!"

His hands were thrust into his trousers pockets, his feet were stuck stiffly in

the direction of Gould Mortimer's flower-filled fireplace.

His brother-in-law-to-be looked down on him with an unsympathetic grin.

Gould Mortimer was a tall, brown, healthy-colored young man, who was remembered at Harvard as Big Mort, and, since a thrifty and ingenious parent had provided for his future, he was apt to underrate the tragedy of failure.

"Why, Charles," he laughed, "you go on as if it mattered to Maisie or me whether you made a two hundred a month or whether you lived on your two hundred a year. See here: you sit down in the old town and just wait for the other medicine men to die. Gosh! they can't live for ever!"

Dr. Charles Bullivant shook his head.

"You don't grub-stake me, Gould," he said quietly. "I want to marry Maisie just as much as any man can want anything and still live to tell the tale, but I marry on an assured income earned by myself and not on charity—"

"Haw!" ejaculated the disgusted Gould, "cut it right out!"

"Charity," persisted the other firmly. "Why, you old philanthropist, you found the money for the practice. You were swindled, and so was I—but you found it. No; I've got to break into Saxmonleigh society in some way other."

The door opened and a girl burst in.

She was, to Charles Bullivant's prejudiced eyes, the one girl in the world by whom Nature might set its standard for all time. Tall, slender, with a perfect figure and the loveliest face that ever captivated a none too susceptible ship's doctor.

"Come and play tennis." She tapped the young doctor's head with the net of her racket. "What is wrong?" she asked suddenly.

"It's the practice," said her brother, who had suddenly assumed the face of doom. "Nothin' doing down Saxmonleigh way; shocking state of health amongst the dud does of the village, shocking state of apathy amongst the gouty dowagers up town—everything on the shady side."

"I don't want to grouse," said the young doctor, taking the fingers surreptitiously extended in his direction, "but nobody seems to want me there—you see, I'm nobody—"

"Oh, nonsense!" said the girl indignantly. ""Why, everybody knows you're splendid! You cured my headache in a minute—in the Red Sea, too."

Charles caught the smothered smile of Gould Mortimer, and smiled sheepishly.

"None of my patients have headaches," he said ruefully. "They are the exclusive County—and I am a London nobody. That is all there is to it."

The girl laid her hand upon the curly head now bowed in dejection. Then she suddenly clapped her hands gleefully.

"I've got it!" she said, and her pretty face was pink with excitement.

"Got—?" began her puzzled brother.

"Wait!" she said, and ran to his desk. They watched her as her swift pen covered sheet after sheet of paper in the big, sprawling hand which had been the despair of her Boston teachers.

"There!" she said, blotting the last sheet, and handed to Gould the effort.

He read it in silence and passed it to the young medico, and the girl, with her hands behind her back, waited.

Charles Bullivant read:

Are you ill?

Do you want to be treated in the old-fashioned way, which is fifty years behind the times?

Or do you wish to be cured by the methods of modern science as exemplified by

CHARLES BULLIVANT,

the up-to-date doctor of medicine, the experienced surgeon.

Don't take a chance! Take Charles!

Watch Yourself Grow Better!

Call on me any hour of the day or night—I shall be waiting for you.

Note the address: Willough Lodge, (Look for the house with the pink curtains.)

"You see," she said eagerly, "we can put that in all the local papers. I learned advertisement-writing by correspondence," she explained proudly. "It was awful good fun—and that's just how " She stopped suddenly.

There was a pained look on the faces of the two young men—the exquisite pain of men who are trying not to laugh.

"It won't do, sister," gasped Gould Mortimer. "It's fine—it's grand, but it's—it's verboten! It's—oh, heavens!"

She looked from one to the other, disappointed.

"I think you're both horrid!" she flared, and marched out of the room.

A roar of laughter, too loud for the door to muffle, brought her back with a flaming face and eyes that glittered ominously.

"Why—why are you laughing?" she demanded coldly.

"He—he tickled me," lied her brother.

It was a lame excuse as the slamming door testified.

"Something has to be done," said Gould, limp and exhausted. "I'm coming down to stay a day or two in Saxmonleigh."

"It's no use, Mort," groaned the depressed young man. "They won't let me in. You see, I've got a wrong impression of my own value. Yes—yes, I have." He silenced the other's protest fiercely. "It comes of having been a popular ship doctor and having hobnobbed with royalties on board ship. If I were to go round Saxmonleigh," he said bitterly, "with the signed photograph of a viceroy in one hand and an autographed letter from a crown prince in the other, and my chest covered with the little decorations that royal travelers chuck about instead of tips, I might have a chance."

"Why don't you?" asked the innocent Mortimer. "I should."

"Don't rot," pleaded the other.

But Gould Mortimer was really serious.

Sir James Colebroke had a suspicious twinge in his left toe and telephoned to Green- Sanders, and that great man motored over to Highhouse to see his distinguished patient and tell him, as he had told him some forty times in the past twenty years, to avoid old brandy and to take more exercise.

"How's that youngster doing?" asked Sir James, after complaint and remedy had been punctiliously exchanged.

"Which youngster?"

"What's his name—the doctor?"

Green-Sanders shrugged his shoulders.

"Poor man, I'm afraid he's doing nothing. He has a house-party this week—rather a pretty girl and her brother."

Sir James grunted.

People did not have house-parties outside the charmed circle of the County society—they merely had folk to stay with them.

"He's an outsider—knows nobody in the County. Why the devil he doesn't chuck up the sponge and go back to London, I don't know," he said irritably. He had caused it to be conveyed to Dr. Charles Bullivant that he might expect from Highhouse no encouragement to extend his visit to Saxmonleigh. The fact that Dr. Charles Bullivant had, in a fit of exasperation, not only ignored the hint, but had expressed his opinion of the County society in coarse terms, was sufficient to establish him in the County Index.

"I met the young man who is staying with him," remarked Green-Sanders casually. "Came down in the same smoker—pleasant person, but American."

A look of understanding came to Sir James' face.

"American!" he said significantly. "Of course, if he's one of those Anglo-American people, he'll never do."

It was one of those vague but portentous nothings which the Lord of the Manor indulged in occasionally.

"If you see his friend—as you might—you would be rendering Dr. What 's-his- name a service if you suggested that he goes back to London. He is not wanted here, and that's the end of it."

Dr. Green-Sanders shared with his fellow-practitioners a resentment for what he regarded as an unwarrantable intrusion on the part of Charles Bullivant. That same afternoon he met a very elated Gould Mortimer emerging from the printer's shop in the High Street. Gould would have passed on with a nod, but Green-Sanders detained him with a gesture.

"I wanted to speak to you, Mr. Mortimer," he said. "I think we introduced one another in the train the other day."

Gould was all attention. His big, homely face beamed down benevolence on the withered little doctor.

"Sure," he said, with a vigorous nod.

"You're a friend of Bullivant's, aren't you?"

"Sure," said Mortimer again.

The doctor smiled tolerantly.

"Well, you know, Mr. Mortimer," he said, "our friend is up against it—that is the expression, isn't it?"

"It's one I've heard," agreed Big Mort cautiously.

"He's up against a very disappointing combination of circumstances," said Green-Sanders soothingly. "Why doesn't a young man like that try his luck somewhere else?"

Gould Mortimer smiled largely and amusedly.

"Why should he!" he asked.

"What chance has he here?" asked the other.

"A mighty good chance," said Big Mort earnestly. "Why, see here, Dr. Green-Sanders, somebody has got to get your practice when you're dead."

"When I'm dead?" gasped the shocked medico.

"Sure," responded the visitor, "you can't go living round here for ever, can you? You've got to die sometime, I guess, and that's just where old man Charles Bullivant gets his chance."

Dr. Green-Sanders drew himself up.

"Let me tell you, Mr. Mortimer," he said stiffly, "that Saxmonleigh has failed to take your friend to its bosom: he has no more chance of getting along here than—than—"

He was at a loss for a simile, so he contented himself with shrugging his shoulders. This he did with such vigor that his top hat fell off, was neatly fielded by Mortimer, and restored with some loss of dignity to the doctor.

"I'm sorry to hear you say all that stuff about Charles," said the resourceful American, with elaborate regret. "I guess he'll have to go back to Spain."

"Spain?"

Mortimer nodded.

"He's some doctor in Spain," he said mysteriously.

That afternoon Dr. Charles Bullivant departed for London at Mortimer's urgent request.

"Stay in my house for a week," said Big Mort, "and don't read the newspapers."

"But why—"

"Why me no whys, but be wise," quoted Gould Mortimer musically. "Get a wiggle on you—you'll lose that train."

"But suppose I'm called in," protested the reluctant young doctor.

"I'll go," said the other promptly. "Under the present circumstances you aren't likely to be called in an<sup>n</sup>^here—except for a bet."

Still the young man was not satisfied, and Mortimer eyed him sternly.

"You're mighty unwilling to get away from here," he said. "This two- cylinder village is surely attractive—but you can't take her with you because I want her help."

The "she" referred to stood behind her brother and out of the range of his vision, so she was safe in making the little grimace with which she favored the back of his head.

Dr. Bullivant blushed and went off to London, horribly perturbed, for he knew his Gould Mortimer.

Scarcely had his train disappeared out of sight when Mr. Tagge, the local bill-poster, proceeded with his commission. "Wherever it was possible to fly- post a bill upon a fence or tree trunk, that bill was posted. Wherever a shop expressed its willingness to display the notice, that shop was liberally supplied.

The tiny placard appeared at frequent intervals along the High Street, in every shop in Church Street and Cathedral Row. It was tacked to the uprights of the stalls in Market Square; it was (crowning infamy) even displayed blandly upon the notice-boards of St. Helen's and St. Asaph's—by permission of the Vicar.

People stopped in the street to read it. Farmers reined up their carts to gather its import. Sir James Colebroke descended from his car, in full view of the town, to read the announcement in Suggett's window.

"Good Lord!" said Sir James in perplexity, and went home to lunch, very thoughtful.



"Wherever men met in the Borough Town of Saxmonleigh, they prefaced their comments on the Government or the crops or the weather with:

"Have you read that—"

In the morning of the following day, the Vicar of St. Asaph's called and asked whether Dr. Bullivant would call and see his wife's throat.

"I'm very sorry," said the genial Mr. Mortimer, "but my friend has been called in to an important case in London."

""When he comes back—ah," said the Vicar.

"When he comes back," agreed Big Mort gravely.

Whilst the Vicar was walking down the drive to the road, Big Mort was dancing uncouthly on the mat, to the scandal of his sister.

Half an hour later Colonel "Westinghouse's victoria drove up the drive, and the Colonel, an irascible man, swore gently at the door till it opened.

"Doctor in?" he demanded explosively.

"No," replied Big Mort.

"When'll he be in!" rapped the Colonel.

"How the devil do I know!" replied Mortimer, who spoke the language very well.

"Woof, woof!" said the Colonel, or something of the sort. "Where's he!"

"He's in town," said Mortimer deliberately; "at this moment he is removing the appendix of an ambassador."

"Then come and see me—Green-Sanders—an ass—old Tingumy- jig's ass too — Colonel Wes'nlane, Merrut Lodge—'morning."

"M'n'g," responded Big Mort, not to be outdone in the matter of contraction.

Mrs. Grayling called about her daughter's earache at two o'clock. At half-past, came Lady Visey-Fane, the relict—she always called herself "relict," being an earnest student of regal phraseology—of the late Sir William Visey-Fane (born Visey, and Fane adopted by deed poll). Lady Visey-Fane wanted somebody to try her heart.

"Dr. Bullivant is in London," explained Mortimer. "You have probably read in the papers that a Certain Personage is in Town!"

"I quite understand," said Lady Visey-Fane graciously. "Will you ask him, on his return, to call! I have no regular medical attendant."

Dr. Green-Sanders went uninvited to Sir James Colebroke.

"Do you know that that infernal man has already taken four of my best patients," he said bitterly. "Never, my dear Sir James, have I seen anything so drivelling, so sycophantic, so horribly contemptible as the attitude of these people."

But his wrath awoke no enthusiasm in the breast of his host, and something like a cold chill struck at the heart of the little doctor.

"Well, you know," said Sir James tolerantly, "there must be something in him—I mean, there's no sense in blinding oneself to facts; people like to be associated with—er—the great ones of the earth—even remotely associated. For myself," he spread out his hands in self-depreciation, "I am human; what is good enough for—er—Certain Exalted Personage is good enough for me."

"You don't mean?" began the horror-stricken doctor.

"I mean," said Sir James stoutly, "I mean I should like you to call him in over this question of my—er—gout."

Had an anarchist dropped a cartload of petro-glycerine on the bald head of Dr. Green-Sanders, he could not have been more astounded.

"Phoo!" he snorted, "your gout!"

He said no more, but stalked from the drawing-room of Highhouse, never to return. That night he declined an invitation to dine with the relict—a fatal blunder, since it was an olive branch extended by a lady who had broken through convention and was scared to death at her own temerity.

For three days Charles Bullivant chafed and fretted in the big house in Onslow Gardens, which Gould Mortimer called "home," reading nothing more amusing than Tackitt on Fracture, which light reading he had brought for his entertainment.

He arrived at Saxmonleigh late at night, and thought that the solitary porter who carried his bag to the station fly was unusually deferential.

He paused in the hall of his house to look at his letters, and was astounded to discover that he had quite a budget—mostly local.

Maisie flew down the stairs to greet him.

"Everything is splendid!" she cried, as she hugged him gleefully; "you're going to be a great practitioner. Oh, Charles, I'm just delighted!"

Dr. Charles Bullivant looked at her in amazement.

"What has happened? Is old Green-Sanders dead!" he asked hopefully.

"He's out—"

Gould, from the landing above, an unheroic figure in a smoking-jacket and slippers, conveyed the information through a large cigar. "Out—Green—out the other two guys. You're It—you're the first medicine man that the tribe of Saxmonleigh... Come up and paint the wigwam red."

"I can't understand it. What does it mean?"

The young doctor was blundering through his correspondence as well as a man could whose one arm was occupied by a girl. "All these blight—all these good people want me to call. Here's an invitation from Sir James himself!"

He stared up at the calm figure in bewilderment.

"What devil's work have you been up to?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Come up and smoke," responded the diplomatic Gould.

He left the two alone together, and after an unconscionable time he heard the flying feet of Bullivant ascending the stairs to his bedroom. Maisie came up to the drawing-room more leisurely.

"There's nothing gained by your doctor dashing upstairs at fifty miles per," grumbled Gould as the girl came in. "He can't make up the time he's lost in the hall. What the dickens you find to talk about, I don't know."

"I hope you will one of these days," said the flushed girl, and rumbled his hair in passing.

They waited with an exchange of glances till they heard the footsteps descending the stairs again—no less hurriedly. Charles Bullivant was really agitated as he came into the room.

"Mort," he said, "I've been robbed!"

"Robbed?" cried the shocked pair together.

"Somebody has been in my room," said young Dr. Bullivant rapidly, "and cleared out all the things I value most—except your portrait, darling. The brutes had the grace to leave that."

"What have you lost?" asked Big Mort. He was disgracefully calm in face of the catastrophe.

"I can't tell for the moment," said Charles, with a worried frown, "but a little case with the Order of Isabella la Catholica is gone—the young King gave me that when we carried him from Vigo to Malaga; a portrait of the Crown Prince, signed; the Order of St. Stephanie, that the Grand Duke Basil gave me when we were taking him to India—oh, Lord, lots of things!"

Gould Mortimer removed his cigar.

"I was the first to discover the robbery," he said solemnly. "You did not imagine that anybody could rob this house and me not know it? Sir, I have been on the track of those robbers; I have moved my artillery against the brigands."

He rose and went to a desk, opened a drawer, and took out a printed sheet. Dr. Charles Bullivant was the only soul in Saxmonleigh who had not seen it. It ran:

£50 REWARD

LOST OR STOLEN

The undermentioned articles were either left in the train between London and Saxmonleigh or removed from the residence of Dr. Charles Bullivant, Willough Lodge, Saxmonleigh.

1. The medallion and ribbon of the Order of Isabella la Catholica: engraved "From Alfonso to Charles Bullivant, in Memory of a Pleasant Association."
2. A signed photograph of the Crown Prince of Mid-Europe, signed "Wilhelm Kron-Prinz."
3. The Order of St. Stephanie in brilliants, and framed portrait of the Grand Duke Basil, inscribed "Mille remerciments, Basil."
4. Photographic group (signed) in gold frame of Dr. Bullivant, the Prince of the Asturias, the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Crown Prince of Mid-Europe, and the Grand Duchess Maria.
5. The freehold deeds of Willough Lodge.

Information leading to the recovery of these should be lodged at the County Police Station, or to Dr. Charles Bullivant, by whom the above reward will be paid.

The doctor read it again, his hand to his brow.

"It is all right," said Gould, and patted the shoulder of the other. "The bag containing these sacred goods was returned anonymously tonight."

"But—but I don't understand," said the doctor. "Of course, those things were mine, and I'm jolly glad to get them—but the deeds of this house; I only rent this place."

Big Mort smiled at his sister.

"That's all right—all right," he said easily. "The freehold is my wedding gift."

Dr. Charles Bullivant looked first at the notice in his hand, then at the pile of correspondence which lay on the table, and a slow light dawned upon him.

"Which of you two was the burglar?" he asked.

The girl laughed. "That's a secret," she said. "I only drew up the advertisement."

## 7.

## THE CAT BURGLAR

Old Tom Burkes used to say to Elsay, his daughter: "Easy grabbing is good grabbing. Nobody was ever ruined by taking small profits."

After his eighth whisky old Tom was rather oracular. He would sit before the fire in the shabby little dining-room at Elscombe Crescent (Mayfair by telephone, Bayswater by bus), and pass across such cultured pearls of wisdom.

"You can't expect millionaires to marry—especially if they've been married before. This Poynting's got money and a family. Families are always a just cause an' impediment. If he wants to make you happy by givin' me a directorship—let him."

So that when, in a moment of mental aberration, Colonel J. C. Poynting pressed upon her for acceptance the emerald bar which caused all the trouble, Elsay accepted. She made some faint protest... One shouldn't (she murmured) accept such a present even from so dear a friend unless... unless...

Colonel Poynting did not fill the gap. He was an infatuated old gentleman, but for the moment infatuation was held in check by an uneasy-sense of family.

"You'd better insure that," said Elsay's wise father. "It's worth three thousand if

it is worth a cent."

Prudently, Elsie followed his advice—which was also unfortunate.

Most unfortunate of all, a few weeks later Colonel Poynting very nervously requested her to return the bar—his daughter had asked to see it... he would return it to Elsie.

"Perhaps," said her cynical parent.

That night the bar was stolen. It was taken from her dressing-table by some person or persons unknown. This information she conveyed to the Colonel by express letter. The Colonel replied in person, arriving in a taxi and a state of nervous perspiration. Accompanying him was a detective.

And that was where the real trouble started. For the detective asked horrid questions, and Elsie wept pitifully, and the Colonel not only comforted her but proposed marriage. On the whole, it would have been better if he had been content with the loss of the emeralds.

Now, here is a point for all mystery-mongers to note. Up to the moment the loss of the emerald bar was reported. Miss Dorothy Poynting had never considered Elsie as anything more than a safe dancing partner for fathers, and knew nothing whatever about the bar having been given to that enterprising lady.

The two shocks came almost simultaneously. Dorothy Poynting's reactions to the announcement were rather inhuman and wholly at variance with Colonel Poynting's ideas of what a daughter's attitude should be when he condescends—there is no other word for it, or at any rate the Colonel could find no other word—to inform her that he contemplated marrying again.

He told her this at dinner, stammering and coughing and talking quite fiercely at moments, though at other moments he was pleading.

"She's rather young, but she's a real good sort. If you feel... um...that you'd be happier away... elsewhere... living somewhere else, you can have the flat in Portland Place, and of course Sonningstead is yours..."

Dorothy surveyed her father thoughtfully. He was good-looking, in a way—pink of skin, white-haired, slim, invariably tailor-right. She wished he was fat; there is nothing quite as effective as a noticeable rotundity for reducing the conscious ego.

He was very vain about his waist and his small feet and nicely modeled hands. They were twiddling now with the spotless gardenia in his buttonhole.

"Elsah Burkes is a dear girl," defiantly. "You may not like her: I hardly expected that you would. It is a tremendous compliment to me that she should, so to speak, sacrifice her—um—youth..."

"It may also be a tremendous compliment to the Poynting Traction Company," said Dorothy gently.

He was infuriated. He told her so. He was so mild a man that she had no other means of knowing.

"I'm simply furious with you! Because a gel's poor... I'm sorry I consulted you..."

She smiled at this. How annoyingly she could smile! And she dusted her white georgette lap before she rose, took a cigarette from the table and lit it.

"Dear old darling," she said, waving the smoking thing airily, "would you have told me if you had not to explain how dear Elsah came to be robbed of a large emerald bar—mother's bar? You had to explain that away—"

"There is no need whatever " he began, with well-modulated violence.

She waved him to comparative quiet.

"It was in all the newspapers. The moment I saw that Elsah had lost an emerald bar I was suspicious. When I saw the photographs, I knew. With all your money, daddy, you might have bought her a bushel of emeralds. It was intensely heartless and vulgar to give away a jewel that was my mother's. That is all." She flicked ash into the fireplace. "Also—don't get vexed with me—it was singularly prudent of Elsah to insure the bar the moment it came into her possession."

"You are going too far," said her father in his awful voice.

"As far as Portland Place, if you go on with this absurd marriage. Or perhaps I'll go out into the world and do something romantic, such as work for my living."

John Venner came in at that moment. Elsah and he arrived together.

She was rather tall and Junoesque—which means on the way to plumpness—red-haired, white-skinned, flashing-eyed.

"That woman," said Dorothy, in a critical mood, "has made radiance a public nuisance."

She said this to John Venner: he was rather charitable. Nothing quite

exasperates a woman so much as misapplied charity. And it is invariably misapplied when employed in the defense of another woman.

John was a Guardsman, a nicely mannered young man who had so much money that he could never marry well.

"I think you're deuced unkind to old Elseh," he said.

With difficulty Dorothy remembered that she was a lady.

Elsah had similar views. She asked her future step-daughter whether they might go to Dorothy's bedroom and have a real heart-to-heart talk. Dorothy checked an inclination to suggest the meat pantry.

"Because you see, darling"—Elsah sat picturesquely on the bed and exhibited her nice legs—"I must get right with you! I know you loathe me, and I told Clarence—"

"Who's Clarence?" asked the dazed Dorothy.

"Your dear daddy," cooed Elseh.

"Good God!" said Dorothy, shocked. "I never realized that! Well, you told Clarence—"

Elsah swallowed something.

"I told your dear father that he mustn't expect you to... well..."

"Hang out the flags?" suggested Dorothy.

"That's rather vulgar, isn't it!" Elseh would not have been human if she had failed to protest. "I do hope you and I are going to be great friends. Won't you come round and dine one night with father and me? He's such a dear..."

All that sort of stuff.

Dorothy listened and wondered, as Elseh told her of the terrible shock it had been to her when she found the bar had vanished, and of what perfect dears the insurance people had been. She had no intention then of calling on Elseh or her father. Two days later, without rhyme or reason, she made her appearance at Elscombe Crescent. Elseh was out, but her plump father was in.

"Cer'n'ly," murmured Mr. Burke drowsily. "Show'rin... who d'ye say 'twas!"

He had been celebrating at luncheon the forthcoming prosperity to his family. Conscious that somebody had come into the room, he jerked himself into semi-wakefulness.



"Elsah, old girl," he droned, "as I've off'n said, grab whils' the grabbin's good."

He said other things, and Dorothy stood stock-still and listened until Mr. Burkes began to snore.

Not in dark cellars with blanketed windows and secret exits do great robber gangs hold their meetings; behind no tiled doors with guards within and without do they confer across a greasy table, with loaded revolvers and bright knives at hand to deal with intruders.

Old Tom Burkes had never possessed a pistol in his life, and he regarded the employment of knives, bright or otherwise, as "foreign." He had, in his unregenerate youth, employed a length of lead piping on the helmeted head of a policeman, but he was not proud of the exploit.

The robbers' cave for the moment was the rather ornate restaurant of Emilio, which is near to the Strand. It was a place of bright lights, in the rays of which silver and glass glittered on snowy napery; there were flowers set in rather florid German-silver cornucopias on every table, and behind the red plush seats that ran along the wall, large mirrors on which landscapes and things were painted so extensively that a lady could not see herself powdering her nose except by dodging between obese swans and glittering minarets.

The robber fare was *crème duchesse*, *sole au bonne femme*, and *poulet curry au casserole*.

Tom had black coffee to follow; Morgan, being younger and less opulent, seized the opportunity to order *pêche melba* at another man's expense.

Tom fetched a plethoric sigh, tapped off the ash of his cigar into the coffee saucer, and made another regretful reference to "Lou."

"What a woman!" he said.

There was both admiration and awe in his tone. He was stout and bald. His red face was rather furrowed; in his prominent blue eyes at the moment was a hint of tragedy. Morgan, being younger, was less easily harrowed by the misfortune of his fellows. He was a mean-faced man of thirty, painfully thin, with large red hands that were mostly knuckle.

"If she'd stuck by her friends," he said, "them that was her real friends, she'd have been out and about, havin' dinner with us—"

"Lunch," murmured Mr. Burkes. "And at the Carlton. Lou believed in the best. Ah!"

He sighed again.

There was more than a hint of sycophancy in "Slip" Morgan's attitude and speech. They called him "Slip" because he was slippery, and because he was so thin that legend had it he had once slipped through the most closely set steel bars that ever protected a bank vault.

"Lou was thoughtless," said Tom, himself very thoughtful. "She was too confident. She was inclined, if I might say so, to forget her jewties. I said to her only a month ago: 'Lou, I want you for a big job, so keep yourself free- - round about New Year's Day. There's grand money in it, and I can't work without you.'—"

Mr. Morgan uttered impatient sounds.

"I'd have thought " he began.

Tom did not want to know what he thought.

"She told me she'd got a job to do for Rinsey, and I told her he was a careless worker, an' warned her. I gave her fifty on account—the money's lost, but I don't mind that, Slip—and I got to work to make the job sweet." He groaned, deliberately it seemed, for he took his cigar from his mouth. "And now, with this footman feller givin' me all I wanted, where the devil is Lou?"

Slip hastened to supply the information.

"Don't be a pie-can," said Mr. Burkes testily. "I know she's in Holloway. Six months ain't much, and she ought to have got a laggin'. But where'm I goin' to find The Gel!"

Slip smiled.

"It's nothin' to laugh about," said Tom. His sourness was justified.

"I got her," said Slip simply.

Tom removed his cigar again.

"You got her?" skeptically. "Maggie Swarty or Gay Joyler or one of them lot! Is anybody goin' to think they're ladies? You want your head shaved!"

"T got her," said Slip again, and added: "A lady."

Tom's nose wrinkled.

"What you think's a lady an' what is a lady is about the differentest thing that ever happened," he said.

But Slip was not offended.

"This one's a real lady. She's pretty and young and plays the pianner," he said impressively. "And she's on the crook, and is ready for anything except funny business."

"Except what?"

"Funny business—love-makin', hand-holdin', cuddlin'," said Mr. Morgan comprehensively.

Tom looked at him suspiciously.

"I ain't tried," Slip was in haste to assure his superior. "One of the other lodgers asked her to go to the pictures. She told him to go to hell!"

"A lady!" murmured Mr. Burkes, closing his eyes like one in pain.

"She's a lady. I got sweet with the maid who looks after her room, and what do you think I found out?"

Tom shook his head, and Slip searched in his pocket and produced fantastically shaped pieces of paper which he maneuvered so that they formed the torn half of a note-sheet.

Mr. Burkes laboriously extracted his pince-nez, fixed them to his nose, opened his mouth (as he did when he was thus engaged), and read:

"Send back the brooch, and no further action will be taken..."

"Written on good paper," said Mr. Burkes, an authority on such matters, "by a woman—she's a maid or something. That's why you thought she was a lady."

Slip argued with great earnestness, and in the end Tom was half convinced. There was an admitted difficulty as regards the approach, but Slip, a man of tact and resource, was confident that all obstacles would be overcome.

Miss Mary Smith was not an easy proposition. Since she had taken a certain jewel from Elsie Burkes' dressing-table, she had been living in retirement, with three thousand pounds' worth of emeralds pinned, if not in the vacuity of her heart, on the garment which enfolded it.

She had changed her lodgings as often as she had changed her name, once with great rapidity, when Elsie had located her and had come later, bearing an offer of forgiveness in exchange for the big green bar. Unfortunately, she did not bear the message which Mary required.

It would be rather awkward, mused Mary Smith, as she sat on the edge of her bed in a Bloomsbury lodging, if Miss Burkes really did put the police on her track; but, on the other hand, how could Elisah explain certain matters... ?

To her cogitations intruded the deferential knocking of the parlor- maid.

"Yes?" asked Mary Smith imperiously.

The maid entered.

"The gentleman says could he have a few words with you?"

She slid a card across the table. Mary read, and was unimpressed:

Mr. Featherlow-Morgan. New Amsterdam Board of Control.

There was a vagueness about Mr. Morgan's exact status which she overlooked. She went down to a hole in the wall of the entrance lobby [which was known as the lounge.

Mr. Morgan understood women: shilly-shallying was a mistake that led to failure. He believed in the direct or knock-out method.

"Good evening, miss," he said respectfully. "I'd like to have a few words with you."

She waited.

"I never beat about the bush"—Slip could not afford to lose time. "Heard about Miss Burkes? I'll bet you haven't! I'll bet you don't know her!"

"You've won your bet," said Mary Smith calmly. "Aren't you awfully excited?"

Such a response was naturally disconcerting. Happily he could cover his momentary confusion. He groped wildly in an inside pocket, brought out a red morocco case, and flicked it open. Between visiting-cards, of which he carried a variety, was a newspaper cutting. This he drew out and flourished at her.

"Read that," he commanded.

Mary Smith took the slip. He saw her brows gathered in a puzzled frown. Then she started to read aloud:

"...with every suit we present an extra pair of pants warranted wear-resisting..."

"You're reading the wrong side of the paper," said Slip testily. She turned the cutting over.

"The police are searching for an emerald bar, which was stolen from Miss Elsie Burkes' dressing-table, possibly by cat burglars, last week, and have circulated the following description of the missing jewelry... The bar is worth £3000, and the insurance underwriters are offering a reward of £200 for its recovery. Miss Burkes, who is engaged to be married to Colonel Poynting, the shipping magnate, says that although the property is insured, it has a sentimental value which is beyond calculation."

She handed the cutting back.

"Sentiment is the ruin of the leisured classes," she said, and he laughed admiringly. It was not a pleasant laugh, being a succession of "huh-huhs" that ended in a violent cough.

"That's the way to look at it. Do you know Colonel Poynting?"

She first hesitated, then nodded.

"Do you know his house in Park Lane—ever been there?"

"I know the house very well," she said. Her eyes were asking questions.

"I am a plain man " he began, and she nodded, he thought a little offensively, and for a moment was thrown out of his stride. "What I mean to say is, that there's no sense in beating about the bush."

"You did say it, some time ago," she said.

Very few women could rattle Slip Morgan. She did.

"You're on the hook and so am I," he said firmly. "I know all about that emerald bar that you've got pinned on your—"

"Don't let us be indelicate," said Mary Smith. "Yes, you know all about it? Well?"

"If you want a hundred pounds for an hour's work, the job's waiting for you. All you've got to do is to go to Colonel Poynting's house. We'll fake a card of invitation. Just walk about amongst the swells, and give a certain friend of mine the office when he can come in. Do you see what I mean?"

"No," she said, shaking her head. "The only thing that's pretty clear is that you want me to go to Mr. Poynting's house, and that of course I shan't do. In the first place " She paused, and shook her head again. "No, I can't do it."

Slip smiled. They still had the ^lounge" to themselves, but the chances were that they would not enjoy this privacy for long.

"I'll tell you what," he said confidentially. You think you'll be recognized?" And, when she agreed, he patted her lightly on the arm. She brushed her sleeve so ostentatiously, so deliberately, that he did not repeat this gesture of friendliness and comradeship.

"It's the fancy-dress ball " he began.

"Oh!"

Evidently she knew all about the fancy-dress ball, for he saw her mouth open a little.

"Of course, masks! How amusing!" She looked at Slip with a new interest. "Your friend is on the hook, you said? Does that mean he's hanged or he's going to be hanged! Or do I understand that your friend is not exactly honest?"

"Don't be comic," said the inelegant Mr. Morgan, "and don't play the dairymaid on me. Innocence is all very well in its place. The question is, will you do it—there's a hundred pounds for you—fifty down and fifty after the job?"

She was pinching her lower lip, looking at, and slightly through, Slip Morgan.

"Do I understand that your friend is going to?" She waited for him to suggest the proper phrase, which he did.

"He's going to do a job at Colonel Poynting's house in Park Lane."

"And that I'm to go inside and signal—how?"

"Through the winder," said Slip. "It's easy.

You just stroll up to the winder—"

""Window," she murmured.

""Winder's' good enough for me," he snarled. "Pull out a handkerchief and sort of rub your nose with it. But you mustn't do that till Colonel Poynting gives away the prizes for the first fancy dress, because everybody will be down in the drawing-room then. Now do you get me?"

She had got him. And once she was interested, she became almost enthusiastic. She arranged to meet Mr. Thompson that night (Tom Burkes' temporary nom de guerre). She would go, she thought, as a pierrot or a pierrette.

"It isn't exactly original," she said.

"That doesn't matter," replied Slip, "so long as it's clean."

So were arranged the preliminaries of one of the neatest cat burglaries that had ever been engineered. Upstairs in Mr. Poynting's study was a safe, and in that safe he kept a considerable sum of money.

Park Lane is not, as some people imagine, a center of wild and hectic gaiety. It is a thoroughfare mainly inhabited by people who are rich enough to live somewhere else. Year in and year out their white blinds are drawn, their furniture is shrouded in holland sheeting. A vulgar few live in their houses, but as a rule they do not give parties. Colonel Poynting's fancy-dress ball was, therefore, so unusual an event that the police hardly knew where to park the cars.

The Colonel received his guests at the head of the big staircase, and he was arrayed, spiritually and materially, in the toga of a Roman father, as he explained to the worried young Guardsman, who wore nothing more symbolical than a dress suit. The Colonel explained between speeches of welcome addressed to his arriving guests.

"I neither know nor care where Dorothy has gone," he said firmly. "You saw the letter she wrote to Elseh—or rather, started to write?—• How d'ye do! How d'ye do!—Happily, I came into the library when she had been called away to the telephone, and read it.—Glad to see you, Lady Carl... how d'ye do!—No daughter of mine can tell my fiancee—order her, in fact—to give up her father—"

"He's an awful old bounder," said Mr. Venner mistakenly.

"I'm referring to myself," said the Colonel. "I mean Dorothy's father—not Elseh's father... how d'ye do! I'm glad to see you... No, Venner; I will not have it... how d'ye do. Miss... um... ?"

The newcomer was a masked lady, who flashed a smile and waved a hand before she disappeared.

"What good legs that girl's got!" said the Colonel. "Terribly good legs!... As I was saying, she left my house, and I've reason to believe that she is persecuting poor Elseh—the dear girl says nothing, but I can guess. If I could only get at Dorothy... ah, darling!"

Darling looked rather worried, and this in spite of the assurance of her parent that she had nothing to worry about. So far as he was concerned, he would keep sober until after the ceremony. Not that this troubled her. She drew the Roman father to a convenient alcove, and a host of clowns and devils and

Venetian ladies arrived unwelcomed.

"Yes, my dear"—the Colonel patted her hand— \* everything is in order. I had the license from the Bishop's office this afternoon. Have your baggage at Victoria... Simplon Express—you know Italy? A glorious place!"

For the moment Italy meant less to Elsie than a pint of pure mud.

"Dorothy hasn't... written?" She was rather breathless, showed appropriate symptoms of nervous apprehension (she was honoring Ophelia in the matter of costume) and a tenseness which he understood.

"You need not trouble your pretty head about my foolish child," he said. "She has neither written nor called."

And here a gathering of Mephistopheles, pierrots, Henry the Eighths, and a Gentleman of the Regency at the head of the stairs sent him to perform the host's duties.

The masked girl sought no friend. She found malicious pleasure in the sight of a disconsolate young Guardsman equally unattached. She danced with a Romeo, a pre-historic man, and a Lord Nelson, and was depressed by the spectacle of an Ophelia in the arms of a Roman father.

Colonel Poynting's fancy-dress ball was an annual affair; the prize-giving for the best costume had developed into a ritual. At half-past eleven the three sycophantic friends who made the choice led the modest Ophelia to the cleared center of the ballroom.

"My friends!"

The Roman father cleared his voice and stroked the moustache which had come into fashion since the days of Augustus.

"My friends, on this joyous occasion—er—and on the eve of what may be the turning-point of my life, I have great pleasure in awarding as a prize a replica of that jewel which was so unhappily lost by the fair choice of the judges."

A disinterested observer might have demanded (and many who were not disinterested did ask sotto voce) whether Colonel Poynting had foreknowledge of how the judging would go.

"This replica—"

"Why not have the original, daddy?"

The Colonel turned with a jump. The masked lady was unmasked.



"Dorothy!" he squeaked. "Really...!"

Slowly she held something to view. It was the emerald bar.

"If the insurance has been paid to your lady friend," she said, "This belongs to the underwriters."

"Where... where did you find it?" stammered the Colonel.

Dorothy looked at the crowd of revellers, stepped nearer to her father, and lowered her voice.

"It was never lost," she said—only the Colonel and the pallid Elsie heard; "I found it in her bedroom—between mattress and overlay—and Mr. Burkes was foolish enough to tell me how useful the insurance money would be!"

"That's a lie!" gasped Elsie. "You're—you're—"

The Colonel stopped her. He was as dignified as a toga and a wreath of roses would allow him to be.

"I will hear no word against Elsie," he said. "We are to be married tomorrow."

Dorothy stared at him.

"But, daddy, not until you make inquiries... you must wait..."

Colonel Poynting smiled.

"My dear," he said, almost playfully, "in my safe upstairs, and in my cash-box, is a little piece of paper signed by the Bishop of London. Come, come, my dear; tell Elsie you're sorry that you made such a ridiculous charge."

"In your cash-box?" she said slowly.

Turning, she walked to the window, drew aside the heavy curtains, and waved her hand.

"My dear!" said her father, in alarm. He thought for a moment that she contemplated suicide and was taking farewell of the world.

"Now let everybody sit down and talk," said Dorothy, coming back to the group. "Tommy Venner—do something for me! Call everybody in—servants, everybody."

The Colonel moved uneasily. "You're not going to make a scene .. J" Dorothy laughed.

"I'm going to drink the health of my friend Tom," she said mysteriously.

Just off Park Lane a taxi was waiting. Tom Burkes strolled negligently towards and entered the vehicle. As the cab drove off, Slip Morgan, who had been waiting nervously in the dark interior, asked a question.

"There it is," said Tom, and dropped the heavy cash-box on the floor. "That gel's a good worker. I'll hand it to her."

"Gels'll do anything for me," said Slip complacently.

## 8.

## VIA MADEIRA

This story concerns four people: Larry Vanne, who understood men and lived on his knowledge; Eli Soburn, who both understood and liked diamonds, and never traveled without a hundred thousand pounds' worth in a little leather wallet attached to his undergarments; Mary Perella, who understood most of the things that a ladies' school could teach, and, in addition, had that working knowledge which comes to a girl who has been left penniless and must shift for herself; and fourthly, Jeremiah Fallowby, who had a knowledge of the world geographically, and who was suspicious of all women who might love him for his wealth alone.

Of these four, only one had a definite objective. Larry Vanne, pacing up and down his hired flat in Jermyn Street, a long cigar between his strong white teeth, his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waist coat, confided to his slightly bored wife that the North Atlantic trade had dwindled to vanishing-point.

"I don't know what's coming over New York, Lou," he said despairingly. "We hadn't been tied up ten minutes to the river end of Twenty-third Street when along came McCarthy with a couple of bulls, and it was 'The Captain wants to see you, Larry.'—"

"They had nothing on you," said Mrs. Vanne; "not if I'm to judge from the presents you brought home!"

"Sure they had nothing on me!" said Larry. "But it shows the tendency of the age, Lou. Suspicion, suspicion, suspicion! And I did no more than to sit in a game with that Boston crowd to trim a half-witted cinema boy—my share was less than a thousand dollars. I haven't worked the North Atlantic for years, and things have gone from bad to worse, Lou. There wasn't a dame on board that didn't park her jewelry in the purser's safe."

Lou yawned.

"Any man who works one-handed is asking for trouble," was her dictum. "That's where you're all wrong, Larry. Now suppose you and me—"

"You and I," said Larry gently. "Let's keep the conversation out of the steerage."

It was true that Larry had never worked the North Atlantic. He had confined himself mainly to the Pacific trade, and had made bigger pickings between Shanghai and Vancouver, B.C., than any man in his line. He had worked scientifically, allowing certain routes to lie fallow for years, had watched and noted changes in personnel, so that he could tell you off-hand who was the captain of the Trianic and just whereabouts in the world you might find that red-nosed purser who nearly gaoled him in '19.

He made no or few mistakes; his patience was remorseless. On one occasion he took two journeys to Australia and back, and caught his man for £8000 worth of real money when the ship was in sight of port.

"I'm trying a new trade, anyway, and this time you 11 work for your living," he said, but gave no further information.

It was his practice to be frank in general and reticent in particular, and he told his companion nothing of Mr. Soburn and his wallet of diamonds. He could have told quite a lot. He could have traced Mr. Soburn \*s family history from the day he started peddling buttons in New York; of his legitimate deals in furs, of his questionable transactions in the world of low and high finance. He carried these wonderful cut diamonds of his for the same reason as a girl carries a doll or a boy a clockwork motorcar. They were his toys and his comforts, and he had frequent satisfaction in displaying these behind locked doors to his cronies with all the hushed pride that a Japanese virtuoso would display a carved jade box of the Ming period.

Larry knew his movements, past, present, and prospective; but, mostly, he knew Mr. Soburn's chiefest weakness, which was for a pretty face.

Larry's wife was beautiful enough in her hard-cut way, but it was not the kind of beauty that would appeal to Mr. Soburn.

"What I want," he told her frankly, "is something that hasn't lost the bloom; the sort of big-eyed girl who would faint at the sight of a sparkler."

Mrs. Larry nodded her head slowly.

"That sounds so much like me that you might be painting my portrait," she

said; "but I gather you want a different type."

That day she sent in an advertisement to two newspapers. On the third day came Mary Perella. Mary walked from Bayswater because she had reached the stage where pennies counted. She had had three jobs in six months. Her three employers suffered from a common misfortune, which they confessed at an early stage of her engagement—they were unhappily married. Unhappily married employers who absent-mindedly paw their secretaries' hands are not so infrequent a phenomenon as many people would imagine. Mary descended the secretariat scale from rich city merchants to a musical composer who lived in a world of writs, and she had broken her last pound sterling and was owing one week's rent when she set forth to Jermyn Street, never dreaming that the lady who required a secretary-companion to travel abroad, at a wildly exorbitant salary, would be likely to choose her from the thousands of applicants.

"She's made for the part," said Larry, who, unobserved, had made a very complete scrutiny of the new secretary. \* \* Orphan and everything; no relations in London..." He scratched his chin thoughtfully. "Fix her tomorrow. Get her passage booked and our own at the same time.

"We'll travel on the Frimley passports."

He was very practical now.

"She 'll want some money for clothing—give her twenty-five on account. You told her that she was my secretary and not yours!"

Mrs. Larry nodded.

"She bore the blow very well," she said. "I suppose you 're sure that Soburn is traveling on that ship?"

"Sure I'm sure!" he said scornfully. "He's got the royal suite, two bathrooms—God knows why—and two of his best pals are traveling. Besides, the next packet is booked up. And, Lou, you can tell that kid to report on board. I don't want to see her till we get to Southampton. Somehow I don't make a good impression on girls."

Mary Perella came the next morning and nearly dropped when the gracious lady confirmed her in the engagement.

"I'm quite sure you will do, my dear," said Mrs. Larry Vanne sweetly, "and you will find my husband a very generous employer. He is writing a book on rare jewels, but nobody must know this, because..."

The excuse, flimsy as it was, convinced Mary.

"What about Dennis?" asked Mrs. Larry suddenly, when she saw her husband after the interview.

Though he was a man who did not usually display his emotion, Larry Vanne was surprised into a grimace. Detective-Inspector Dennis, of Scotland Yard, was an atom in the molecule of uneasiness which never quite ceased to perturb him. And Dennis had met him on his arrival in England, and in his suave, nice way had said "Don't," He hadn't been quite as terse as that, and had added a sermon, the text of which was "Watch out," that had left Mr. Vanne distinctly uncomfortable.

Detective-Inspector Dennis does not really come into the story at all, so it would be superfluous to describe that very wise man, who read the minds of jewel thieves and confidence-men with such devastating accuracy.

At ten o'clock on the Thursday morning Mrs. Larry Vanne booked stateroom No. 15, the last available accommodation on the London Castle. A quarter of an hour later, Mr. Jeremiah Fallowby also rang up the Castle office, and was answered by a junior who was deputising for the booking-clerk, who had just gone out to lunch.

People often said that Jeremiah Fallowby was good-looking. They qualified the statement in various ways: some said that he would be really handsome if he had a little more expression; some thought that his features were irregular, but he had nice eyes; others were inclined to the belief that it was his mouth which spoiled him. On one point they were all agreed: he could be very dull. He seldom went anywhere—you never met him, for example, dining at the Ambassadors' on the night of the Grand Prix. He certainly went to Deauville—but ways in the off-season. The month he spent in Venice was the very month that the Lido was a wilderness. He was in town when everybody else was out of town, and Ascot usually coincided with the period that he chose for his stay at Aix.

At the height of the London season he was pretty sure to be somewhere in the country and when the north-bound trains were overloaded with guns bound for the moors, Jeremiah would be writing excuses from Madeira.

"Jerry, you're absolutely impossible!" rasped his aunt. "You never meet a gel worth knowing, and you'll end up by marrying a waitress in a tea-shop!"

"Which tea-shop?" asked Jerry^ momentarily interested.

"You're coming to us for Christmas," said his aunt. ^^ I am not going to allow

you to wander alone. If you go away, I '11 come with you—I warn you."

"Thank you," said Jeremiah gratefully.

"You would like me to come!" asked the astonished lady.

"No," said Jeremiah truthfully. "I'm thanking you for the warning."

None of his many relatives were really very rude to his face, because he was worth a quarter of a million sterling. But the uncles and aunts and cousins who planned to marry him off, and who arranged the most cunningly devised house- parties, only to receive a letter which began:

"...most terribly sorry, but I shall be in Venice on the 10th..."

had no scruples in speaking of him in the plainest possible manner.

"It is his damned romanticism," fumed Uncle Brebbury, who had five eligible daughters. "He's got a fairy prince complex... thinks he'll find a (naughty word) Cinderella. Tea-shop gel! He 11 be bringing home a—a!"

"Bertie!" murmured his shocked wife. "Please... The gels!"

But "the gels" were in complete sympathy.

Jeremiah wrote a little, read much, thought even more. He was modest enough to believe that he was entirely without attraction, sophisticated to the extent of suspecting that most mothers were prepared to sacrifice their daughters on the altar of his fortune.

One gloomy morning Jeremiah, having sworn to be a member of Mrs. Leslie Fallowby's Christmas house-party, was contemplating the dismal prospect. The glory of autumn is at best the wan beauty of decay; and since healthy men do not love caducity in any expression, Jeremiah had met the early frosts and the mists which lie in the tawny hollows of Burnham Beeches with an uneasy yearning for the moorland when spring was coming in, with arum lilies growing on the seashore and gladiolas budding on verdant slopes. He would rise from his writing-table and pace restlessly the worn carpet of his study. And inevitably he would be drawn to the drawer where, with the supreme indifference which summer brought to him, he had thrown the early sailing lists.

For hours this morning he had sat turning them over. He could go to the east coast, stop off at Naples or Port Said... He could spend a week in Nairobi... he knew a man who was trying to grow cotton somewhere in Kenya—or was it tobacco?

It would be rather fun to end the sea journey at Beira—push off up country to Salisbury, and work down through Bulawayo and Kimberley to the Cape.

There was a delightful boarding-house at Rondebosch, kept by an ex-civil servant, with great hedges of blue plumbago. Behind, like the backcloth of a theatrical scene, the ranges of Constantia.

Jeremiah Fallowby made a little face and, walking to the casement window, stared out over the darkening lawn. Rain was falling steadily. Every tree dripped dismally. Near at hand was a bed of bedraggled chrysanthemums—white they had been, and their soiled petals littered the ground.

He looked at his watch mechanically. Really, he intended looking at the date block. One o'clock. 27th October.. November in four days—fogs and drizzle and colds in the head.

He sat at his table again and reached for the telephone, gave a London number, and waited indecisively till the bell rang.

"Is that the Castle Line? Good... have you anything on the London Castle—deck cabin if possible?"

He waited, the receiver at his ear, his pen drawing uncouthly arabesques on his blotting-pad.

A voice at the other end of the wire awakened him to realities.

"Good... my name is Fallowby... yes, Jeremiah Fallowby. I'll arrange to collect the ticket right away."

He rang off, and immediately connected with a London agent in Threadneedle Street, and gave him instructions. The tickets arrived by the first post in the morning, and Jeremiah went joyously to the task of packing.

If he had only been content to stay at Burn-ham Beeches he might have been saved a great deal of inconvenience. Within two hours of the receipt of his letter he had left his house with instructions that neither letters nor telegrams should be sent on to him, and had deposited himself in his club in St. James's Street, so that he did not receive the frantic wire addressed to him by the Steamship Company, nor yet interview a penitent junior clerk who had booked a stateroom that was already engaged. In complete ignorance, he motored to Southampton, had a breakdown on the way, and arrived only just in time to hurl his baggage on board.

The cabin was a large-sized one. He was annoyed to discover that there were two beds, and directed the steward to remove one.

"Traveling alone, sir," said the steward phlegmatically. (Nothing surprises stewards.) And then, "There was some trouble about your ticket. Another gent was booked."

He glanced at the initials on the suitcase, took the counterfoil of the steamship ticket, made a few inquiries about Jeremiah's taste in the direction of early-morning coffee and baths, and vanished.

To the purser, as he handed in the counterfoil:

"Seventeen's aboard. The other fellow hasn't come."

"That's all right," said the assistant purser, and spiked the paper.

The ship had cleared Southampton waters and was nosing its way to the Channel when Jerry, writing letters at the little desk in the cabin (the usual and untruthful excuses to Mrs. Leslie Fallowby), became aware that somebody was standing in the open doorway.

He looked up and saw a girl.

"Um... er... do you want anything!" he asked.

Mary Perella came into the stateroom a little boisterously. She had that excited pinkness which adventure gives to young skins—the day was unexpectedly mild; there was a blue, cloud-flecked sky above, and the white cloisters of the Needles on the port quarter.

Ahead a summery land, and the immense possibilities of new lands.

Jeremiah glared up at her from his writing-table.

"Oh, Mr.—?"

He got to his feet slowly.

"Fallowby," he said, and she looked relieved.

"I've been worrying terribly about the name," she said. "You know when Mrs. Fallowby told me I didn't really catch it, but I hadn't the courage to ask."

Jeremiah frowned.

Mrs. Fallowby? "Which of his innumerable aunts was this? Mrs. Hector Fallowby, or Mrs. Richard—or was it that terrible little Mrs. Merstham-Fallowby with the impossible daughters?... He uttered an exclamation, but swallowed its violent end.



"Not Mrs. Le—" he said.

Even in his agitation he thought she was extraordinarily pretty: she, at any rate, was no Fallowby. Gray eyes, rather big; there was the faintest film of powder on her face, but young girls did that sort of thing nowadays.

She nodded smilingly. He was, she thought, being a little facetious. Husbands and wives spoke about one another in such queer ways.

"It will be rather fun spending Christmas Day on board ship," she went on. "We are going to South Africa, aren't we?"

"Unless the captain changes his mind," said Jeremiah, and they both laughed.

Then he became conscious of his remissness.

"Won't you sit down?"

She sat on a sofa under the square window that looks on to the promenade deck.

"I suppose you have a letter from Mrs. Fallowby?"

It wasn't like any of the Fallowbys to give letters of introduction to pretty girl outsiders.

He saw a look of consternation come to the girl's eyes.

"Isn't she here!" she gasped.

Jeremiah blinked at her.

"Who—Mrs. Fallowby? I hope not!"

Mary Perella went pale.

"But... I suppose it is all right... but... she said she was coming."

Jeremiah frowned. If there was one experience in the world he didn't want, and which he intended to avoid, it was a tete-a-tete with a female Fallowby. Mrs. Leslie had evidently kept her promise.

"I suppose she's here, then," he said unhappily.

There was an awkward pause. Into Mary's mind crept a doubt.

"She engaged me as traveling secretary, and she said I was to see you as soon as I got on board. Fortunately, I remembered the number of your cabin."

"Really!"

He could think of no comment more illuminating.

"So you're going to South Africa? Do you know the country?"

She had never been abroad. Her father had served in Africa: he was so interested a listener that she found herself telling him about the tragedy of two years before.

"I stayed with an aunt for six months, but it was rather—well, impossible."

"I never knew an aunt that wasn't," he sympathized. "You seem to have had a pretty unhappy time, Miss Perella—that is an Italian name, isn't it?"

She thought it had been Maltese two hundred years before, and he seemed to remember a General Sir Gregory Perella who had done tremendous things in the Abyssinian War—or was it the Mutiny?

Suddenly:

"What do you want me to do! I have a portable typewriter—"

"Nothing," he said hastily. "The best thing you can do is to go along and find Mrs. Fallowby—no, I don't think I should do that. If I remember rightly, she is a terribly bad sailor, and won't be on deck for a week. Just loaf around. If there is anything I can do for you, let me know... got a nice cabin! Fine! If you see Mrs. Fallowby, tell her I'm... er... awfully busy. In fact, I thought of writing—"

She nodded wisely.

"A book—I know."

She left him a little dazed.

He saw her that night at dinner, sitting at a little table by herself, and they exchanged smiles as he passed. There was no sign of Mrs. Leslie Fallowby, but the ship had a slight roll on, and that would explain her absence. After dinner he saw the girl leaning over the rail, and went up to her.

"I haven't seen your—" she began.

"You wouldn't," he interrupted her. "Poor dear, she thinks this is rough weather."

He commandeered a chair for her, and they sat down and talked till nearly ten o'clock.

"You're going to let me help you with your book!" she said, as they stood at the head of the companion-way before she went below for the night.

"My book?" He started guiltily. "Oh, of course! Did I say I was writing a book? Naturally, I will be happy for you to help me, but I haven't got very far."

He found himself awaiting her arrival on deck the next morning with some impatience. They were in the dreaded Bay, but the sea was as smooth as a pond, and, save for the chill in the air, the weather was delightful. Pacing round and round the deck, they discovered mutual interests—she also would one day write a book, which was to be a tremendous affair about life and people. He did not even smile. Jeremiah was rather diffident: possibly he credited her with as extensive an acquaintance with the subject as he himself possessed.

"I can't find Mrs. Fallowby's cabin anywhere," she said. "My conscience has been pricking me. Couldn't I do something for her?"

"She's quite all right," said Jeremiah hastily.

It was time enough to brace himself for an interview with Mrs. Fallowby when she made her appearance. The letter of excuse he had written was already torn up. How like that enterprising lady to discover that he was sailing!

And yet he was puzzled a little. Why should Mrs. Fallowby have taken this voyage without her unprepossessing daughters? He resolved at the earliest convenient moment to discover from Mary Perella a solution to this private mystery.

"We shall be in Funchal Harbor on Christmas Eve, by which time it ought to be fairly warm," he told her in the course of the afternoon walk. "It will be rather jolly doing one's Christmas shopping."

"Mrs. Fallowby will be well enough to come ashore by then?" she suggested.

Jeremiah prayed not, but refrained from giving expression to the hope.

The next night they leaned over the rail together and watched the faint star of light which stood for Cape Finisterre sink down behind the horizon; and he told her what a bore life was, and how he hated crowds and people who were terribly resolved to be gay to order. And she reviewed some of her landladies, and told him of a restaurant where one could get a wonderful lunch for 3d., or 6d.; and once he squeezed her arm to attract her attention to a passing sailing ship, its white sails looking ghostly in the faint light of the crescent moon, and she did not seem to resent that method. Yet, curiously enough, when he took her arm again to lead her to the companion-way, she very gently disengaged

herself.

"I hope Mrs. Fallowby will be better in the morning," she said, "and I do hope you will do some work—I feel a great impostor: I haven't done a stroke since I've come on to this ship!"

He went to bed and dreamed of gray eyes and very soft arms that gave under his grip.

The night before the ship came into Funchal Bay, and whilst he was dressing for dinner, the purser came to see him, and the tone of that officer was rather short, and his manner strangely hostile.

"In what name did you book this cabin, Mr. Fallowby?"

"In my own name," said Jeremiah in surprise.

The purser looked at him with suspicion.

"The name I have on the list is Frimley—the same initials, J. F., 'John Frimley.' Are you sure that isn't the name in which the cabin is booked?"

"You've seen my ticket—and really, does it matter?" asked Jeremiah, a little impatiently.

"It does and it doesn't," said the purser. "Who is this young lady you're with, Mr. Fallowby?"

"I am with no young lady," said Jeremiah, with pardonable asperity. "If you mean Miss Perella, she is my aunt's secretary. Nobody knows better than you that my aunt is somewhere on this ship. I suggest that you should interview Mrs. Leslie Fallowby, who I have no doubt will give you the fullest information."

"There is no person named Mrs. Leslie Fallowby on the ship," said the purser, and Jeremiah stared at him. "The young lady," went on the officer, "states that she is your secretary, and that she is traveling in that capacity."

"My secretary!" said Jeremiah incredulously.

"She says she is your secretary, engaged by your wife."

Jeremiah sat down with a thump.

"Say that again," he said.

The obliging purser repeated his tremendous tidings.

"Now I don't want any trouble with you, Mr. Fallowby," he said, not unkindly, "or with your wife. I'm going to show you a copy of the wireless we have received from London, and you'll understand that the game is up."

"Which game?" asked Jeremiah faintly.

The purser took a sheet of paper from his pocket, evidently a typewritten copy of a radio that had been received that day. It ran:

"To Captain, London Castle. Believe passenger named John Frimley and his wife are traveling under assumed name on your ship. They booked Suite No. 17, but they may be traveling separately to avoid detection. Frimley escaped our officers sent to arrest him at Waterloo, and has not been traced. He is a tall, good-looking man, clean-shaven, may wear horn-rimmed spectacles—"

(At this point Jeremiah quickly removed the reading-glasses he had been wearing when the purser came into the stateroom.)

"His wife is pretty, looks younger than she is. If any persons answering this description or occupying Suite 17, hand them to Portuguese Police, Funchal, to await extradition."

Jeremiah read the document twice.

"Your wife is already under guard in her cabin," said the purser, "and there'll be a master-of-arms on duty outside your stateroom to see that you do not attempt to leave until the Portuguese authorities arrive."

Jeremiah gaped at him.

"My wife is what?"

The purser waved a majestic hand and left the cabin before Mr. Jeremiah Fallowby began the exercise of the colorful vocabulary which he had acquired in his travels.

It was in the bare and whitewashed office of a Portuguese police office that he saw again Miss Mary Perella. He expected her to be carried in, a pallid and wilting wreck, whose nights had been made sleepless by the thought of her tragic sorrow; but it was a very healthy and indignant girl who came across the uncovered floor towards him.

"What is the meaning of this, Mr. Frimley!" she asked. Reproach was rather in her eyes than in her voice. "It isn't true that you are a jewel thief?"

"My name is Fallowby," protested Jeremiah.

"You told me your wife was on board, and she isn't."

He guessed that this was his real offense.

"I never said my wife was anywhere," said Jeremiah loudly. "I was talking about my aunt, Mrs. Leslie Fallowby. You told me you were her secretary."

"I did nothing of the kind," she stormed. "I told you I was your secretary—that your wife had engaged me."

"But I've never had a wife!" he wailed.

"Attention!" The fat man behind the desk boomed the word. "I know English too well! Now you spik my questions when I ask them!"

"Fire ahead," said Jeremiah recklessly.

He slept that Christmas Eve in a stone cell which was very dark and very unpleasant in other respects. He had no acquaintance with the Portuguese language, but he spoke Spanish rather fluently, and he learned that the girl had been taken to a convent. The British Vice-Consul had been requisitioned, but that worthy was not in Funchal. So Jeremiah despatched long and vehement cables to London... and might have saved himself the trouble.

In the early hours of the morning came a wire to the Chief of Police, announcing the arrest of "Mr. and Mrs. Frimley," whose other name was Vanne, and an apologetic police dignitary of the first class came personally, and in uniform, to offer apologies.

It was from him that Jerry learned of Mr. Vanne's little plot (revealed to the London police by his wife); of the engagement of a secretary who was to charm from a susceptible millionaire a view of his diamonds and such information about their safeguarding as she could secure.

Apparently, Miss Mary Perella had been similarly informed: he met her half-way up the steep slope which led to the convent, and she came running down with her hands outstretched.

"Welcome, and a merry Christmas, fellow-convict!" she said, with a gaiety that was immensely infectious.

He took her arm as they walked down the cobbled hill lane together, and came to a bench that overlooked the bay.

She was beautifully sympathetic—apparently saw nothing in her own experience but a thrilling adventure.

"I knew, of course, that something must be wrong. I couldn't imagine you were a burglar, or whatever this Mr. Frimley was." She sighed. "I've lost a very good job," she said ruefully.

"Let me find you another," said Jeremiah eagerly. "I really am going to write a book—I have threatened to do it for years, and you can come along and correct my spelling."

She half shook her head. Yet apparently she accepted the position, for they went on to the Cape by the next mail steamer, and the English chaplain who had married them on the morning they sailed came down to see them off.

## 9.

## JAKE'S BROTHER BILL

The effect of wine upon temperament is a subject for study which the psychologists have neglected.

Jake's brother Bill was the only man who ever tackled the question in an earnest spirit of research, and although his studies were frequently interrupted by circumstances over which he had no control, he never forsook his course of study. On one point he was emphatic, and it was that champagne produced an overwhelming sense of patriotism. He reached this conclusion in the week he was expelled from college for painting a pacifist professor's motorcar red, white and blue.

He had to break into the garage to do it, and he spent the whole of one night at his task, but neither his enterprise nor his nobility of purpose saved him from being expelled.

When he was in prison for violently assaulting the police in the execution of their duty, he developed his theory to the extent of marking rum as a "revolutionary stimulant which arouses the basest resentment against established law."

He used to write long letters to Jake, setting forth his views.

It is to his credit that he never drank rum again. Jake insists that he did one memorable evening at Funchal, but the truth is not yet known, for Bill is somewhere in China, having escaped from Funchal on a fruit boat which "he did unlawfully seize by piracy, and did cast away by neglect upon the foreshores of Algiers"—to quote the indictment on which, in his absence, he was tried and sentenced to death by the Government of Lisboa.

All the trouble came about over a girl who was also a ward of Government.

Wards in Chancery are frequent phenomena, but a ward whose guardians changed with the fluctuating fortune of political parties was a surprising circumstance even to Jake Harrison.

And the only thing that ever surprised Jake was Q.Z.H., who lived at the Vigo end of the cable. Q.Z.H. had a name and an identity, but nobody at Funchal ever knew him, except by the initials which preceded the messages he relayed. And he was certainly a poor operator.

"It is surprising to me that that fellow holds down his job," said Jake at odd intervals.

Jake came to the South-Eastern from the Western Union. He left the Western Union from sheer ennui.

Wall Street prices were his specialty, and after five weary years of fraction tapping, he threw up the work and came to the South-Eastern, which carries a line of romance and unexpectedness. For the South-Eastern drains China and India, Africa and Australia of their surplus news, and there is generally a little war near one sensitive, trembling antenna of the service, and Funchal got all the news that was going.

Jake was a Canadian, a brilliant operator and a misogynist. Or he was until one day, strolling up the long hill road that skirts the Grand Canyon, he met a girl who had no other duenna than a half-bred terrier pup.

At the sight of her Jake stood still and stared. Women did not usually take him that way, but this girl was amazingly different. Her father had been, in his lifetime, a native of Funchal, which meant that the blood of two proud Latin races had flowed in his veins. In his native land he had been a marquis, or something of the sort, but Jake never troubled to inquire. In Funchal he had owned banana lands of vast size.

The girl's mother was a Miss Macverney, and pretty.

In the person of Inez Savalla the warm south and the austere north fought, gigantically, for expression, and neither side lost. Her hair should have been black or flaxen. Instead, it was of swarthy gold. South won in the creamy complexion, but the north triumphed in her blue eyes. The pride of the Clan Macverney (who are really Brodies) compromised with the hauteur of a race that once lived on the borderline of Castile. The carriage of her, the swing of hip and shoulder, the tilt of her head, and the long black eyelashes through which the blue eyes flashed sideways as she passed him, these were pleasantly



southern.

Jake stared after her as she strode down the hill, and he blinked twice.

"That is a pretty nice girl," he admitted.

He observed that she was very simply dressed, and this puzzled him. Simplicity is very uninformative. She might have been a tradesman's daughter, and therefore within the possibilities of his acquaintance. On the other hand, she might be one of those grand ladies of the Island who live on so exalted a plane that nothing meaner than the officers of a visiting man o' war, or a consul-general, or a distinguished man of affairs breaking his journey to Cape Town, might meet on terms of equality.

"That is an extraordinarily nice girl," said Jake with a sigh, and followed her with his eye until she was out of sight.

Society on the island of Funchal is notoriously exclusive, but is neither as exclusive nor as outspoken as the mess of the South-Eastern Cable Company. Here reputations go cheap, as is only natural, for if the officials of the S.E.C.C. are punctilious in the matter of secrecy, and it is considered bad form even to discuss the contents of cables outside the instrument-room, the knowledge of private affairs gained professionally has very naturally an influence on the attitude of the individual mind. To the mess-room the folks high and low of Funchal were just Funchalese, with or without endearing adjectives.

The mess had few friends outside, and depended upon Fanelly to supply all that was requisite of local gossip. Fanelly, who spoke the language like a native, was an inveterate collector of news. To him Jake went.

"A girl with gold-black hair!" Fanelly knitted his youthful brows. "It sounds like Inez Savalla: do you know Colonel Pinto Muello, the fat man with the mole on his chin?"

"I have seen the swine," said Jake inelegantly. "Don't tell me she is his daughter!"

Fanelly sneered.

"Her name is Savalla, I tell you—how can she be his daughter, eh!"

"Well, what about him!" asked the impatient Jake.

"She is going to marry him, that's all," said Fanelly, with an air of finality.

Jake fingered his lean brown cheek and a light shone in eyes that at least were as blue as Inez Savalla's.

"She isn't," he said.

The young man resented this refutation of news which was practically official.

"I tell you the marriage has been fixed by the governor, who is her guardian. Old Savalla was an eccentric old devil, and he left his daughter a ward of the governor."

"But this governor is a new man—Almedez only came to the island six months ago."

Fanelly smiled.

"That's the joke: whoever is governor is her guardian. Almedez is a great friend of Muello's, they went to the same chiropodist in Lisboa—"

"Cease your facetious commentaries," said Jake, laying his big hand on the young man's shoulder, "and when you go calling on your dago friends, pass the word around that the engagement has been dissolved."

"Who by?" asked the startled youth.

"By whom, is better English," said Jake gently, "but if you are asked that question, hand 'em my card... does she speak English?"

Fanelly nodded.

"With a strong Aberdeen accent," he said.

"Good!" nodded Jake in all seriousness. "Then the last obstacle to our happy union has been removed."

She spoke English very prettily, when she came upon Jake bandaging his ankle on the mountain road.

It was a sprained ankle for the time being.

"Are you English?" she asked, as she helped him to a convenient bank.

"Scottish," said Jake somberly. "Aberdeen—maybe you have heard of the place?"

He was a liar and a scoundrel, and was prepared to admit it. For the moment there was no necessity. She sat by his side whilst the half-bred terrier pup gnawed and pulled at loose ends of the bandage. And there was such beauty in the world and in his heart, that Jake Harrison was prepared to find excuses for the deception he was practising.

Funchal is a jewel of an island. Above them, as they sat, the scarp of the Sierra was a gray-banner flung against the blue. Beneath, the land lay in irregular squares of brown and emerald and gold. Funchal was a dainty toy-town, perched on a ledge of rock that jutted into the blue Atlantic. And the air was sweet with the aromatic fragrance of fruit and flowers.

"It is a wonderful island: I was born here," she said simply, "and I suppose I shall die here."

"God forbid," said Jake fervently.

He met her again the next day, and then every day, and learnt more than Fanelly could have told him. She certainly was engaged to Colonel Pinto Muello. She spoke of the fact without enthusiasm. And Jake discovered why she had not been married off before. Her successive guardians had successively administered her estate. Each governor stole a little on one pretext or another. Now there was nothing left to steal. She did not state the case as crudely. She spoke of "expenses of administration," but Jake was an impartial student of graft in all its forms, and supplied his own interpretation.

The last governor to arrive had discovered to his intense annoyance that the Savalla estate, which was and had been for years regarded as a perquisite of office, was no longer there to be "administered." Having nothing else to sell, he sold the girl. Pinto Muello was a rich man.

On the ninth day of meeting, Jake met the colonel. He was a stout, tightly uniformed man, with a heavy black moustache, which he twisted with a quick "wiping" gesture, the result of many years of practice, and Jake gazed in fascination at the large mole on the side of his chin and wondered how often the colonel shaved.

In manner he was fiery and made gurgling noises in his throat. This, Jake gathered, was an expression of his fierceness.

"You are the operator in charge?" he demanded insolently.

"I admit it," said Jake.

"There has not come a cable for me, yes, no!"

Jake Harrison shook his head with exasperating slowness. Moles were supposed to be lucky, he thought, yet he would not have changed places with the colonel. And Jake had no moles.

"Twice, four times, seven, I have come to this bureau," thundered Colonel Pinto Muello, thumping the counter, "and always it is no! You are certain?"

Have you messages I may look through to be sure none has escaped the observer! I have authority, eh! I am in command of military mens on the island."

"So I'm told," said Jake wearily, "but if a cable comes through for you, it goes through to you."

"If it comes through, it goes through?" repeated the colonel frowningly. His knowledge of idiomatic English was slight. "Remember!" he thumped the table again. "I have all authorities for search! I command military mens on the island—all of them!"

"I know 'em both," said Jake.

He related the conversation at tiffin to Jack Boynes; the senior operator grinned.

"Pinto is in a devil of a state of mind," he said. "He's been to the office twenty or thirty times the past two days."

"Maybe he's expecting a remittance," suggested Jake.

It was Fanelly who supplied the explanation.

"There is a whole lot of political trouble in the dear land that owns this island," he said. "Some people think there will be a revolution, and that Pinto is in it. Anyway, his police are pinching all sort of people on the island—why, they even shadowed me last night!"

"This is fearful news," said Jake.

"You can laugh, Harrison." Fanelly was very serious. "But it isn't a joke. Every new arrival on the island is being trailed."

"That's certainly tough luck on Bonson's baby," said Jake, and big Bill Bonson, whose wife had augmented the population that morning, howled his delight.

That afternoon the humorous aspect of the situation carried no appeal to Jake Harrison.

Neither the blue of the bay nor the scarlet of wild geraniums, nor the sun-blazed glories of the wispy clouds that trail from peak to peak of the Sierra Funchal, had form or color or beauty for him as he stood stricken dumb on the canyon road and listened to the halting words of Inez Savalla. He knew the worst when he met her, and saw the ravage the all-night tears had made.

"In three days..." she sobbed. "Oh, Jake... can't you do something, dear?"

So far had their friendship developed from the pleasantries, the sympathies, the shameless deceptions, and the other correlatives of a sprained ankle.

Jake thought powerfully. There was no ship leaving for three days, and though he might speak slightly of Muello's army and his ragged gendarmerie, they were unpleasant facts. So, too, was the untidy prison on Tower Hill.

A fruit boat was entering the bay as he looked, a squat tub of a boat out of Cadiz—there was no help from there. She was under the command of Pietro Manzana y Manzana. Jake had once smitten Pietro and had been fined a hundred milreis for his brutality.

"You just trust to old Jake," was all he could say: the basis for such a trust was his faith in Jake.

He had hardly got back to his quarters before he received a letter. It was written on the yellow edge of Funchal's one newspaper, the Diaro del Funchal,

"I am a prisoner in the house; Muello has sent his aunt to stay with me, and there are soldiers on guard at the door. Do not expect me, dear; good-bye."

Jake read the penciled words and rubbed his head. Fanelly, coming into the reading-room where Jake was sitting, asked in his aimless way if he wanted anything.

"A red-hot miracle, my son," said Jake.

The headquarters of the South-Eastern in Funchal is as near to the shore end of the cable as is convenient. It had the disadvantage of accessibility, a considerable disadvantage, remembering that Funchal is essentially a relay station, for the business done on the island would not pay the board of the most junior operator.

The evening meal had finished, and all but Jake had gone their several ways. He alone sat at the table, his head on his hands, thinking wonderfully but ineffectively.

He had no more thought of his brother than he had of the Grand Khan of Muscovy. He had not thought of the erratic Bill for years, and yet into his solitary meditations came this last considerable factor.

The man who stood in the doorway was tall, dark, and untidy. He had a week's growth of beard on his cheek and his linen was even older. He came in softly, seeming to wriggle through a two-inch opening of the door, and he stood

surveying the room and its rough comfort with an approving eye.

Between the tramp who shuffles the countryside and the tramp who stalks the world, there is a great difference.

The world tramp brings with him an air of self-confidence, and meets the most exalted personages on terms of equality. He is never abashed, never cringes, and is equally at home in the musty hold of a steamer or the gorgeous club-rooms of the colonial aristocracy.

With his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his stained and ragged trousers, he regarded the gloomy and unconscious figure of Jake with a smile of amusement.

Presently Jake looked round, took a good look at the newcomer, and rose slowly to his feet.

"Where in hell have you been, Bill!" he demanded, and a wise observer would have known immediately that Jake Harrison was talking to his brother, and by his attitude of domination, his younger brother.

Bill Harrison came forward to the table, seated himself, and viewed the scraps of food which were left with the eye of a connoisseur.

"I've just blown in," he said.

"On the Onzona?"

Bill Harrison selected a piece of bread, buttered it calmly from a remnant left on the edge of a plate, and nodded.

"I knew you were here: I thought I'd come along and look you up. Let me see, it's nearly eight years since we met, isn't it, Jake?"

"Nine," said Jake. "Where have you come from?"

"Cadiz," replied the other. "Do you mind passing that loaf along? Thank you. Have you got a drink?"

Jake shook his head.

"A glass of Marsala?" suggested his guest. "Except for its melancholic reaction, Marsala is as innocuous as grape fruit."

"You'll get no drink here," said Jake. "Haven't you been drinking already?"

"I have drunk and eaten bananas for eight days," said his brother. "There should be a law passed making the growing of bananas a penal offense."

Jake made no comment, and the other went on. He cut a slice of bread, and Jake pushed toward him a plate of butter.

"I got to Cadiz," said the wanderer, "from Malta, on a C. and I. boat that was short of a steward. Before then I was in Alexandria: a pretty mean kind of place, but not so mean as Colombo. I tossed up whether I'd go across to Rio, or whether I'd look in here, and you won."

"You won, you mean," said Jake.

"Very likely," said the visitor carelessly, and then: "what is wrong here? Has Funchal gone dry or is there an election in progress?" he asked.

"There are so many things wrong on this damned island that I couldn't start telling you," said Jake testily. "Why do you ask?"

The other shook his head.

"I don't know," he said, "except that I've been followed around by a cop ever since I landed."

"You don't tell me," said Jake sarcastically. "Why they should shadow a well-set-up young fellow like you is beyond my understanding. I will send a note to the governor." He winced at the word "governor," and his grimace did not escape the attention of his brother, who was a student of humanity.

Jake walked to the door and beckoned his relative with a jerk of his head.

"Come along, I'll find you a bed," he said. "! suppose I shall have to keep you for a day or two."

Ten minutes later Mr. Bill Harrison was sucking luxuriously at a long black cigar in his brother's room.

"You'll have to sleep here tonight. Tomorrow I'll get you a place in the town," said Jake.

"A glass of Madeira," murmured Bill, "and I should be in paradise= Madeira is a sedative, and excellent for the tired business man. Its pathological effects are exaggerated. And it is cheap."

"You'll drink ice-water," snarled Jake.

Bill Harrison nodded calmly.

"Ice-water is poison, but is not as deadly as the fruit of the *musa sapientium*, or as the vulgar describe it, the banana."

Later Jake had to vouch for his identity to a suspicious chief of police.

"No, I don't know who he is," said Jake icily. "He has come out with excellent credentials, and he is the guest of the mess for a week or two." He did not admit the relationship in which the visitor stood to him, for obvious reasons. It was just like Bill to come barging in at this moment of crisis, he thought bitterly as he went on duty that night. Only a fraction of his mind was on the instrument he manipulated; the best of his thoughts were with a girl and a stout colonel of infantry in a tight-fitting uniform.

At three o'clock in the morning came an urgent Government message. Jake was the only man on duty at the moment, Fanelly, his second in command, having been dispatched to make coffee. Jake wrote the words mechanically, and sat for a long time staring at the written message whilst Cape Town called frantically on his right, and Vigo chattered impatiently on his left.

Although he was a poor linguist, he could both read and write the language, and the message ran:

"To Colonel Pinto Muello, very urgent. By order of the Government you will arrest Almedez and assume the functions of governor. The Diaz Government has fallen. Long live the Revolution."

There followed a code-word which Jake knew terminated all Government messages, and guaranteed their bona fides. He sat for ten minutes, and then hearing the footsteps of Fanelly, thrust the message into his pocket. An hour later he was relieved, and went back to his quarters carrying with him a blank message form.

He switched on the light and kicked his brother awake. Bill Harrison sat up blinking.

"Bill, do you speak this lingo very well?"

"It is my native language," said Bill modestly, and then Jake outlined the wildest scheme that the mind of a cable operator ever evolved.

"It is not a job I like," said Bill, "and it is certainly not a dry job. This palace, I presume, will be well stocked?"

Jake swore at him for fully three minutes.

"It is all very well for you to cuss," said Bill, hurt. "You ask me to masquerade as a new governor appointed by the Central Government. You ask me to bestow a wife upon you, and yet—"



"You can have anything you like when it is all over," said Jake. "I'll borrow Bane's motor-boat, and the day after I'm married we'll get away."

Bill thought for a long time, then:

"Cut my hair, Jake, and lend me a suit of your society clothes. I have views about governing."

"The only thing I ask you—in fact. Bill, I implore you—is to cut out the champagne," pleaded Jake, and his brother eyed him coldly.

"I have forgotten that such a wine is made," he said.

At half-past five, when the dawn was coming up over the eastern seas, a Major Corelli was wakened from his profound slumbers, and into the hands of this dazed man was thrust a telegram.

YOU WILL TAKE CONTROL OF THE TROOPS; ARREST COLONEL MUELLO AND GOVERNOR ALMEDEZ. YOU WILL CO-OPERATE WITH SEÑOR DUSA, WHO HAS ARRIVED SECRETLY FROM LISBOA, AND WHO IS APPOINTED GOVERNOR OF FUNCHAL. YOU ARE PROMOTED COLONEL AND ARE DECORATED WITH THE SECOND CLASS ORDER OF ST. XAVIER.

Probably Jake's most artistic effort was the decoration of the new commander of troops. By eight o'clock in the morning the evolution was accomplished. At seven o'clock that evening, Jake Harrison was united in the holy bonds of matrimony to the Senhora Inez Savalla. And he was married in style by the Archbishop of Funchal. The new governor had insisted upon this, and when Jake heard the news he quaked, for when Bill Harrison was grandiose, he was usually drunk.

Furthermore one of the first acts of the new governor was to issue a decree prohibiting the consumption of bananas.

Here was proof positive.

"He's got as far as the sparkling wines," groaned Jake when he heard the news, and hurried his preparations for departure.

The next morning he chartered a fiacre and drove up to the governor's palace. The decree against the consumption of bananas was being pasted upon the brick gateway as he drove in, and almost the first person he met in the large stone hall was the newly decorated commander of troops. He was looking a little wistful.

"You have brought a message?" he asked eagerly, recognizing Jake, but the operator shook his head.

"I cannot understand it," said the major. "It is inexplicable! No other instructions have come to me, and I simply await the orders of my Government."

Jake could have explained why no other messages came through. Some evil person had waded out at low tide, and had affixed an explosive charge to the cable connecting Funchal with Lisboa. He thought it wise not to mention this fact.

"I want to see the governor," said Jake, and the major's face lit up.

"What a man!" he said. "Only for two days has he been at the palace, and everything is reorganized! And what a voice!"

Jake's heart sank.

"Has he been singing?" he asked faintly.

"In every language," said the enthusiastic major. "To me alone, you understand: we are as brothers." He threw out his arms expansively.

"You can have him," said Jake in English.

He found Governor Bill Harrison in the governor's library, and there was in Bill's eye a gentle sadness which confirmed Jake's worst suspicions.

"Now, Bill," he said violently, when the door had closed, "you've got to cut this drink out. I've heard stories in the town that have kept me awake at night. I have the boat ready and we can leave tonight."

"You leave alone," said Bill grandly. "I have a duty to perform; a duty to a downtrodden people, crushed under the burdens imposed by successive tyrants. Every democratic fibre in my body vibrates to the call of their necessity. Will you have a drink?"

"No, I won't have a drink," shouted Jake. "You're a madman. Bill; you can't stay here. The Lisboa Government will send a warship, and I daresay there's one on its way already. And then where will you be!"

"I shall defy them," said Bill dreamily, as he sat easily in his chair, his legs crossed, his finger tips together. "I've already summoned a meeting of the Cabinet, and we have decided to resist any attack upon our sovereignty."

Jake drew a long breath.

"Is this the effect of Marsala!" he asked bitterly.

"It is a light German wine which I found in the cellar—pre-war stuff, Jake. You're losing the experience of a lifetime if you refuse my hospitality."

"What are you going to do!" asked Jake again.

Bill shrugged his shoulders and smiled serenely.

He had enlisted the services of a hairdresser. His little beard was trimmed to a point, his linen was faultless. Happily the late governor, now languishing in Tower Hill prison, had been almost Bill's size and shape.

"I have given instructions to the batteries to fire upon any warship that attempts to enter the harbor," he said briskly. "Tomorrow morning we're having a meeting of the Education Board. Funchal shall be educated into an appreciation of our democratic ins—institutions."

Jake could only stare at him open-mouthed.

"Do you imagine that you're going to be allowed to remain here in peace?" he asked, awe-stricken.

Bill nodded gravely.

"I think so," he said. "If those old guns don't bust!"

Jake walked out of the room like a man in a dream; it couldn't be champagne, he thought. Champagne did not induce in Bill's hard heart a love for the new people he had acquired. And it couldn't be rum, because he was so gentle and reasonable. Besides:

Bill's last words rang in his ears.

"You needn't worry about the champagne, because there isn't any in the palace," he said. "There's a legend about a dozen cases having been bricked up by the last governor, in the hope that he would be able to come back and enjoy them, and I'm having a search made, but I have no great hopes, Jake."

Jake had a very considerable sum in the bank, and this he drew before he went to the hotel where he had taken his wife.

"Inez, my dear, we're going to have a pretty bad time," he said, "and I don't exactly know where the first few years of our married life will be spent. But of all the troubles that are likely to come along, there is one which we shall be spared."

"What is that, Jake?" she asked.

"We shan't see much of Bill," said Jake grimly.

He spent the remainder of the night provisioning the motor-boat which he had hired on the excuse of taking a honeymoon trip to the Lesser Canaries. He had long since ceased to be an efficient member of the South-Eastern staff, but it may be said of them that knowing little, but guessing a lot, he carried with him a whole cargo of their good wishes when he slipped out of the tiny harbor in the early morning, and set the nose of the motor-boat for the nearest Canary island.

He was three miles out when ahead of him he saw a boat on the horizon, and fixed his glasses upon the tiny ship that was coming over the edge of the world.

"I thought so," he said. "It is a warship; poor old Bill!"

The words were hardly spoken before there came the sound of a deep boom from the island, and he looked round. They could not have opened fire on the incoming man o' war; that was beyond the range of their antiquated pieces. Again the gun crashed, and after an interval, it boomed once more. They were firing a salute, he realized, and wondered to whom this salutation was offered.

And then, above the governor's palace he saw a ball creep to the masthead and break. In the morning breezes fluttered the Union Jack, and Jake's jaw dropped.

"He's annexed the island to England!" he gasped.

Jake's brother Bill had found the champagne.

There were very few moments when Alys Southey could find sufficient placidity of mind to interest herself in the news of the day.

Fragmentary scraps of gossip came to her in the hurried luncheon hour, when girls, between their semi-confidential narratives of what "he said" and what "she" had replied, spoke of the world outside their own large universe. And she knew in a dim way that the houses of the great had been robbed, that the Duchess of Monfort had lost her family emeralds, and that William Sollette, the rich American, had lost a pearl necklace of fabulous value; she even knew

that a society man, Henry Melville, had been arrested as a result of a detective having found Mrs. Callagan's diamond sunburst in his overcoat pocket.

Her drama was nearer at hand, and the complications of society were as nothing compared with the complex of her domestic situation. She possessed a stepfather and a stepmother. The stepfather had been tolerable during the lifetime of her mother, but when he had married again, and had imposed a new relationship upon her, the outlook became blacker and more hopeless than ever it had been. To leave the house was a simple solution—so simple that it was freely tendered by the few who knew the circumstances; but there was Olga, her sister, and Olga was fourteen, easily scared, terrified of being left to the mercy of her new mother, and Alys barely earned sufficient to keep one. So Alys stayed; and staying, prayed for a miracle.

"And it may happen," said Olga wisely. "Perhaps Pots will get tired of us and give you the money to keep me." (Her stepfather's name was Potter.) "Or you may have a lot of money, Alys darling."

"Brown and Helder never pay more than thirty shillings a week, even for their best assistants," sighed Alys wearily, "and I'm not their best assistant!"

The child's forehead puckered in a frown.

"Perhaps that handsome man who buys gloves every day—" she began, but Alys stopped her.

"O1ga, don't be a goop!" she said, with a little smile. "Fairy princes avoid Oxford Street."

"I saw him yesterday," said Olga, after a moment's thought. "He was talking to the milkman—"

Alys stared at her.

"You saw him!—my darling, you don't know him. And is he likely to come to Kilburn? I don't suppose he knows the place."

But the child was emphatic.

"I know it was him—he," she insisted. "You've described him so that I'm sure I recognized him. And he had a beautiful big car waiting at the end of the street. I'm sure he was making inquiries about you."

Alys gasped.

"You shall have no more detective stories from the library," she warned. "You're dreaming."

The mysterious and good-looking stranger who had piqued the curiosity of the staff by buying a new pair of gloves every day had become almost part of her daily life. Sometimes he amused, sometimes irritated her. She had woven many stories about him, but never once did she associate him with romance, for romance played no part in her day-dreams.

It was at ten that night that the bolt she had feared was launched.

Mr. Potter, a stout, bald man, entirely dominated by his shrewish young wife, cleared his throat before he spoke.

"Alys, don't you think you could get a better job?... It is a great expense to me, keeping two big girls like you and Olga... you ought to be able to support your sister... When I was your age—"

He rambled off into reminiscences, but his wife brought him up with a jerk.

"I'm tired of people asking me if I'm your sister, and if Mr. Potter is my father. It makes things so very, very awkward, my dear. It sort of—well, it emphasizes the May and December-ness of my marriage, and I'm getting fed up!"

"But I can't possibly earn enough to keep us," protested Alys. "If father would give me an allowance—"

Mrs. Potter bridled.

"An allowance! If he would give me an allowance, I should be glad! What nonsense! Of course you could earn enough—or you could marry. Young Phillips has asked you, and his father is well off."

"Mr. Phillips is out of the question," said Alys, rising. "Just give me a day or so to think it over."

It was lightly said, but not a day or two, or even a year or two, could solve her problem, thought Alys, as she went up the stairs with a heavy heart.

Yet, in twenty-four hours, the solution came...

The girl at the glove counter recognized the tall young man who was moving slowly through the store in her direction, and hardened her pretty face into a frown.

Any other girl in the store would have been flattered by the marked and, so far, respectful attention of this man about town.

Some of them knew his name—knew, through the porters' department, that he

occupied one of the best suites at the Ritz-Carlton; knew that he used, even if he did not own, two speedy cars—a very desirable friend for a shop-girl scornful of the conventions and immensely satisfied that she could look after herself."

His name was Stenton. He was, according to reliable accounts, a rich man, and he had come on successive days to the Universal Store, had walked straight to the glove counter, and had bought one pair of reindeer gloves, size eight.

Alys Southey, watching his approach, recalled none of his desirable qualities. She only knew that for weeks she had been the target for dubious witticisms addressed to her by her fellow-workers; that she had been jollied and ragged at every meal! that she had gone red and white under crude raillery; and that this young man was the conscious or unconscious cause of it all.

He walked up to the counter, settled his gold-headed cane against a chair, and slowly stripped his gloves. Alys waited, neither embarrassed nor unhappy in the consciousness that a dozen pairs of eyes watched the meeting; her own private embarrassment was so much more real.

"I want a pair of reindeer gloves, size eight," he drawled.

He was something more than ordinarily good-looking. There was a strength and a character in the mouth and jaw, a grave knowledge in the gray eyes that looked at her, a hint of purpose in his every action which did not accord with the mess-room's conception.

"Size eight—brown or gray!" asked the girl mechanically.

"Gray—you're having a pretty bad time at home."

There was no pause between the words, and for a second the girl did not comprehend his meaning. She had half opened a drawer when she realized that he had put into words the disquiet of her own mind.

"Why " she began. "You mustn't—you haven't any right—"

He could admire dispassionately the characteristic beauty of the girl, the slim line of her figure, the regularity of feature, the curve of lip and chin, the dusky blue of eyes now opened wide in pained astonishment.

"Life is becoming insupportable at home," he said, examining the gloves and continuing in an even, conversational tone. "There's a way out."

She faced him, calm and outwardly self-possessed.

"Not for me," she said quietly. "I am afraid you do not understand—I suppose

you mean no great insult to me, but it is not fair for a man of your position—oh, I think you are horrible!" she burst out, and he saw the quick rise and fall of her bosom and heard the indignant tears in her voice.

"There is a way out," he repeated, "for you and for me. I've been watching you for weeks—I've had you photographed from every angle—an impertinence which you must forgive. And I want your services. I will give you two thousand pounds, and I will ask nothing that a good woman cannot give."

She stared at him, bewildered.

"But—but I don't know you—I've never met you before you came here—I've not spoken to you until today—it is absurd to pretend you love me—"

"I don't," he said.

He was turning over the gloves that lay in the drawer she had put before him, and he seemed to the watchers behind the ribbon counter to be wholly absorbed in his inspection.

"Oh no, I don't love you, and I don't expect you to love me. I like you as a man might like a Botticelli statuette or a Corot landscape or da Vinci's portrait of Beatrice d'Este. One does not love those things, unless one is quite crazy, any more than one loves a woman for the satisfaction she brings to the eye. One can only love minds and characters and the intangibility which is called Soul—and I am not only ignorant of these factors in your make-up, but I am sincerely incurious."

She listened, dumbfounded, perhaps a little piqued, since she was human. He made his selection, and she wrapped his purchase and scribbled his bill automatically.

"I am not coming here again," he said as he took the packet and the bill. "I repeat that I want you to undertake a piece of delicate work on my behalf, and I will pay you two thousand pounds for your services."

Mr. Cyrus Stenton raised his glossy hat, and turned and walked to the cashier's desk.

Alys looked after him; then a glimpse of something white on the counter brought her eyes down. It was a visiting card, and underneath the name was written:

"My 'phone number is Regent 1764, Extension 9. Meet me at 7 o'clock at Fozzoli's restaurant. Private Room No. 4."



For the remainder of the day Alys moved like one in a dream. It was so fantastical, so unreal, so like all the stories she had ever read. All her reason told her that men did not offer girls £2000 for any service that they could honestly perform, and yet her instinct told her that there was no danger from this tall, good-looking stranger.

It was early closing day, and she left the store soon after two o'clock and made her way home. Olga was at school—at the cheap little school which Mr. Potter had chosen for her.

£2000! What would it mean to Olga? An end to this life of fret and strain, a good school for Olga, and an opportunity for herself to take up the Art course she longed for.

Again the doubt came to her mind with overwhelming force. Why should a man pay her £2000 for a simple duty which any girl might perform? But was it?

Throughout that afternoon, in the privacy of her little attic bedroom, she wrestled with this grotesque problem. At half-past six she was hovering in the region of Fozzoli's, with neither the courage to take the bold step or to withdraw. Seven o'clock struck, and, summoning all her courage, she crossed the road quickly and passed into the broad vestibule of the famous restaurant. The liveried attendant seemed to be expecting her.

"You're come for Mr. Stenton?" he said.

"Yes," she answered breathlessly. "I—I want to speak to him."

She knew how feeble was the reply, and hated herself for the weakness she was showing. Before she could order her thoughts, the elevator had taken her up two floors, and she was conducted along a broad, heavily carpeted corridor. The attendant stopped before a rosewood door and tapped gently; then, as a voice bade him come in, he opened the door and, stepping aside to allow her to pass, closed it behind the girl.

She was in a room quietly but luxuriously furnished. A table was laid for two, and, most grateful sight of all, a woman of middle age in the uniform of a serving-maid was standing near a second door. Mr. Stenton was in evening dress, and was even better-looking than she had imagined. She was sufficiently human to notice this fact before he came toward her.

"This is indeed very good of you. Miss Southey," he said, taking her hand for a moment. "You would like to take your coat off? Mary, will you please attend to Miss Southey?"

Scarcely knowing what she did, Alys followed the woman into the second room. It was a dressing-room, for on the settee was spread a beautiful gown. The table held a variety of articles, including a diamond and platinum chain, a double row of pearls, and an open case in which glittered a beautiful bar brooch.

She looked around for the owner, and Mary, the maid, smiled as if she guessed the girl's thoughts, which, however, Alys did not put into [words.

She returned to the man, and found him, his hands clasped behind him, looking out of the window, evidently absorbed in his thoughts, for he started when she spoke to him. Throughout the meal no reference was made to the object of her visit or to the £2000. It was not until the maid had withdrawn that he came directly to the subject.

"Miss Southey," he said, "I am going to ask you to do something for me which you may well hesitate to agree to, since behind a very simple service you may imagine there lurk all manner of sinister meanings. I must start right off by telling you that my name is not Stenton—though I am not prepared at the moment to tell you what it really is. How late can you remain out tonight?"

She looked at him quickly, suspiciously.

"Until midnight," she said, "or even till later. There is a dance at the Art School, and I had half made up my mind to go."

"An Art student?" He raised his eyebrows. "Really I was hoping that you had some such interest. You are not a typical shop lady," he smiled.

"There isn't such a thing as a typical shop girl," she replied quietly. "There are typical girls and typical men, and the fact that they are engaged in one or another profession or business doesn't alter the type."

He seemed surprised at her answer, and looked at her again a little oddly. And then he put his hand in the pocket of his evening coat and took out a flat leather case. This he opened. She did not look at him during the process, but it required all her control to keep her eyes averted. She heard the rustle of banknotes, and his hand came across the table.

"Here are ten notes for a hundred pounds<sup>^</sup> each," he said. "I will give you this in advance as an earnest of my sincerity. The other thousand you will receive when your work is completed."

"How long will it take!" she asked.

"It may take a week—a month. It may be finished tonight. I hope it will be

finished tonight," he said gravely. And then: \* \* I may want you tomorrow. What will happen supposing you do not go back to the store!"

"I shall get the sack," she said, with a faint smile, \* \* and I shall forfeit exactly sixteen shillings of my pay."

"I think that can be remedied." His voice was grave. He was considering this little problem of hers as profoundly as though it were the fate of an empire. "That, of course, can be remedied, and the sixteen shillings can be made good."

She laughed aloud.

"I don't know that the sixteen shillings matters much in relation to a thousand pounds," she said, looking down at the notes, yet afraid to touch them. "Mr. Stenton, what am I to do? You know so much about me that you may be able to advise; and though my child-like faith may sound absurd, I am almost willing to abide by the advice you give. Should I do this work? Is it work that you would ask anybody who was related to you, or whom you were"—she flushed—"fond of, to perform?"

He considered a moment, then nodded.

"Yes, it is. If you were my sister, I should ask you to help me in the same way," he said quietly.

She took the money up, folded the notes, and put them into her bag.

"Now tell me what I must do," she said, almost briskly.

He looked at her for a long time before he spoke.

"In the next room there are some clothes. I haven't attended to all the details, but Mary, who was in my mother's employ, has, I think, procured all the necessary articles and will assist you to dress."

"Me?" she said in amazement. "You want me to wear that wonderful dress?"

He nodded.

"And the pearls? Oh no!"

"I want you to dress exactly as Mary suggests to you, because Mary knows."

"And then?"

She looked at him, her lips parted in amazement, her eyes bright with eagerness, for now the spirit of the adventure was upon her.

"And then I propose taking you to a party. You will be there for exactly half an hour, possibly three-quarters of an hour—not longer, I should imagine. You will speak to nobody unless it is absolutely necessary, and I will give you a partner who will save you from that embarrassment. At the end of three-quarters of an hour you will come away; but during the time I imagine you will learn something."

He got up from the table and, going to a sideboard, pulled open a drawer and took out a black portfolio. This he opened, extracting what was evidently a page from an illustrated weekly. It was obviously a portrait—she saw that at a distance—and it had been cut carefully round, so that the inscription below did not appear. Without a word he handed her the picture, and she stared and gasped. She was looking upon her own portrait.

"But—but—I don't understand," she said, bewildered. "You said you had had me photographed, but not in those clothes... they are not mine... I have never worn them."

The picture that looked up to her was singularly beautiful—she had to admit that, in spite of the likeness to herself. About the fair throat were row upon row of pearls; a big diamond butterfly caught up the dress at the shoulder; and the hand that was held to the face was encrusted with rings.

"Little too many, don't you think?" said Mr. Stenton. "But that is the fashion nowadays."

She turned the page over, and saw it was from the Bystander.

"This is not me," she said, "but the likeness is perfect."

He smiled slowly.

"Now don't ask any more questions. That is the one promise I want to extract from you, that you will not ask me, at inconvenient moments, any question which I might be embarrassed to answer. You will carry out all my instructions to the letter. You will not interfere in any scene which you may witness, however remarkable and sinister it may seem to you. Do you promise?"

She nodded. Looking at his watch, he stood up.

"I think we will go," he said, with a smile. "I don't know how long it takes a lady to dress, but I am going to give you twenty minutes."

It was half an hour before she came out of the room, and at the sight of her he was stricken dumb. She flushed red at the admiration in his eyes, and for a second felt foolish.

"Wonderful!" he breathed. "Wonderful!"

The night had fallen when they came through the vestibule, a great green chiffon cloak about her shoulders. At the door was a big Rolls, and a footman was standing with the open door in his hand. Blindly, dumbly, she stepped in, still in a dream. She felt ridiculously like Cinderella, and expected to wake up any moment in the garret bedroom. These things did not happen in real life, she told herself again and again as the car sped through the crowded West End and went swiftly down Piccadilly. They only happened in story-books. She was dreaming.

Where was the party to be? They had passed Hammersmith and were crossing the bridge, when she asked the question.

"It is in the country," he said. "We have an hour and a half's drive, though we are not due for another two hours."

Through Barnes and Kingston, past Sandown, into Cobham. She recognized the places up to there; beyond that, she was in a strange land. The bright headlamps of the car illuminated the road, and she sat, staring through the window, wondering... wondering.

They had been an hour on the journey when the car slowed and stopped. There was no house in sight, and, looking out, she saw the boles of trees on either side. They had come to a forest road, and for a moment her courage failed her.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"Now please don't be alarmed. I want you to step out, because the car is going to make a rather uncomfortable journey into the shelter of the trees," he said kindly. "You must trust me. Miss Southey."

Trembling, she stepped down upon the hard road, and he wrapped the cloak around her.

They stood watching whilst the chauffeur put the bonnet of the car toward the wood, and drew it into the cover of some laurel bushes. Then the lights were extinguished.

"You can go back now. I shall be close at hand, and you will not be waiting for longer than a quarter of an hour."

Then she saw another man. He was in evening dress; she caught the flash of his white shirt-front as he lit a cigarette. A man of more than middle age, with a gray moustache and dark, forbidding eyes. Stenton and he talked together in a low tone for some time. Where had he come from? He must have been

waiting on the road for them, and that red lamp he carried in his hand had signalled the car to stop.

She went back to the limousine, and, letting down the big plate window, looked out. Her eyes were now growing accustomed to the darkness, and she could see the two men in the road clearly. Then suddenly the red lamp began to wave. From the distance came the dull whine of a motor-car. The red lamp waved more furiously, and the man with the gray moustache was suddenly illuminated by the glaring headlamps of the oncoming car, which stopped suddenly.

Stenton walked to the door and jerked it open.

"I want you, Jane," he said. There was a note of harshness in his voice.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

She saw a woman bend forward and heard a cry.

"Philip! What is the meaning of this!"

"Step out," said Stenton curtly.

"I'll do no such thing; I—"

"Step out. I don't want to use force on you. You know why I am here. Your scheme has been discovered."

"You're a fool!" cried the woman shrilly. "And a blackguard! How dare you stop me, Philip!"

He had whispered something to her, and the shrill quality went out of her voice, and she spoke now in a low tone, which did not reach the astounded ears of Alys Southey.

She was wondering what was happening, when she saw Stenton coming toward her.

"Now, Miss Southey," he said, "I want you to get into that car."

"But why " she began.

"You must ask no questions," he said almost roughly. "You promised!"

His arm guiding her, she walked back to the road and, looking round, she saw the figure of a woman talking to the man with the gray moustache, vehemently, tearfully.

"Get in," said Stenton, and she obeyed.

The interior of the car was heavy with the aroma of an Eastern scent. She was about to let down the window when he stopped her.

"I don't think I should do that," he said gently. "I forgot the scent."

"I don't understand what it all means, but I'll do as you tell me," she said.

She felt that, if she gave way now, she would get hysterical. And then, to her surprise, he patted her hand.

"The Colonel is going along with you—Colonel Dayler. I shall follow later."

He called the man with the gray moustache, and that gentleman hurried toward him, and, without a word, climbed into the car, and, before she realized what was happening, it was moving on.

"My name's Dayler. I don't know whether—Philip told you. I am a Colonel of the 195th "Wessex."

"Who is Jane?" she asked.

The extraordinary was becoming the normal. She had ceased to worry, ceased almost to think independently.

The Colonel chuckled.

"Oh—Jane? Jane's a nice gel," he said and chuckled again.

"I didn't promise I wouldn't ask you questions," she said presently. "Where are we going now?"

"We're going to Lord Ilcombe's country house," said Dayler. "And you've got to stick tight to me, and I'll fend off all inconvenient inquiries. Until you feel me squeeze your arm, you're to take no notice of anybody. They'll certainly try to talk to you, but you trust me."

She could only sit helplessly and wait. Presently the car turned from the road, and passed up a lordly avenue of elms, stopping before the brightly illuminated facade of a big house. As the footman assisted her down, she heard the sound of music, and, clinging tightly to the Colonel's arm, she passed, bewildered and puzzled, into the big hall. As she did so a butler opened a door. She was in a big banqueting-hall. In one gallery a band was playing, and the floor was crowded with dancers.

Somebody nodded to her. A girl who swept past said something which she

could not catch. And then a young man checked himself to lift his eyebrows and say:

"You're late, Jane."

"Jane!" The significance of the name came upon her with a rush. Jane was the woman whose portrait she had seen in the paper. She was impersonating her. At the thought of all that might signify, she hung heavily on the Colonel's arm; and realizing that she had discovered the role she was playing, he hurried her into an alcove and sat her in a big armchair.

"Now let me assure you, Miss Southey," he said earnestly, "that you will have no cause to reproach yourself for this night's work. You are impersonating Lady Jane Dinford. That is why Philip has chosen you."

"But—but " she began.

"I swear to you, on my honor, that you will come to no harm, and that we are asking you to do nothing that is dishonorable," said the Colonel emphatically. "Your big test is to come, my dear, but I'm sure that I'll be able to see you through with it."

It was when the dance had stopped that the test really came, for two men and a girl came to the alcove and greeted her.

"You're not to bother Jane," said the Colonel. "She's got a fearful headache. Her car met with a little accident coming down, and she's shaken. Smile," he hissed under his breath, and Alys forced something which, she felt sure, looked more like a death's-head grin than the amiable smile of a pretty woman.

The Colonel was watching. She sensed, in that quick left and right glance of his that swept the hall, an expectancy out of the ordinary. Presently she saw a woman—tall, graceful, and a little passee, crossing the room with slow, leisurely steps.

"Ah!" whispered the Colonel. "When she speaks, you call her Edith."

"Who is it?" she asked in a whisper.

"Lady Carleigh."

As the woman came up, the Colonel rose.

"You know Jane Dinford?" he said.

"I think we have met," said Lady Carleigh languidly, and put out her cool



hand.

To the girl's amazement, she left behind a little wad of paper, which Alys had the presence of mind to conceal. Lady Carleigh did not wait, but went on to the next alcove as though that had been her objective.

"What does it mean?" asked Alys fearfully.

"Did she give you anything I" asked the Colonel quickly, and she passed him the slip of paper that the woman had left in her hand.

"Let's go out," said the Colonel. His voice was husky.

They crossed the floor into the hall, and, as though expecting them, a servant stood outside the front door with the girl's cloak on his arm. The car was waiting, and before she realized what had happened, she was speeding down the drive again. They had left the house well behind before the Colonel switched on the light and unrolled the ball of paper that Lady Carleigh had given her.

"10.45 to London. Bonton Tunnel 11.17. Be on the down road near entrance, dressed in white so that I can see you. I will drop the box. It will be well wrapped."

"What does it mean?" asked Alys.

"It means that your work will be at an end tomorrow," said the Colonel.

"Where is Mr. Stenton!"

"I think he has gone back to town with his cousin."

"Lady Jane?"

The Colonel nodded.

It was nearly midnight when the car turned into a quiet London square and stopped before the sedate portals of a big house. The door was opened to them at once, and, conducted by the Colonel, she passed into a gorgeous drawing-room, lit by softly shaded wall-brackets. Stenton, his back to the empty grate, was waiting, and at the sight of the girl he came forward eagerly.

"Well... do you know—?"

"I know I was supposed to impersonate Lady Jane Dinford," she said.

"We've got it, my boy," said the Colonel's voice exultantly, and he produced the slip of paper.

Stenton read. When he had finished, he nodded.

"Thank you, Colonel," he said. "And now, will you go along and arrange for supper for Miss Southey, while I tell her the truth?"

He closed the door upon his companion and turned again to the girl.

"Won't you sit down. Miss Southey I" he said gently. "The story I have to tell you is not a very long one, but I think you have had sufficient shocks for one evening. Nevertheless, I am going to give you another.

"You have heard of the jewel robberies which have been occurring in various country houses?"

She nodded.

"To those of which you know, I will add another. A few weeks ago Lord Ilcombe's best friend was arrested, charged with stealing a diamond ornament, and he is now waiting his trial. Lord Ilcombe was satisfied that his friend was innocent, and that the real culprits were two ladies, who apparently were not very great friends, but who, working in conjunction, had carried out a series of most audacious thefts. The reason for their conduct I will not go into. They are both more or less poor women, and certainly both more or less unscrupulous. There have been incidents at cards which it is unnecessary to recall.

"Lord Ilcombe fixed upon these two women as the culprits, but he found it impossible to prove that they were acquainted with one another. The two were invited to the house-party, of which you were momentarily an uncomfortable guest. Last night Lord Ilcombe showed his guests six very valuable rubies that had come down to him from an ancestor of the eighteenth century. They were in a jewel case, and he knew that, if these women were guilty, they could not resist the temptation of adding yet another to their long list of thefts. Only one saw the casket; the other—who, I need hardly tell you, is Lady Jane Dinford—has been ill in London. But this morning an urgent wire was sent to her, asking her to come down for the evening.

"Tonight his jewel case will be stolen. The loss will not be discovered until after the departure of the guests. Lady Carleigh will, of course, be the culprit. But she is clever. She was nearly caught at the Earl of Pinkerton's house, but managed to secrete the stolen property in the overcoat pocket of Lord Ilcombe's friend."

"You are Lord Ilcombe?" said Alys quietly, and he nodded.

"Yes, I am Lord Ilcombe," he said.

"Where is Lady Jane now?"

He looked up to the ceiling.

"I have taken the liberty of holding her prisoner until I have proved beyond doubt that my suspicions are correct. That proof has already been given to me by the paper which her confederate slipped into your hand."

"But what is she going to do?"

"She will throw the box from the window as she passes through the tunnel, and you will be there to take it."

"But why?" interrupted Alys. "Why could she not take it to London!"

"Her job is to get rid of it as quickly as she can," said Lord Ilcombe quietly. "The only fear I have is, that in the daylight she may recognize you. You must go to Bonton Tunnel to take that box from her. I know what you're going to say." He smiled faintly. "You are going to ask me why I do not have her arrested the moment I know that the box is in her possession. There are many reasons, not the least being that she is my mother's sister, and I do not want a scandal. What I want to do is to be able to furnish proof, without the assistance of the police, that she is the robber. And you, my dear young lady, are going to assist me."

The girl scarcely slept that night, and long before Mr. Potter was down she had left the house. Lord Ilcombe's car was waiting for her, and that young man himself was standing talking to the chauffeur when she came up.

"You have an hour's drive, and I've ordered breakfast at an inn en route," he said.

He was not a good conversationalist that morning. Apparently some trouble clouded his mind, and presently it came out.

"I'm worrying about you, young lady. I think that I have scared you unnecessarily. I should have told you the truth at first. You see," he confessed, "I was rather chary of taking anybody into my confidence. Both these women are relatives of mine—yes, Lady Jane is my first cousin, and I did not want the fact to be generally known. And"—he hesitated—"I was very fond of Jane, and would have helped her if I'd known—though I doubt if I could ever have reformed her."

She shot a swift glance at him, and in that moment felt a pang of sorrow for the woman who had sacrificed so much.

It was a silent meal, that breakfast, but one which ever remained in the memory of the girl. Lord Ilcombe was so immersed in his thoughts that he scarcely answered when she spoke to him.

A few minutes before eleven the car stopped near a railway line, and the two got out and walked along.

"There is a pathway down the embankment for the use of plate-layers," said Ilcombe, leading the way through the hedge.

Following him, the girl saw the black mouth of the tunnel.

"I hate asking you to go into that unpleasant-looking place, but I am afraid I must," smiled Ilcombe, and with a gaiety in her heart which was unusual, and wholly foreign to the seriousness of the business, she laughed, and ran down the path.

The tunnel was short but dark. It was filled with the suffocating, sulphurous odor peculiar to tunnels, and, with a glance backward at the watching man, she sat down on the bank and waited. She heard the rumbling of the train long before it reached the far end of the tunnel, and, rising, walked quickly to the entrance.

Would she be recognized? Would there be time for Lady Carleigh to see that her plot had failed! Alys moved further into the shadow of the tunnel and waited. With a shriek and a roar, the train thundered past, deafening her. Then, from a window, something big and round was thrown, striking the metals and rebounding almost to her feet. Stooping, she picked up the ball of paper and cardboard, the train vanishing in the distance.

With knees that trembled, she ran up the path breathlessly and put the parcel in his hand.

"Thank Heaven, that's over!" he said, and with a knife cut the string.

Under the paper, wrapped in fine shavings, was a cardboard box, and within was yet another box, padded tightly with cotton wool.

He opened this, only to reveal a third box. The girl watched eagerly. At last the case was revealed, and with a jerk of his finger the lid snapped up.

As it did so, he uttered a cry of amazement. The jewels were not there. Instead, was a letter, which he opened.

"Dear Philip," it ran, "I recognized Jane's double the moment I put the paper in her hand. Even if I had not, Jane's telephone message this morning would have

told me all I wanted to know. We are leaving for the Continent by the afternoon train. If you want a scandal, you can have us arrested.—Your loving Aunt."

There was a P.S.

"As you have so completely compromised your very pretty girl, the least you can do is to marry her."

Without a word, he handed the letter to the girl.

"For the first time in my life," he said, and his voice was very gentle, "I agree with my aunt. Let's lunch."

"You've lost your rubies," she said in dismay, and he looked at her with a strange light in his eyes.

"There's a Biblical proverb somewhere about rubies, if I remember rightly—the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs and the tenth verse. Look it up, Alys."

## 11. WHITE STOCKING

### I

John Trevor was not a jealous man. He told himself this a dozen times; he told Marjorie Banning only once.

"Jealous!" she flamed, and then gaining control of her anger; "I don't quite understand you. What do you mean by jealous?"

Jack felt and looked uncomfortable.

"Jealous, of course, is a silly word to use, but," he blundered, "what I mean is suspi—"

He checked himself again.

They were sitting in the Park under an expansive elm, and though not far from the madding crowd, the crowd was sufficiently removed from its madding qualities to be minimized to a negligible quantity. There were within sight exactly three courting couples, a nurse with a perambulator, a policeman, and a few playing children.

""What I mean to say is," said Jack desperately, "I trust you, dear, and—well, I

don't want to know your secrets, but—"

But?" she repeated coldly.

"Well, I merely remark that I have seen you three times driving in a swagger motorcar—"

"A client's car," she said quietly.

"But surely the dressing of people's hair does not occupy all the afternoon and evening," he persisted. "Really, I'm awfully sorry if I'm bothering you, but it is a fact that whenever I've seen you it has been on the days when you have told me you could not come to me in the evening."

She did not answer immediately.

He was making it very hard for her, and she resented, bitterly resented, not only his doubt and the knowledge that in his eyes her movements were suspicious, but that she could offer no explanation. She resented most of all the justification which her silence gave to him.

""Who has been putting these ideas in your head?" she asked. "Lennox Mayne?"

"Lennox!" he snorted. "How ridiculous you are, Marjorie! Lennox would not dream of saying anything against you, to me or anybody else. Lennox is very fond of you—why, Lennox introduced me to you."

She bit her lips thoughtfully. She had excellent reasons for knowing that Lennox was very fond of her, fond in the way that Lennox had been of so many chance-met shop-girls, and that she also was a shop-girl brought that young man's admiration into a too familiar category.

She was employed at a great West-End hairdresser's, and hated the work; indeed, hated the work more than the necessity for working. Her father, a small provincial doctor, had died a few years before, leaving her and her mother penniless. A friend of the family had known the proprietor of Fennett's, and old Fennett was in need of a secretary. She had come to what Lennox Mayne crudely described as the "woman's barbers" in that capacity. From secretary she had passed to a more practical side of the business, for the old man, a master of his craft, had initiated her into the mysteries of "color culture"—an artless euphonism.

"I'm awfully sorry that I've annoyed you," she said primly as she got up, "but we shop-girls have our duties, Jack."

"For Heaven's sake don't call yourself a shop-girl," he snapped. "Of course, dear, I quite accept your explanation, only why make a mystery of it?"

Suddenly she slipped her arm in his.

"Because I am paid to make a mystery of it," she said, with a smile. "Now take me to Fragiana's, for I'm starving."

Over the meal they returned to the subject of Lennox.

"I know you don't like him," said Jack. "He really is a good fellow, and what is more, he is very useful to me, and I cannot afford to lose useful friends. We were at Ruby together, but, of course, he was always a smarter chap than I. He has made a fortune, while I am struggling to get together the necessary thousand that will enable me to introduce you to the dinkiest little suburban home—"

She put her hand under the table and squeezed his.

"You're a darling," she said, "but I hope you will never make your money as Lennox has made his."

He protested indignantly, but she went on, with a shake of her head:

"We hear queer stories, we dyers of ladies' faded locks," she said, \* \* and Lennox is awfully well known in London as a man who lives by his wits."

"But his uncle " he began.

"His uncle is very rich, but hates Lennox. Everybody says so."

"That is where you're wrong," said Jack triumphantly. "They have been bad friends, but now they are reconciled. I was dining with Lennox last night, when you were gadding around in your expensive motor-car—I didn't mean that unpleasantly, dear—anyway I was dining with him, and he told me that the old man was most friendly now. And what is more," he lowered his voice confidentially, "he is putting me in the way of making a fortune."

"Lennox?" said the girl incredulously and shook her head. "I can imagine Lennox making a fortune for himself, or even dazzling unsophisticated maidens with golden prospects, but I cannot imagine him making a fortune for you."

He laughed.

"Has he ever tried to dazzle you with golden prospects?" he bantered, but she avoided the question.

She and Lennox Mayne had met at the house of a mutual friend, and then they had met again in the Park, as she and Jack were meeting, and Lennox had discovered a future for her which had certain material advantages and definite spiritual drawbacks. And then one Sunday, when he had taken her on the river, they had met Jack Trevor, and she had found it increasingly easy to hold at bay the philanthropist.

They strolled back to the Park as the dusk was falling, and entering the Marble Arch gate they passed an untidy, horsey little man, who touched his hat to Jack and grinned broadly.

"That is Willie Jeans," said Jack, with a smile. "His father was our groom in the old Royston days. I wonder what he is doing in London?"

"What is he?" she asked curiously.

"He is a tout."

"A tout?"

"Yes; a tout is a man who watches racehorses. Willie is a very clever watcher. He works for one of the sporting papers, and I believe makes quite a lot of money."

"How queer!" she said and laughed.

"What amuses you?" he asked in surprise, but she did not tell him.

## II

The man who sprawled motionless along the top of the wall had certain strange, chameleonlike characteristics. His mottled green coat and his dingy yellow breeches and gaiters so completely harmonized with the ancient wall and its overhanging trees, that nine passers-by out of ten would have failed to notice him. Happily for his peace of mind, there were no passers-by, the hour being seven o'clock on a sunny May morning. His elbows were propped on a patch of crumbling mortar, a pair of prismatic glasses were glued to his eyes, and on his face was a painful grimace of concentrated attention.

For twenty minutes he had waited in this attitude, and the stout man who sat in the car drawn up some distance along the road sighed patiently. He turned his head as he heard the descent of the watcher.



"Finished?" he asked.

"Huh," replied the other.

The stout man sighed again and set the rattling machine running toward the village.

Not until they were on the outskirts of Baldock did the dingy watcher regain his speech.

"Yamen's lame," he said.

The stout man, in his agitation, nearly drove the car on to the sidewalk.

"Lame?" he repeated incredulously.

Willie nodded.

"He went lame when the gallop was half-way through," he said. "He'll win no Derby."

The fat man breathed heavily.

They were brothers, Willie the younger, and Paul the elder, though there was no greater family resemblance between the pair than there is between a rat and a comfortable hen.

The car jerked to a stop before the Baldock Post Office, and Willie got out thoughtfully. He stood for some time meditating upon the broad pavement, scratching his chin and exhibiting unexpected signs of indecision. Presently he climbed back into the car.

"Let's go down to the garage and get some juice on board," he said.

"Why?" asked the astounded brother. "I thought you were going to wire—"

"Never mind what you thought," said the other impatiently; "go and load up with petrol. You can take me to London. The post office won't be open for half an hour."

His stout relation uttered gurgling noises intended to convey his astonishment and annoyance.

As the rattling car came back to the Stevenage Road, Willie condescended to explain.

"If I send a wire from here, it will be all over the town in a few minutes," he said libellously. "You know what these little places are, and Mr. Mayne would

never forgive me."

Lennox Mayne was the principal source of the tout's income. Though he had a few other clients, Willie Jeans depended chiefly upon the honorarium which he received from his opulent patron.

Mr. Jeans' profession was a curious one. He was what is described in the sporting press as a "man of observation," and he had his headquarters at Newmarket. But there are great racing establishments outside of the headquarters of the turf, and when his chief patron required information which could not be otherwise secured, Mr. Jeans traveled afar to the Wiltshire Downs, to Epsom, and elsewhere, in order to gain at first-hand knowledge of certain horses' well-being.

"It was a bit of luck," he mused as he went along. "I don't suppose there is another man in England who could have touted old Greyman's horses. He usually has half a dozen men patrolling along the road to see that nobody sneaks over the wall."

Stuart Greyman owned a large estate on the Royston Road, which was peculiarly adapted for so furtive and secretive a man, for a high wall surrounded the big park wherein his horses were trained, and his staff was loyalty itself.

From other stables it is possible to secure valuable information through the judicious acquaintance of a stable-lad, but Greyman either paid his staff too well to allow of that kind of leakage, or he showed a remarkable discrimination in employing his servants. And in consequence the old man was something of a terror to the ring. He produced unexpected winners, and so well kept was his secret that until the race was over, and the money began to roll back from the starting-price offices, there was not the slightest hint that the victor was "expected." In consequence, he enjoyed the luxury of long prices, and every attempt that had been made to tout his horses had hitherto been unsuccessful.

Willie's gratification was, therefore, natural and his success a little short of miraculous.

The dust-stained car came to a stop in a decorous London square, and an outraged butler who answered the door hesitated for some considerable time before he announced the visitors.

Lennox Mayne was at breakfast, a sleek-looking young man, who was less disconcerted than his butler at the spectacle of the untidy Mr. Jeans.

"Sit down," he said curtly, and when the visitors obeyed and the butler had closed the door—"Well?"

Willie poured forth his story, and Lennox Mayne listened with a thoughtful frown.

"The old devil!" he said softly, and not without admiration; ^ \* the wicked old devil!"

Willie agreed on principle that Stuart Grey-man was all and more than his loving nephew had described him, but was puzzled to know why Mr. Greyman was more particularly devilish that morning than any other.

Lennox sat for a moment deep in thought, and then

"Now, Jeans, you understand that this is a secret. Not a whisper of Yamen's lameness must leak out. I might tell you that ten minutes ago my uncle rang me up from Baldock to say that he had galloped Yamen and he had pulled up fit."

"What!" said the indignant "Willie. "Why, that horse is as lame—"

"I don't doubt it," interrupted his employer, "but Mr. Greyman has a good reason for putting it about that Yamen is sound. He has heavily backed the horse to win the Derby, and he wants time to save his money. What other horses were in the gallop!"

"I don't know his horses very well," explained Willie, "but the colt that made all the running was a smasher, if ever there was one. He simply carried the rest of the horses off their feet. I couldn't put the clock on him, but I know they were going a racing gallop."

"You're sure it was Yamen that pulled up lame?"

"Sure, sir," said the other emphatically. "I saw him run at Ascot and at Newmarket last year, and there is no mistaking his white legs. You don't often see a brown horse with four white stockings."

The other meditated.

"What kind of a horse was it that won the gallop?"

"He was brown all over, not a speck of white on him."

"H'm," mused Mr. Mayne; "that must be Fairyland. I must remember him. Thank you for coming," he said, as he dismissed his visitors with a nod, "and remember—"

"Mum's the word," said Willie as he folded up the two banknotes which his employer had pushed across the table.

Left alone, Mr. Lennox Mayne did some quick, intensive thinking. He had in his mind no thought of blaming his uncle. Lennox Mayne could not afford to condemn trickery or treachery in others, for he had not amassed a comfortable fortune by paying too strict an attention to the niceties of any known code of conduct. He was a gambler, and a successful gambler. He gambled on stocks, on horses, but in the main his success was due to backing and laying against human beings. In this latter respect he had made two faux pas. He had gambled not only upon the tolerance but upon the inferior intelligence of his maternal uncle, Stuart Greyman.- He had used information given to him in secret by that reticent man, and to his consternation had been detected, and there had been an estrangement which had lasted five years, and had apparently ended when old Greyman met him one day at lunch at the Carlton Grill and had gruffly notified his forgiveness.

"The old devil!" he murmured admiringly; "he nearly sold me."

For old Greyman had told him, again in confidence to back Yamen for the Derby.

Lennox Mayne trusted no man, least of all the uncle whom he suspected of harboring a grudge against him. Therefore had he sent his tout to confirm the exalted story of the lame Yamen's amazing speed. Yamen had only run twice as a two-year-old. He had been carefully nursed for his classic engagements, and at least the story which the old man had told him was plausible.

So the old man was trying to catch him! Luckily, Lennox had not wagered a penny on the information which his uncle had brought him.

If Greyman had been one of his failures, no less had Marjorie Banning. There were times when Lennox Mayne irritably admitted that she had been the greatest failure of all. She had seemed so easy. She was just so circumstanced that the way seemed simple.

It was a coincidence that, as his mind dwelt upon her, the telephone bell rang shrilly and the voice of John Trevor greeted him.

He heard the name and made a wry face, but his voice was pleasant enough.

"Hullo, Jack! Certainly come round. Aren't you working today? Good."

He hung up the receiver and returned to his table. Jack Trevor! His eyes narrowed. He had not forgiven this innocent friend of his, and for ten minutes his mind was very busy.

Jack had a fairly good post in a city office, and just at that time the rubber trade was one of England's decaying industries, and his time was very much his own.

Lennox received him in his study, and pushed a silver box of cigarettes toward his visitor.

"What brings you west at this hour?" he asked. "You'll stay to lunch?"

Jack shook his head.

"The fact is," he blurted, "I'm a bit worried, Lennox. It is about Marjorie."

Lennox raised his eyebrows.

"What has Marjorie been doing?" he asked. "Does she want to turn your hair a flaming gold?"

Jack smiled.

"Not so bad as that," he said; "but I know you are very fond of Marjorie. Lennox, you're a man of the world, whose advice is worth having, and—the fact is, I am worried like the devil about her." He was silent for a long time, and Lennox watched him curiously. "Either she has a mysterious friend or she has a mysterious job," said Jack at last. "Four times she has passed me in the street, in a most swagger car."

"Alone?"

Jack nodded.

"Perhaps she was going to see a client," suggested the other carelessly. "You know, even women who own luxurious motor-cars need the service of a trained perruquier."

"Even females who own luxurious motor-cars do not require the services of a perruquier from three in the afternoon until eleven at night," said Jack grimly; "and that is the time Marjorie has returned to her diggings. I know it was hateful to spy on her, but that is just what I've done. She is getting a lot of money. I had a chat with her landlady. I called in on the pretense that I had called in to see Marjorie, and got her to talk about her, and she told me that she changed a hundred-pound check for her."

"H'm," said Lennox. He was as puzzled as his friend. His agile brain was busy, and presently he said:

"There is certain to be a simple explanation, my dear chap, so don't worry.

Marjorie is not flighty, whatever else she is. When are you going to get married?"

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"Heaven knows," he said. "It is all very well for you to talk about marriage, because you're a rich man, but for me it means another twelve months of saving."

"Have you fixed the sum on which you can get married?" asked Lennox, with a smile.

"A thousand pounds," replied Jack, "and I've got about six hundred towards it."

"Then, my dear chap, I'll put you in the way of getting not a thousand, but ten thousand."

Jack stared at him.

"What the dickens are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about the dark Yamen," said Lennox, "my uncle's horse. I told you the other day that I would make your fortune—I am going to do it."

He got up, went to a table, and took up the morning paper, turning its pages.

"Here is the betting," he said. "One hundred to six Yamen—and Yamen is as certain to win the Derby as you are to marry your nice little girl. I can get you ten thousand to six hundred today—tomorrow the price may be shorter."

"Good lord! I couldn't lose six hundred pounds," gasped Jack, and the other laughed.

"If you knew how small a risk it was you wouldn't yammer like a sheep. I tell you this is money for nothing."

"Suppose I had sixty pounds on it—"

"Sixty pounds?" sneered the other. "My dear chap, what is the use of making money in pennies? Here is the chance of your lifetime, and, unless you are a lunatic, you will not miss it. Tomorrow the horse will be nearer six to one than sixteen, and you can lay out your money and stand to win a fortune at practically no risk to yourself."

He spoke for half an hour on horses—of Yamen, its speed, its breeding—and Jack listened fascinated.

"I'll ring up a bookmaker and put it on for you."

"Wait, wait," said Jack hoarsely as the other reached for the telephone; "it is a fearful lot of money to risk, Lennox."

"And a fearful lot of money to win," said the tempter. If he had had more time, he would have arranged the bet so that the six hundred pounds fell into his pocket, but that was impossible. Jack Trevor must be caught immediately or not at all—must be given no time to reflect or to seek advice, and certainly no time to discover that Yamen was a cripple. The secret might leak out at any moment; a disgruntled stable-boy, a chance spy, a too-talkative veterinary surgeon—any of these might talk and the stable's secret would be revealed. The loss of six hundred might not prevent a contemptuous little hairdressing girl from marrying—it would certainly postpone the event.

"I'll do it," said Jack, with a gasp, and listened as in a dream to his placid companion's voice.

"Put it to the account of Mr. John Trevor, Castlemaine Gardens... Yes, I'll be responsible. Thank you."

He hung up the receiver, and looked round at the other with a queer smile.

"I congratulate you," he said softly, and Jack went back to the city, his head in a whirl, even the mystery of his fiancée's movements obscured by the tremendous realization of his own recklessness.

Marjorie Banning heard the news and dropped into a twopenny park chair. Happily, the chair was there.

"You've put all the money on a horse?" she said hollowly. "Oh, Jack!"

"But, my dear," said Jack stoutly, "the money is as good as mine, and all that Lennox said is true. The horse was sixteen to one yesterday and it is only eight to one today."

"Oh, Jack!" was all she could say.

He had to find conviction for himself. He was miserably conscious of his own folly, and had cursed himself that he had ever listened to the voice of temptation.

"It is all right, Marjorie," he said, with poorly simulated cheerfulness; "the horse belongs to Lennox Mayne's uncle. He told Lennox that it is certain to win. Think what ten thousand pounds means, Marjorie dear..."

She listened, unconvinced. She who knew with what labor and sacrifice his

little nest-egg had been gathered, who understood even more clearly than he what its loss would entail, could only sit with a blank sense of despair at her heart.

At that moment Mr. Lennox Mayne was experiencing something of her dismay, though the cause was a little different. Summoned by telegram, he who had been described as the "Prince of Touts"—though a more untidy, unshaven, and uncomfortable prince had never borne such a title—had come post-haste to Manchester Square, and whilst the grimy Ford, with its stout, hen-like driver, stood at the door, Mr. Willie Jeans fidgeted uneasily and endured -with such patience as he could command the flow of his employer's abuse.

"You're a blundering jackass, and I was a fool to hire you," stormed Lennox Mayne. "What is the use of touting a horse if you're seen touting? I told you that you were not to let anybody know that you were connected with me, you drivelling fool, and you've been talking."

"No, I ain't," said the other indignantly. "I never talk. Do you think I should be able to earn a living if I—"

"You've been talking. Listen to this." Lennox snatched up a letter from the table.

"This is from my uncle. Listen to this, you damned fool:

"You are not satisfied with my information, it seems, but employ your tout to spy on my training. You can tell Mr. Willie Jeans from me that if ever he is again seen in or near my estate, he will get the biggest flogging he has ever had in his life..."

The following paragraph, which gave Stuart Greyman's opinion of his nephew, Lennox did not read.

"I never knew anybody saw me; there was nobody about when I was on the wall," grumbled Mr. Jeans. "I've earned my fifty, if ever a man has earned it."

"You'll get no fifty from me," said Lennox. "I've given you as much money as you're entitled to, and don't come near me again."

When Mr. Willie Jeans joined his brother, he was in no amiable frame of mind.

"Where are we going now?" asked that placid man.

Willie suggested a place which has the easiest and most varied of routes, and his brother, who was not unused to these temperamental outbursts, held on his



way, for their original destination had been Epsom. A policeman at Hyde Park raised a warning hand at the sight of the ramshackle machine, but Mr. Willie Jeans' flivver was a "private car" within the meaning of the Act, and they joined the resplendent procession of machines that were moving slowly through the Park.

It was Fate that made the oil lubrication choke within a dozen paces of where two disconsolate lovers were sitting.

"What a queer car!" said the girl; "and isn't that the man you saw the other day—the tout, did you call him?"

"Yes," said Jack gloomily; "that's the tout," and then suddenly, "I wonder if he knows?"

He rose and walked across to the man, and Willie touched his cap.

"Good evening, Mr. Trevor."

"Where are you going!" asked Jack.

"I'm going to Epsom, to watch the Derby gallops. Most of the horses are there now, but," he grinned unpleasantly, "not Yamen."

"Why isn't he there?" asked Jack, with a sickening of heart, for he instinctively recognized the hostility which the little man displayed toward the horse on whose well-being so much depended.

"Because he'll never see a racecourse—that's why," said the other savagely.

"He'll never see a racecourse? What do you mean?" asked Jack slowly.

"He is lame," said the little man. "I hope you haven't backed him?" he asked suddenly.

Jack nodded.

"Come over here," he said. "This is pretty bad news I've heard, Marjorie," he said. "Jeans says that Yamen is lame."

"That's right," nodded the tout, "as lame as old Junket. That is another one of Mr. Greyman's. You remember him, sir; he always looked as if he was winning in a canter and then went lame in the last hundred yards."

"I don't know much about horses," said Jack. "I want you to tell me about Yamen. How long has it been lame?"

"Three days," said the little man. "I have been touting it for a week. It broke

down in the winding-up gallop."

"But does Mr. Greyman know!"

"Mr. Greyman!" said the little man scornfully; "why, of course he knows. He didn't let on to Lennox Mayne, but I told Lennox Mayne, and a fat lot of thanks I got for it."

"When did you tell him?" asked Jack, going white.

"The day before yesterday."

"Then Lennox Mayne knew!"

Jack was bewildered, shocked beyond expression.

"It can't be true," he said. "Lennox would never—"

"Lennox Mayne would give away his own aunt," said Willie Jeans contemptuously.

"Was it Lennox Mayne who persuaded you to back this horse?" asked the girl.

Jack nodded.

"You are sure Yamen is lame!"

"I swear to it. I know Yamen as I know the back of my hand," said the little man emphatically. "The only horse with four white stockings in the Baldock stables—"

"Baldock!" The girl was on her feet, staring. "Baldock, did you say?"

"That's right, miss."

"Who lives there?" she asked quickly. "What is his name?"

"Greyman."

"What sort of a man is he?"

"He is an old man about sixty, gray-haired, and as hard as a nail. A cunning old devil he is, too; I'll bet he's too cunning for Lennox Mayne."

She was silent a long time after the little man had gone on his shaky way, and then most unexpectedly, most surprisingly, she asked:

"Will you take me to see the Derby, Jack?"

"Good Lord! I didn't expect you'd be interested," he said, "and it will be an awful crush."

"Will you take me? You can hire a car for the day, and we could see the race from the roof. Will you take me?"

He nodded, too dumbfounded to speak. She had never before evinced the slightest interest in a horse race.

Some rumor of the dark Yamen's infirmity must have crept out, for on the morning of the race the horse was quoted amongst the twenty-five to one brigade, and hints of a mishap appeared in the morning Press.

"We hear," said the Sporting Post, "that all is not well with Mr. Greyman's dark candidate, Yamen. Perhaps it is wrong to describe him as 'dark,' since he has already run twice in public, but until his name appeared prominently in the betting-list, very few had the slightest idea that the colt by Mandarin-Ettabell had any pretensions to classic events. We hope, for the sake of that good sportsman, Mr. Stuart Greyman, that rumor was exaggerated."

Marjorie had never been to a race-meeting before, and possibly even the more sedate meetings would have astonished her, but Epsom was a revelation. It was not so much a race-meeting as a great festival and fair. The people frightened her. She tried, as she stood on the roof of the car, to calculate their number. They blackened the hills, they formed a deep phalanx from one end of the course to the other, they packed the stands and crowded the rings, and between races filled the course. The thunderous noise of them, their ceaseless movement, the kaleidoscopic color, the booths and placards even more than the horses held her interest.

"There are all sorts of rumors about," said Jack, returning from his tour of discovery. "They say that Yamen doesn't run. The papers prepared us for that. I am horribly afraid, dear, I've been a fool."

She bent down over the edge of the roof and took his hand, and to his amazement he discovered she had left a paper in it.

"What's this—a banknote? Are you going to have a bet?"

She nodded.

"I want you to make a bet for me," she said.

"What are you backing!"

"Yamen," she replied.

"Yamen!" he repeated incredulously, and then looked at the note. It was for a hundred pounds. He could only stare helplessly at her.

"But you mustn't do this, you really mustn't."

"Please," she insisted firmly.

He made his way to Tattersalls' ring, and after the race preliminary to the Derby had been run, he approached a bookmaker whose name he knew. The numbers were going up when he got back to her.

"I got two thousand to a hundred for you," he said—"and I nearly didn't."

"I should have been very angry with you if you hadn't," said Marjorie.

"But why " he began, and then broke off as the frame of the number board went up. "Yamen is running," he said.

Nobody knew better than the girl that Yamen was running. She watched the powder-blue jacket in the preliminary parade, and caught a glimpse of the famous white stockings of Mandarin's son as he cantered down to the post. Her arm was aching with the labor of holding the glasses, but she never took them off the powder-blue jacket until the white tape flew upward and the roar of two hundred thousand voices cried in unison:

"They're off!"

The blue jacket was third as the horses climbed the hill, fourth on the level by the railway turn, third again as the huge field ran round Tattenham Corner into the straight, and then a strident voice from a near-by bookmaker shouted:

"Yamen wins for a pony!" as the dark Yamen took the lead and won hard- held by three lengths.

"I don't know how to begin the story," she said that night. They were dining together, but Marjorie was hostess.

"It really began about a month ago, when an old gentleman came into the shop and saw Mr. Fennett, the proprietor. They were together about ten minutes, and then I was sent for to the private office. Mr. Fennett told me that the gentleman had a special commission, and he wanted an expert to undertake some dyeing work. I thought at first it was for himself, and I was rather sorry that a nice-looking old gentleman should want to interfere with his beautiful white hair. I didn't actually really know for what purpose I was required until the next week, when his car came for me and I was driven to Baldock. And then he told me. He asked me if I had brought the bleaching and dyeing

material with me, and when I told him that I had, he let me into the secret. He said he was very fussy about the color of horses, and he had a wonderful horse with white legs, and that he objected to white legs. He wanted me to dye the legs a beautiful brown. Of course I laughed at first, it was so amusing, but he was very serious, and then I was introduced to this beautiful horse—who was the most docile client I have ever treated," she smiled.

"And you dyed his legs brown?"

She nodded.

"But that was not all. There was another horse whose legs had to be bleached. Poor dear, they will be bleached permanently, unless he dyes them again. I know now, but I didn't know then, that it was a horse called Junket. Every few days I had to go to Baldock and renew the dye and the bleach. Mr. Greyman made it a condition with Mr. Fennett that my commission should be kept a secret even from the firm, and of course I never spoke about it, not even to you."

"Then when I saw you in the car—"

"I was on my way to Baldock to dye and bleach my two beautiful clients," she laughed. "I know nothing about racehorses, and I hadn't the slightest idea that the horse I had dyed was Yamen. In fact, until Willie Jeans mentioned the word 'Baldock' I had not connected the stable with the Derby.

"The morning after I left you I had an engagement to go to Baldock to remove the dye—Mr. Greyman had told me that he had changed his mind, and that he wanted the horse to have white legs again. And then I determined to speak to him and tell him just how you were situated. He told me the truth, and he swore me to secrecy. He was reconciled to Lennox and told him all about Yamen. And then he discovered that Lennox did not believe him and was having the horses watched. He was so angry that, in order to deceive his nephew's watcher, he had the horse's legs dyed, and gave the—the tout a chance of seeing poor Junket with his bleached legs break down—as he knew he would. He told me he had backed Yamen to win him a great fortune."

"So you, of all people, on Epsom Downs knew that Yamen would win."

"Didn't I back him?" asked the dyer of legs.

"Who knows where I may sleep to-night.

On what dark moor or what wild shore?

With starry robes of Heaven for gown,

I'll lay my bruised body down.

My bed the em'rald bracken bright—

Who knows where I shall sleep to-night?"

If it were not for the fact that this was Pogy's favorite ballad, Ferdie would have said nothing. But whenever Letty sat down and twiddled the keys and turned over the music and said, "I don't like that," or "That's a beautiful song, but I can't sing it properly," or strummed and hummed another, and finally ran her white hand down the crease of "The Song of the Zingari," Ferdie used to sit back and recite the multiplication table to himself until she struck the final chord. Pogy, of course, wrote the song. His name, E. Poglan Bannett, was stamped all over the cover, and he drew unbelievable sums in the shape of royalties. Amongst the unbelievers was Ferdie.

"I think it is a perfectly asinine song," said Ferdie. "Where the deuce do you expect to sleep?"

Letty dropped her hand on her lap. She would, with the slightest encouragement, have dropped one on his ear.

Picking up her fan, she walked across to the library table, which Mr. Revel insisted upon keeping in the drawing-room, and sat down. And they talked. And at the end of ten minutes...

"I suppose you know," said Ferdie, choking, "that you've simply blighted my whole life!"

Letty Revel considered the matter, knit brows and pursed lips advertising her study.

"Like the Spaniard?" she suggested.

Ferdie had no acquaintance with vaudeville songs, being somewhat serious minded, but he did know that the Spanish were a romantic and melancholy people, and took the illustration in good part.

"I daresay the Spaniard is blighted under similar circumstances, and, for the matter of that, the Czecho-Slovakian. And the Transylvanian. You've made an absolute mess of my existence, Letty. You've simply hashed me!"

"Hash is Irish Stew, isn't it?"—really interested. "We had the funniest cookery mistress at school. We called her Doughnut Dora, because she simply specialized—"

"A man has a right to believe that, when a woman accepts a man's ring and says 'Certainly,' or whatever she says when the man says 'Will you, old dear?' that a woman won't go strolling over a man's suscep—sus—well, whatever it is— with spiked boots. If a man has principles and refuses to go to a party where you've invited a shocking little bounder, who simply makes a fearful ass of himself all the time, and thinks he's being funny because a lot of fearful asses laugh at his apish tricks—and as to his being a composer... he couldn't compose a rice pudding!—I say, if a man says, 'No, I won't go and I don't want you to have him,' if a man—well, dash it, Letty, can't you see...?"

She ran her fingers through her hair—it was a mass of golden floss—and leant back, resigned.

"Who is this man you're talking about—the fearful ass?"

"Me, of course," he said indignantly. "No, not that one, that's Poggy. I mean I'm the man you're talking about—I'm talking about!"

"Oh!" said Letty quietly.

The wonderful eyes she turned upon Ferdie were grave, every contour that made up expression showed how much she realized the exceeding seriousness of the situation. Her diamond engagement-ring lay on the table by her side (she happened to be sitting on the table), well within reach of the wretched young man, who blinked alternately from the ring to the girl.

"No useful purpose can be served by prolonging an interview already too painful," she said primly. "We are experiencing the clash of ideals—"

"Come down off the table if you want to be dignified," said the young man miserably. "And all that clashing of ideals stuff sounds like the introduction to a cinema drama of love and sacrifice."

"Let us part without a scene," she said gently, and held out her hand. "I shall never forget you, Reggie."

He writhed.

"I won't even trouble to tell you that my name is Ferdinand. It would only make you more comic."

The ring he gathered up with a sneer.

"Don't you dare throw it in the fire!" she warned him as he lifted the trinket to the level of his eyes.

"It cost a hundred and twenty-five pounds," said the disconsolate young man. "They gave me a ten per cent discount because I knew the managing director. Am I likely to throw it away? I was looking to see if you'd damaged it. You've been very careful. Good-bye, Letty."

Her speculative gaze held him.

"Are you going to shoot lions?" she asked. He appealed to her mutely. "Or build a house in some fever-stricken swamp in Central Africa? Once I believed in you, Ferdie, and ordered black. Once I put an advertisement in the newspapers asking Central African newspapers to copy. And the same night I saw you in Chiro's, teaching Molly Fetinhough the new tango step. Ferdie, you are speaking to a woman who has suffered!"

"I lost the boat," he said lamely.

"Did you find it looking down that bony creature's back? You will not go away. Tomorrow night you will be here."

She pointed to the exact spot on the carpet where he would grovel. Ferdie examined it curiously.

Through the open window came the soft harmonies of church bells and the hushed music of a band playing carols. It was the Salvation Army band. Ferdie recognized the flat E of the cornet.

"And is this Christmas Eve!" he said bitterly.

"It is—the twenty-fourth," she said informatively. "Didn't you know?"

"Tomorrow, when you're entertaining your beastly boulder friend, Pogy, or singing his 'Who Knows?' and splitting your sides over his fatuous, infantile jokes that he cuts from Life and keeps in a scrapbook—I've seen it," he added treacherously. "There isn't a boat for Asia Minor tonight, but perhaps you'll think of me in my lonely apartment drinking beer all alone—"

"Surely you don't want assistance to drink beer!" she said coldly. "I've always understood that it wasn't strong enough to necessitate the calling in of help. Ferdie, I wish you a happy Christmas. There is no reason in the world why we shouldn't be good friends. I've realized for a long time that, temperamentally, we were unfitted for one another. A woman has the right to choose her friends."



"A woman!" he scoffed. "And the year before last I was coaching you through the holidays for your school certificate! Who sat up half the night trying to knock the first idea of the integral calculus into your nut?"

"The past is dead," she said, with dignity, and switched her fan.

"Do that again," he said, fascinated.

"Do what? The fan? It is an old trick I learnt years ago."

"In the kindergarten? Go on, do it. That's cute. Ill bet Pogy taught you that. What a lady!"

She was on her feet now, delicate trace of eyebrows arched. She might, with profit to her reputation as a well-bred lady, have maintained the pose. Instead of which:

"Now, Ferdie, are you going? Or shall I call Arthurs to chuck you through the window?"

Ferdie bowed. In the presence of vibrant maidenhood he was dumb—temporarily.

"I only want to say—" he began.

She walked to the fireplace and put her finger on the bell, and there was a look of sinister curiosity in her eyes. So might Caesar's wife, above suspicion and well out of reach, have looked when she saw her first Christian martyrs introduced to the lions.

Mr. Ferdinand Stevington stepped out into Portland Place and turned up the collar of his overcoat. It was a rainy night, a warm westerly breeze was blowing—typical Christmas weather.

Standing by the iron railings that separated the street from the cavernous area, he gazed, dim eyed, at the yellow blind which hid from his view all that had been desirable in life. He had an immeasurable sense of poverty, and his heart blazed resentfully against those who, rich in her respect and affection, refused him the crumbs which had so sparsely fallen from the feast her bounty provided.

The watchful Nobbins brought the Rolls from the center of the road, where it had been parked, and guided it noiselessly and cunningly to the edge of the sidewalk.

"No, thank you, Nobbins; I will walk," said Ferdie quietly.

"It's raining, sir."

Nobbins invariably told him the news. Many a murder would have passed unscanned but for Nobbins.

Ferdie glanced up at the copper-hued sky and laughed bitterly.

"I hadn't noticed it," he said.

A raindrop fell straight into his eye and he cursed.

"No, I will walk," he said.

He was wearing the thinnest of shoes, and the pavement was wet and muddy. Wet feet had turned many a robust man into a wan and listless invalid about whose cot red-eyed women hung breathlessly, praying that the past could be wiped out and cruel words recalled. Ferdie walked in the gutter.

The Salvation Army band at the corner of Duke Street was inviting Christians to awake. Most of the Christians in Duke Street had been awake for hours, and were only just beginning to take an interest in the overcrowded state of the dancing-floor. Those Christians who were asleep were in the smoke-rooms of respectable clubs, where only the head waiter or the house steward is allowed to waken members.

And at this blessed time, when the servants' Christmas-box list is hanging in the hall and only three tables are laid in the dining-room, even head waiters hesitated to assist the carollers in their mission.

Ferdie strode on, shrugged at the collecting-box that was pushed timidly toward him by a bonneted adjutant, repenting, to return and donate handsomely. And then there occurred in his brain one of those seismic disturbances that send tidal waves of brilliant inspiration across the commonplace surfaces of his mind.

"Will you be good enough to take your band to No. 743 and play 'Where is my Wandering Boy Tonight?'" he asked.

She consulted the man with the silver cornet—he of the flat E—and it was arranged.

Ferdie went onward with a lighter heart. His flat in Devonshire Street seemed strangely lonely and empty. On the table lay a little package wrapped in thin silver paper and tied with blue ribbons, and at the sight of it, his spirits sank again. On the mantelpiece was a photograph of a girl. He averted his eyes.

"Nobbins is here, sir."

His valet made the announcement in his quiet way.

"Here, is he? Let him go home to his wife and family, Stephen; it is Christmas-tide. Go home to your wife and family!"

"I am not married, sir."

Ferdie turned upon the man.

"Have you a family?"

Stephen, a man with a beautiful mind, whose dream it was that some day he would be appointed a lay reader or a court missionary, gazed at his master with eyes that in dumb suffering were like unto a wounded beast.

"No, sir; it follows," he said gently.

Ferdie hunched himself round in his chair.

"What would you like to do tomorrow, Stephen?"

Stephen coughed.

"I should like to attend the morning service at the Foundling Hospital, sir," he said. "In the afternoon I and some friends are giving a little musical entertainment at the Marylebone Workhouse. I play a little."

"The harp, one thinks!" said Ferdie.

"No, sir: the saxophone," replied Stephen modestly. "It is somewhat difficult to play."

"Go somewhere—and play it. Bring joy into suffering hearts, Stephen." He sat up quickly. "Can you play 'Where is my Wandering Boy Tonight'?"

"No, sir."

Ferdie pointed to the door. Stephen bowed slightly and went out.

Tomorrow was Christmas Day. He had rejected every invitation but one. And that one...

...His maniacal laughter reached the butler's pantry, where Stephen and Nobbins were exchanging cigarette cards.

"One can excuse much on Christmas Eve, Nobbins," said Stephen charitably. They were both members of a Brotherhood, but Stephen was the more brotherly. "You wouldn't like to drop in at the Marylebone Workhouse

tomorrow afternoon?"

"Am I drunk, too?" asked the chauffeur reproachfully.

But Ferdie was not drunk. He was not even intoxicated. He was just broken-hearted and crushed and baffled. He wanted to do something that was exceedingly reckless, such as rescuing a child from a fire. The fire, for preference, to be in Portland Place, immediately opposite No. 743. He wanted to grow a beard and go away to sea before the mast. Or, if necessary, he was willing to give the mast a start. And then he wanted to come back bronzed and bearded, and be knocked down by a motor-car, preferably Letty's two-seater, and be picked up and carried into 743 Portland Place and hear Letty cry, "Why, it's Ferdie! What have I done?"

He wanted to sink lower and lower in the social scale (without necessarily surrendering his large holdings in Conifers Corporation, which yielded a steady 8 per cent) until he was the inmate of a common lodging-house. He wanted Stephen also to sink lower and lower in the social scale until he was the inmate of a common lodging-house too. Stephen could sleep in the next cubicle and bring his tea in the morning.

And by day he would sell things in the gutter, such as shoe-laces, matches, and pitiable little toys. And Letty would come along and buy something. Then, looking down at him, she would pale and say, "Ferdie! Have I brought you to this?"

Ferdie rang the bell at this point.

"Bring me a glass of milk," he said.

"Hot or cold, sir?" asked Stephen.

Ferdie shrugged.

"I am indifferent," he said. He was in his most dangerous mood.

Christmas! He remembered a story he had read, one of Dickens', or it may have been some other Johnny. After consideration he decided that it was Dickens. He had a wonderful memory for names. The story was about a curmudgeon of a fellow who hated Christmas. Sneered at the serried ranks of deceased turkeys that hung in the poulterer's shop, snarled at the rosy-faced apples, at the grocer's, loathed plum-pudding, and despised holly and mistletoe. Ferdie's heart warmed toward... Snoop, was it? Or Gooch, or Groodge... Scrooge! That was the chap's name. Scrooge! He remembered perfectly. His memory was uncanny where names were concerned.

Ferdie hated Christmas too. He hated everything that was bright and cheery. He turned down the gas fire to make the atmosphere of the room attune with his sentiments. Stephen came in to say good-night.

"And a merry Christmas to you, sir."

"A merry Christmas!" said Ferdie through his nose. He had never snarled in his life; but Scrooge snarled.

"Have you a cold, sir?"

Stephen could be fatherly.

"No, I haven't! Christmas! Put out that fire! Have you locked up the bread and butter? Do it, Stephen, in case some of the poor break in. Your wages are reduced. I'll do without you next week. Did I promise you a Christmas- box?"

"You are good enough, as a rule..."

It hurt Ferdie to laugh through his nose; it was like champagne that went the wrong way. Nevertheless he laughed.

Stephen went back to the Butler's pantry.

"Nobbins," he asked earnestly, "will you join me in a short prayer for our master?"

"If it is short," said Nobbins.

It was toward twelve o'clock when Ferdie put out his hand and clawed toward him the little flat package in silver paper. He untied the blue ribbons thoughtfully, carefully removed and smoothed the paper, and pressed the spring which held together the two sides of a small jewel case. Gleaming and glittering in its blue velvet bed was a diamond and platinum pendant. It had cost a lot of money. Letty would have given him in exchange a cigarette-holder or a walking-stick or a manicure set. Pogy would get it now. He ground his teeth at the thought. And Letty would be disappointed and hurt. He must send it on and then go away. Whither, he knew not; to some obscure foreign town where nobody would dream of looking for him. But who would look for him! He asked the question of himself, and his lips curled. Stephen would miss him, but he would soon find a new master. The income-tax collector would miss him and write to his lawyer. Letty!... She would go, uncaring, through life, holding her slim sides and rocking with laughter, with Pogy twittering like an ape at her side and asking if she'd heard the story about the plumber and the Colonel's knee?

Stephen came in with a knock.

"What time would you like your tea in the morning, sir?"

Ferdie bit his lip deliberately.

"I may not want tea in the morning, Stephen. My plans are unsettled. At any moment I may have to go away. Don't look for me. Dewberry, Hokey, Middleton, Parker and Sutton will pay you your wages."

"Would you like your letters forwarded, sir?"

Ferdie sighed his impatience.

"I may be dead," he said simply.

"Very good, sir. Good-night and a merry—good-night, sir."

The fellow was impressed, Ferdie could see that. And other people would be impressed. He looked up the first train to Bournemouth.

But the package must go. A letter should be enclosed, just a brief, courteous, and yet not too courteous greeting. "Yours sincerely, Ferdinand Stevington." Or, "Wishing you the Christmas you deserve"? No, Ferdie could never wish her the least harm.

"Dear Letty," he began, altered it to "My dear Letty," and began again.

"My dear friend,—This trifle" (he originally wrote 'inexpensive trifle' but cut out the adjective) "comes to you with all my best wishes..."

He ought to make her feel that all the blame was not hers. It was only fair.

"I am afraid I have been rather a bear. Forgive me!! I am going a long journey, and we may not meet again—"

He paused here to consider whether he ought to add "for a day or two," but decided to let it go without qualification. It was cruel to raise false hopes.

"I have left your ring in an envelope. It will be found with other little intimate relics of a life that has not altogether been wasted. Who knows where I may sleep tonight?"

This he blotted smugly, read every line, picturing her distress when she read it. Reluctantly he folded the note inside the silver paper, tied again the blue ribbons, and dropped the whole into a long envelope. At twelve forty-five he stole up to the door of 743 Portland Place, opened the flap of the letter-box and dropped the letter in; it was addressed, with rugged simplicity, "Letty,

from F.S."

On three points he was satisfied. It was a big, a magnanimous thing to have done. There was something innately fine in the act. The deed was worthy of the man. The three statements passed unchallenged. Ferdie knew that he had not judged himself unfairly. There was no sterner critic of his actions than himself. This he also admitted as an incontrovertible truth.

And yet...?

Ferdie wriggled in his chair and looked hard at the shoes he had taken off.

And yet...?

Had he not lowered himself in her eyes? Was it not an abject surrender on the part of one who was, and had been all the time, entirely in the right? Was it not a fulfilment of all her scornful predictions? He remembered the identical spot on the carpet where he must abase himself!

Would it not have been better to send a Christmas card? There was one on his mantelpiece. It had come from his old nurse and was a picture of a blue cottage and white moon. The ground and roof were covered with Epsom salts that glittered in the light and was a fair representation of hoar-frost.

"May Christmas cheer this day be yours,

Of sorrow may you ne'er have cause"—

was appropriate—singularly so.

This time he bit his upper lip, and when a man bites his upper lip he is in doubt. She would laugh at him. Poor fool! How quickly he had come to heel!

Ferdie rose, kicked off his slippers so that when he did make up his mind, he could instantly dash into the kind of footwear that his decision called for. Whilst he was thinking, he might as well put on his street shoes.

She would tell Pogy, of course...

He took down the Christmas card, underlined the pious hope in the second line of the stanza, and, scribbling a line, "Merry Xmas, F.," put it into an envelope.

There was a pair of ice tongs somewhere about—curved silver ice tongs, with handles like scissors. He had thought everything out.

"I would have made a wonderful criminal," said Ferdie regretfully.

With the tongs in his coat pocket, he drove in a taxi to Langham Place,

dismissed the machine, and walked up Portland Place. A thin fog assisted the drizzle to make England what it is at Christmas-time. A new and livelier herd of carol players were jazzing "Good King Wenceslas" brightly. Ferdie found himself stepping unconsciously. And the clock struck two.

No. 743 was in darkness when he stepped up to the door. In a second the ice tongs were in the letter-box and had gripped. He drew out a package of a familiar shape and dropped it into his pocket.

"What's the idea?"

In his agitation Ferdie released his ice tongs, and they fell with a clatter.

"I beg your pardon?" he said, and added seasonably, "A merry Christmas!"

"And a happy New Year!" said the big man who had come noiselessly behind him. "You're coming to Marylebone Lane with me."

"If you imagine I'm going to take a country stroll at this hour and in this beastly weather, you're mistaken. Give me the lanes of England by all means—but on a summer day with the meadow-sweet and the may-weed and the dog-roses on the hedges..."

"Are you coming quietly!"

There was something very tremendous in the question. Ferdie reeled and gripped the railings, tight.

"That sort of thing went out with the suffragettes," said the detective testily.

"You're a policeman!"

"Sergeant—M'Neill. Now come on, my lad, I've been watching you for an hour."

He took Ferdie's arm unaffectionately, and they walked on.

"Where's your pal. Lew?" asked the officer.

"Loo—do you mean Waterloo?" Dazed but brave, Ferdie endeavored to be intelligent.

At the station, a bright steel dock and a very stout and annoyed station sergeant who put down his pen and surveyed the prisoner with disfavor:

"Name?"

"My name... Smith."



"Very original—John or William?"

Ferdie thought.

"Caractacus," he said.

The sergeant at the desk lifted his upper lip cynically.

"Address?"

"Buckingham Palace, ha, ha!" said Ferdie dismally.

Such jests had been made before.

"Refuses address—yes, sergeant, what's the charge?"

"Letter-box stealing. I found him extracting letters from 743 Portland Place with the aid of an instrument or tool."

The instrument or tool was laid on the desk.

"Did he get anything?"

The detective laid a package on the table, and Ferdie scratched his chin. His little present had been in a long envelope. This was not in any kind of envelope. Moreover, it was tied with lavender ribbon.

"From Pogy to Lettice," read the detective.

Ferdie staggered out of the pen, but the detective pushed him back.

"A diamond and emerald ornament in the shape of a grand piano," announced the desk-officer.

"What execrable taste, and may I add how singularly vulgar!" said Ferdie.

"Have you anybody you wish to notify of your arrest? You will be in custody for three days," said the sergeant.

"A word from a woman could save me," said Ferdie brokenly. "I am too proud to ask: we Smiths are not without our proper pride."

A weary gaoler appeared; Ferdie was searched. A pocket-book containing a fabulous sum of money, a gold cigarette-case, divers articles of gold and silver.

"You've had a good day, son," said the sergeant respectfully. "Put him in No. 6, Wilkins..."

The cell door did not clang, Ferdie noticed; it "ooshed"!

The Revels never opened their Christmas presents until the dinner-hour, when all kind donors were on hand to be thanked, enthusiastically, ecstatically, or just thanked. "You really ought not to have got such a beautiful handbag. It is just the thing I wanted! I'm getting so used to the other twelve."

There was a master to the house, one George Palliter Revel, P.O., M.P. He paid for everything and approved of everything. Lettice Gionvanna Revel was another master. She merely gave orders, and said who might come to dinner and who might not. Everybody loved Lettice. People wrote poems about her, even people who could not write poetry. She had a speed-car, a bull-terrier, and a signed photograph of Douglas Fairbanks framed in gold. She liked men to be strong and manly and silent. Purposeful men who picked girls up in their arms and strode through the dim aisles of the primeval woods. Ferdie had never picked her up, except in a figurative sense. She loved him as a mother loves a helpless babe.

She mentioned this fact at dinner, being entirely without reticence.

"Ferdie isn't here, papa, because I told him not to come."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Revel mildly. "I thought that you and he...?"

She smiled indulgently.

"It was merely a boy-and-girl courtship," she said.

Mr. Revel rubbed his left ear.

"How old are you now, Letty?"

"Nineteen and a bit," she said. "I'm a woman, daddy—you sometimes forget that. My love for Ferdie is purely maternal."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Revel, more mildly than ever.

He was by nature mild, being one of those large-faced men with pannier cheeks and a bald and wrinkled forehead. He owed his eminence to his mildness, for, when his party was in power, he was so mild that the opposition thought he was sympathetic, and when they came in they offered him a seat in the Cabinet, only to discover that he was mildness itself to his former colleagues, and by them was confirmed in his office when they, in their turn, came back to power. To any Government, mild opposition is more acceptable than violent support.

"Now for the presents!" said Mr. Revel.

Poggy Bannett grew melancholy.

"You quite understand why mine isn't here, Letty? The wretched burglar took it. I've been half the day at the police station, identifying the thing. They wouldn't let me bring it away."

She smiled with her eyes. It is awfully difficult, but if you practise before a mirror for an hour a day it can be mastered.

"It was too good of you, Poggy, my dear. I'd much rather have had a signed copy of your lovely song. Honestly, I dislike Christmas presents. They are so unreal—so... you know."

Poggy nodded. He was a thin-faced young man with a sharp, out-thrust nose. Even amateur artists found him easy to draw.

"And, of course, I don't expect anything from Ferdie. He wouldn't dare—"

She looked at the envelope and frowned.

"If he has returned the pipe I gave him last Christmas, I shall be very angry," she said. The envelope torn: "Oh! How perfectly wonderful! Oh, but he shouldn't! Isn't that just like Ferdie, papa? He really has the most exquisite taste!"

He looked at the little price ticket that Ferdie had left on, and rapidly calculated what 10 per cent, discount on £95 might be.

The letter she read slowly, her lips moving.

"Heavens!"

Poggy saw her pale... She passed the letter to him without a word.

"Oh, nonsense!" said Poggy. "Twiff! Skittles! He's all right! You don't imagine...pooh! He's done it before!"

Her eyes shone like twin stars.

"If Ferdie says he will do a thing, he will do it," she said.

"What is it, my dear!"

When Mr. Revel asked a question, he signified his intention by fixing his pince-nez.

"Ferdie may have committed suicide," breathed Lettice.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Revel, and took off his glasses. He had no further questions to ask. All day long he had had a feeling that it would be an interesting evening.

"Stuff!" said Pogy hotly. "I like his nerve quoting my verses: 'Where will I sleep tonight?'—that's practically plagiarism."

She drew a long, long breath that swelled her all up momentarily.

"Where do you think he is?"

The author of "Where Will I Sleep Tonight" smiled.

"I'll tell you a story," he said. "A South American once asked an Irishman—"

"Will you reserve your quotations from Life until a more appropriate occasion?"—icily. "I asked you what do you think he has done?"

"You asked me where he was," responded the aggrieved composer. "He's in his own rooms; that's where he is—sulking and causing everybody trouble! I'll bet a thousand!"

He got up from the table excitedly.

"I'll go and bring him!" he said. "With my bare hands I will drag him from his hiding-place. He can't fool me. My friend Cruthers has a flat on the same floor. Wait for us!"

He dashed from the room. Mr. Revel, who had dozed, looked up.

"There will be an inquest, of course," he said, addressing the ceiling. "Happily I shall not be called."

She looked at her progenitor, pain in her eyes.

"Father!" she said, and he winced at the word. "How can you! Ferdie isn't the kind of man who would allow you to be called."

Mr. Cruthers, the good friend and former schoolmate of Pogy Bennett, was dressing for dinner when Pogy was announced. He was as a rule an early riser, and seldom missed his luncheon, but today, there being no racing and no daily newspapers and consequently no sin in the world, he had slept on until seven o'clock in the evening.

"No, I haven't seen Ferdie; his man told my man he was going away; in fact, he hasn't been visible since last night."

"Skulking and sulking," said Pogy. "I've knocked at his door. No answer."

Naturally! I'm going to get out of your window and walk along the fire parapet and have an independent investigation."

"Do you mind waiting until I've changed my undies?" pleaded his friend. "It's so unpleasant with the window open."

Poggy seated himself with folded arms.

"I can wait," he said.

Not until his friend was nearly dressed did he raise the sash and find his way along a narrow iron gang-way. Ferdie's bedroom window was open at the top; therefore it was openable at the bottom; quod erat demonstrandum. He lifted the sash and stepped in.

"Ferdie, my boy," he called, "the game's up. Come, come! Don't be naughty!"

Silence answered him. He switched on the light. The bedroom was in order. The cupboards and wardrobes held no more than made life supportable to a gentleman of fashion.

The dining-saloon had the tidiness of an empty room. Ferdie's slippers were before the fire. On the table was a stack of letters of a seasonable character. The spare bedroom, the study where Ferdie studied the sporting press, the bathroom, box-room, valet's room, pantry, and kitchen were empty.

On the mantelpiece in the dining-room was the framed portrait of a woman, a woman of nineteen and a bit. Across the foot was written a message that was in no sense maternal. Poggy's brows met. They had not far to go. He felt that in a sense he had been deceived. A woman who signs herself "Yours for eternity, darling" wasn't being matronly at all. He seized the photograph viciously. This he would produce to her embarrassment or relief. At any rate it was hardly a fit possession for one who had outlived Letty Revel's eternity.

The lights he extinguished, opened the window, and stepped out. Mr. Cruthers's light was also extinguished when he reached the window; the sash was fastened also. Mr. Cruthers had probably thought that Poggy would make his exit via Ferdie's front door. It seemed the simplest method.

Poggy considered the matter for a moment. What was wrong with the fire escape? He went down the narrow iron staircase, dropped the last few feet into the yard, and then an interested spectator came from the shadows.

"A merry Christmas!" said the stranger. "Coming a little walk along with me?"

"Certainly not!" said Poggy. "I don't know you; and I don't want to know you."

Good evening.—"

The stranger caught his arm.

"My name is Sergeant M'Neill, C.I.D., and I shall take you into custody for breaking and entering."

With rare presence of mind, Pogy took the photograph from his pocket and dropped it on the ground.

"Thank you," said the officer of the law, and picked it up. "Been collecting art treasures? I've watched you for two hours. Where's your friend Ike? I haven't seen him for years."

At the station:

"Smith," said Pogy, pale but inventive. The photograph episode was damning. And Sergeant M'Neill, who all morning had been pestering him to identify the diamond piano, had not recognized him, and the station sergeant of the morning was away on leave.

"John or William?"

"Haydn," said Pogy musically.

The gaoler went over him and enumerated his finds. Then, in a state of exaltation, Pogy said:

"I think it is only fair that you should know that my name is Bannett, and I am the composer and author of 'Where Shall I Sleep Tonight?'"

"The answer is, No. 6!" said the station sergeant.

Ferdie heard the key turn and the cell door swing open. He sat up, interested, and Pogy recoiled at the sight of him.

"Ferdie!... You here!"

Ferdie was not surprised.

"Sit down and make me laugh," he said. "What are you in for—murder?"

"This is the second case today," said the magistrate awfully, "where a prosecutor who should have come forward and identified stolen property has failed to realize his responsibilities to the public. The cases have been remanded for a fortnight, yet neither Mr. Stevington nor Mr. Bannett have appeared to aid the police. I have sent the other man to prison for a month as a suspected person; you also will go to prison with hard labor for a month, and I

warn you..."

A month later they left Pentonville Model Prison together. Ferdie bagged the only taxi in sight, and when Pogy reached Portland Place, Letty was engaged. He waited an hour. She was still engaged. The footman thought she would be engaged for some time.

Her head of gold floss was on Ferdie's shoulder.

"Go on!" she whispered.

"Two nights later I arrived in Constantinople, despair in my heart. I knew I had lost you; there was nothing to live for. Should I dash madly into the desert, perhaps never to return!"

"If you had only cabled!" she breathed. "When Pogy didn't return I knew that he dared not face me. Oh, my dearest darling, I didn't dream that you would take such awful risks. You will never run away again! I can't bear it! Where have you come from now!"

"Penton Villia—a suburb of Rome," said Ferdie. "As I was saying, I might have joined the dervishes..."

"Do you think it is any use my waiting!" asked Pogy.

The footman, an honest man, shook his head. The back of the drawing-room settee was exactly opposite the keyhole.

***Freeditorial*** 

Liked This Book?

For More FREE e-Books visit [Freeditorial.com](http://Freeditorial.com)