

The Brigand

By

Edgar Wallace

***Free*editorial** 

The Brigand

1. A MATTER OF NERVE

Anthony Newton was a soldier at eighteen; at twenty-eight he was a beggar of favours, a patient waiter in outer offices, a more or less meek respondent to questionnaires which bore a remarkable resemblance one to the other.

'What experience have you?'

'What salary would you require?'

There were six other questions, all more or less unimportant, but all designed to prove that a Public School education and a record of minor heroisms were poor or no qualification for any job that produced a living wage and the minimum of interest, unless the applicant was in a position to deposit fabulous sums for the purchase of partnerships, secretaryships and agencies.

And invariably:

'I am afraid, Mr Newton, we haven't a place for you at the moment, but if you will leave your address, we will communicate with you just as soon as something comes along.'

Tony Newton struggled through eight years of odd jobs. His gratuity had been absorbed in a poultry farm which as everybody knows, is a very simple method of making money. In theory. And at the end of the eighth year he discussed the situation with himself and soberly elected for brigandage of a safe and more or less unobjectionable variety. His final decision was taken on a certain morning.

Mrs Cranboyle, his landlady, presented a bill and an ultimatum. The bill was familiar—the ultimatum, not altogether unexpected, was both novel and alarming.

He looked at his landlady thoughtfully, and his good-looking face wore an unaccustomed expression of doubt. As for Mrs Cranboyle, a solid, stout woman with a flinty eye and a large, determined chin, she was very definitely beyond any kind of doubt whatever.

Anthony heaved a sigh, and his gaze wandered from his landlady's face to the various features of his small and comfortless room. From the knobbly bed to the 'What is home without a mother?' (a masterpiece of German lithographic art) above the bed board, to the 'All we like sheep have gone astray' above the mantelpiece, to the two china dogs thereon, to the skimpy little hearth-rug before the polished and fireless grate, and then back to Mrs Cranboyle.

'You can't expect me to keep you, Mr Newton,' she said significantly, not for the first time that morning.

'Hush,' said Anthony testily. 'I am thinking.'

Mrs Cranboyle shivered.

'I have worked very hard for all I've got,' she went on, 'and a young man like you should know better than to impose upon a widow who doesn't know where her next pound is coming from—'

'You've got seven hundred and fifty pounds in Government Bonds, two hundred and fifty in the Post Office, and a deposit account at the London and Manchester Bank of nearly five hundred pounds,' said Anthony calmly, and Mrs Cranboyle gasped.

'What—how—' she stammered.

'I was looking through your passbook,' explained Anthony without shame. 'You left it in the drawing-room one day, and I spent a very pleasant afternoon examining it.'

For a moment Mrs Cranboyle was incapable of speech.

'Well, you've got a cheek!' she gasped at last. 'And that settles it! You leave my house today.'

'Very good,' said Anthony with a shrug. 'I'll go along and find other rooms, and I'll send a man for my luggage.'

'Send the six weeks' rent you owe,' said Mrs Cranboyle, 'or don't trouble to send at all. If you think I'm going to keep a house open for a gambling, good-for-nothing—'

Anthony raised his hand with some dignity.

'You are speaking to one of your country's defenders,' he said, loftily, 'one who has endured the terrific strain of war, one who, whilst you slept snug in your bed, was dithering through the snow, the sleet, the slush, the fog and the gunfire. Always remember that, Mrs Cranboyle. You can't be sufficiently thankful to men like me.' He glared at her. 'Where would you be if the Germans had won?'

Mrs Cranboyle was quite incapable of speech. She wanted to remind him, for the third time, of the manner in which he had wasted his substance, but he saved her the trouble.

'You tell me I am a gambler,' he said. 'It is true that I backed Hold Tight for the Sheppey Handicap; how true it is, you, who spend your spare time in rummaging amongst my papers, know only too well. Your curiosity will be your ruin.'

He looked out of the window and picked up his hat. Mrs Cranboyle was incapable of comment. She met his stern gaze with the stare of a hypnotised rabbit.

'The least you can do for me, Mrs Cranboyle,' he said sternly, 'is to lend me ten shillings, which will be repaid in the course of the next few hours.'

The landlady came out of her trance, violently.

'Not ten pence—not ten farthings!'

'Your country's defender,' murmured Anthony. 'People like you turn us ex-soldiers into anarchists.'

'If you threaten me, I'll send for the police,' bawled Mrs Cranboyle.

He walked back to the dressing-table, brushed his hair carefully, took up his hat again and put it firmly on his head.

'I will send for my luggage this afternoon,' he said soberly.

She was muttering incoherent and menacing sounds as he walked slowly down the stairs; he realised that the crisis of his life was at hand.

That he was going forth into a hard and unsympathetic world, with six copper coins in his pocket, and the knowledge that he had yet to earn his board and his bed, worried Anthony not at all. He stepped forth into the spring sunlight with a joyous sense of physical well-being and strolled up the suburban street with the carefree air of one who has no worries.

An ex-lieutenant in the Blitheshire Fusiliers, ex-secretary to the veritable Mr Hoad, of Hoad and Evans (Anthony invariably referred to them as 'Odds and Evens', and cherished no malice in his heart against the spluttering and apoplectic Mr Hoad, who had fired him), he knew that the normal sources of income which, at the best, had produced but a trickling stream, were now dried up. He had been fighting when he should have been receiving training and his succession of odd jobs demonstrated the futility of a public school training and a military career as a means of acquiring steady or lucrative employment.

And as Anthony swung on to a bus and paid three of those six remaining coppers of his to the conductor, he had thoroughly made up his mind that the oyster of life was not to be opened either by sword or song.

He spent the morning at the National Gallery, which had ever been a source of inspiration to him, and came out at the hunger hour, singularly deficient in ideas. He was famished, for he was healthy and young and his breakfast had consisted of two hard slices of bread, meagrely buttered and a cup of Mrs Cranboyle's impossible tea.

A policeman saw him standing about on the corner of Trafalgar Square and decided, from his air of indecision, that he was a country or colonial visitor, for Anthony affected soft felt hats, grey and large-brimmed, and he invariably appeared to be well dressed. 'Are you looking for something, sir?' asked the constable.

'I want to know where I can get a good lunch,' said Anthony, truthfully.

'You ought to go to the Pallaterium. A gentleman told me yesterday that that was the best place in London.'

'Thank you, constable,' said Anthony gratefully, and to the Pallaterium he went, for Anthony had faith. He strolled carelessly into the broad vestibule which was crowded with people, the majority of whom were waiting either for guests or hosts, and seated himself in a deep armchair, stretching his legs luxuriously. And from the swing door of the restaurant came a fragrant aroma of food. He watched the greetings between apologetic late arrivals and hypocritical and patient guests; he saw the little family parties drift in and pass into the gilded heaven beyond the glass doors, but he saw nobody that he knew.

Presently four stout people came in, two men and two women. They were expensively dressed, and they were obviously ladies and gentlemen who would not lie awake on hard beds that night, wondering how they might scrounge a good breakfast. He watched them as they, too, went past into the restaurant, and sighed.

'Now, if I were only—' he began, and suddenly an idea occurred to him.

He waited for another ten minutes then, rising slowly, he handed his hat to the cloakroom attendant and passed into the restaurant. He saw the four stout people at a table at the far end of the long room; next to them was a small unoccupied table. The elder of the two men looked up at the sight of a very respectable figure.

'Yes, sir?' he asked.

Anthony bent down and lowered his voice, but it was not so low that all four members of the party could not hear.

'Lord Rothside says he is awfully sorry he can't come, but will you lunch with him instead, at Berkeley Square?'

'Eh?' said the staggered recipient of this invitation.

'You are Mr Steiner, aren't you?' said Anthony, in a tone of apprehension, as though it were beginning to dawn upon him that he had made a mistake.

'No, sir,' said the fat and smiling Hebrew, 'my name is Goldheim. I am afraid you've made a mistake.'

Anthony uttered a 'tut' of impatience.

'I'm awfully sorry, but the fact is I have never met Mr Steiner, and I knew he was lunching here, and—' He broke off in confusion.

'No offence, I'm sure,' said the nattered gentleman. 'I don't know Mr Steiner

myself, or I would point him out.' He chuckled round at his companions. 'I've only been mistaken for a friend of Lord Rothside's, that's all,' he said, not without enjoyment.

'I'll wait for him,' smiled Anthony, apologetically. 'I can't tell you how sorry I am to have interrupted you.'

He sat down at the next table; and when the waiter bustled up:

'I am not ordering anything, yet,' he said. 'I am expecting a gentleman.'

At the next table the lunch proceeded and Anthony writhed in agony. Presently one of the party looked round.

'Mr Steiner hasn't come yet, has he?' he asked unnecessarily.

Anthony shook his head.

'I'll wait,' he said, 'though it is rather a nuisance. I am losing my lunch.' There was another interregnum of clattering knives and forks, and then: 'Won't you join us, Mr—?'

'Newton is my name,' said Anthony, 'and really, I don't think it is fair to impose myself upon you.'

But before he had finished the sentence, he was sitting with them, and in five minutes had given his opinion on an excellent Niersteiner.

'Are you Lord Rothside's secretary?'

'Not exactly his secretary,' said Anthony, with a little smile.

He conveyed the impression that the question had been in the nature of a faux pas, and that the position he occupied was something infinitely superior to secretaryship. So might Napoleon have looked if, in the days of the directorate, he had been asked if he was a member of the Government.

The two women were nice-looking motherly ladies, with that sense of humour which Anthony was best able to titillate. He set the table in chuckles as he struggled manfully to overtake them. By the time the coffee stage was reached he was level: he smoked one of Mr Goldheim's cigars with the air of a connoisseur.

'It is strange meeting you like this,' said Anthony reminiscently. 'I shall never forget the first time I dined with the Duke of Minford. I dropped in most unexpectedly, had never met him before, never been introduced, didn't know him from Adam.'

Here, Anthony spoke nothing but the truth, for he had 'dropped in' when His Grace was lying at the bottom of a shell-hole in France, and they had dined upon a biscuit and a bar of chocolate.

'You're in the City, I suppose Mr Newton?'

'I'm everywhere,' said Anthony, vaguely. 'I have a place in the City, of course, but I have only recently returned from abroad.'

Mr Goldheim smiled at him slyly.

'Made a lot of money, eh?'

'Yes, I've made a lot of money.'

'South Africa?'

It was Anthony's turn to smile, but Anthony smiled cryptically. It neither admitted nor denied South Africa. It was a smile which stood as well for the Argentine, Chicago or South America.

'The truth is, I don't know London very well,' he admitted.

All the time he was wondering who were the three quiet, middle-aged men at the next table, who spoke a little, but who gave him the impression that they were listening intently. The first time he noticed them, he realised that they had heard almost every word he had spoken, from his first mention of the great master of finance; and he felt a momentary discomfort. And yet they did not appear to be listening. The man with the big red face, who was nearest to him, seemed utterly absorbed in the meal he was eating. They might have been prosperous farmers in London for the day, or successful north country mill owners.

Soon after, Mr Goldheim called for the bill, tipped the waiter extravagantly (Anthony's palm itched to take back one of the half-crowns), and the party strolled back into the vestibule.

Anthony was the first to hand his check to the cloakroom attendant; and the official accepted Mr Goldheim's tip as for the whole of the party.

'Can we drop you anywhere?' asked that gentleman.

'If you could put me down at the Ritz-Carlton,' Anthony hesitated, 'that is, if it is not out of your way.'

It was not out of their way, for the theatre where they were spending the afternoon was next door to the hotel.

He stood for a moment in the entrance of the hotel waving farewell to his benefactors and then strolled into the reception hall.

'I want a bedroom and a sitting-room,' said Anthony.

He had not the slightest intention of going to the Ritz or to any other hotel; but it seemed such an hotel as a brigand, at sudden war with society, would choose for his headquarters.

'I will bring my baggage in later,' he said, 'but remember, I must have a room overlooking The Mall.'

'What name, sir?'

Anthony signed the book with a flourish, and before the reception clerk could hint gently that rooms could not be reserved for baggageless visitors without a deposit, Anthony was enquiring the exact location of the nearest branch of the Hardware Trust Bank, of New York.

'If you turn to the right when you go out of the entrance, sir, and then turn to the right again, you will find the Trust Company on the left,' said the clerk. 'It is customary in engaging rooms—' and then came a welcome interruption.

A hand fell on Anthony's shoulder, and he turned to look into the smiling eyes of a big jovial man, whose tanned face spoke of an open air life.

'Isn't this Mr Newton?' he asked, wonder and hope in his voice.

Anthony took a step back, and then thrust out his hand.

'By Jove, I don't know your name, but I remember you so well.'

'John Frenchan, of Frenchan and Carter. You remember my store in Cape Town?'

'Remember!' said Anthony ecstatically, and shook the man's hand. 'As if I could forget it! I can't quite recall where I met you, but I know your name as well as my own.'

He turned from the desk; the clerk's face bore a look of resignation. Automatically he placed a room number against Mr Newton's name; in his private register he wrote 'No baggage. OK? The question mark against 'OK' was more than justified.

Anthony's new friend led the way to the lounge, where the coffee and cigar parties were sitting. A waiter came forward expectantly, and spun a chair.

'You've had your lunch? Join me in a cup of coffee,' said Mr Frenchan. 'Did you come over by boat?'

'Yes, on the Balmoral Castle,' said Anthony.

In his capacity of secretary to Hoad and Evans, a firm which conducted an extensive shipping business, he was acquainted not only with the ships of the Castle line, but knew by repute the name of Frenchans. They were amongst the biggest agricultural implement importers at the Cape. Also he was interested in shipping news, and he had noted the arrival of the mail.

'I thought I recognised you in the restaurant,' nodded Mr Frenchan; 'In fact I was sure!'

'Huh?' said Anthony. Now he remembered the three men who had sat at the next table. 'Why, of course! I spotted you and couldn't place you.'

'I suppose you made a lot of money in South Africa, like the rest of us?' Mr Frenchan resented his own share of good fortune if his tone meant anything. 'It's easy enough to make—I was happier when I was earning a few pounds a week. Money? Bah!'

Anthony, who had never had enough money to 'bah!' at, was a little shocked.

'Yes, I made about forty thousand pounds'—he shrugged his shoulders to intimate the absurdity of describing so insignificant a sum as 'money'. 'But I wasn't in Africa very long.'

Mr Frenchan looked at him with a new interest. As the representative of capital, Tony was a possibility—as a capitalist, he was a proposition.

'Do you know the Goldheims very well? I saw you were lunching with them.'

'I don't know them very well,' said Tony, realising that this was a moment for candour. 'In fact, I met them more or less by accident.'

'Smart fellow, Goldheim,' meditated the other, examining his cigar. 'He's in oil—worth a million. Maybe two millions.'

'Dear Me!' said Tony, and to make conversation and at the same time secure a little data, he asked: 'Are you in London for long?'

'For three or four months,' said the other with a grimace of dissatisfaction. 'I shouldn't be here at all if my poor foolish brother hadn't died.'

Anthony wondered whether it was the folly or the poverty of the departed Mr Frenchan which so ruffled his host. Certainly one or the other annoyed him,

for he was scowling.

'A man has no right,' he exploded suddenly, 'no right whatever to indulge in eccentric charities. When a man makes a will he should dispose of his property so that it does not hold his relatives up to ridicule, contempt or malice. Envy—yes. But not contempt.'

Anthony agreed.

The hard faced man was blinking indignantly. The memory of his brother's folly apparently stirred all that was uncharitable in his nature. His underlip thrust out aggressively.

'If he wants to leave a thousand to the Stockwell Orphanage, and a thousand to the London Hospital, and ten thousand to the Home for Providing Babies with False Teeth, let him do it! Personally, I never wanted a farthing of his money, neither I nor my family.'

From which lofty declaration of disinterestedness, Anthony gathered that the late Mr Frenchan had not left his brother anything.

'What Church do you attend, Mr Newton?' he asked unexpectedly, and Anthony, for a moment, was taken aback.

'Primitive Methodist,' he said. If Anthony was attached to any sect at all, it was towards Primitive Methodism, the church to which he had been dragged every Sunday morning as a child.

The effect upon Mr Frenchan was electrical. He sat back in his chair and stared at the young man for fully a minute.

'Well, that's a most remarkable coincidence,' he said, slowly. 'You're the first Primitive Methodist I have met in this country!'

Anthony was more than a little astonished. Primitive Methodism acquired a new importance. Never had he imagined this sect of his could provide anything in the nature of a sensation... Almost his heart warmed to the brick chapel of his youth.

What particular significance lay in the fact, Mr Frenchan went on to explain.

'My brother Walter was a bit of a crank. I am not saying that Primitive Methodism is a cranky kind of religion, but Walter carried it to an extreme. He employed nearly two thousand hands in his business, and, if you believe me, sir, nobody had a chance of a job with Walter unless he was a Primitive Methodist. It is a fine religion, I daresay; personally I don't know very much

about it. But you might say that Walter lived for the church, and was so bigoted that he could see no good in any other kind of worship. Now, I am sure, Mr Newton, that you, as a man of the world, do not agree that that was an intelligent view to take?'

Anthony murmured his complete disagreement.

'And because he held these eccentric views,' Mr Frenchan went on bitterly, 'he has put me to more trouble than anybody else has ever put me to in my life. I said to my lawyer: "Am I to sit here in London, year after year, looking out for cases of poverty amongst Primitive Methodists, in order to carry out the provisions of Walter's will? I'll be dashed if I do!"'

He grew almost choleric, swallowed the remainder of his coffee savagely. There was a peculiar glitter in his eyes that at first alarmed and then encouraged his companion.

'Will you have a liqueur?' he asked suddenly.

Anthony nodded.

'I should like you to meet my lawyer: he is a man after your own heart, a shrewd man of the world, a little suspicious, but I don't think that any harm in a lawyer. You probably know the firm, Whipplewhite, Summers and Soames.'

Anthony nodded. He had never heard of a firm of lawyers called Whipplewhite, Summers and Soames, but it sounded very much like a firm of lawyers. He knew there was a firm called Bennett, Wilson, Moss, Bennett and Wilson, and he had heard of another firm called Jones, Higgins, Marsh, Walter, Johnson, dark and Higgins, and he was quite prepared to accept so simple a thing as a triple alliance.

Mr Frenchan looked at his watch.

'I wonder if I could catch him?' he said. 'You'd be delighted with him. A dour Scotsman, mind you, but a man with a heart of gold. He looks upon everybody as a potential criminal.' He chuckled to himself, and shook his head. 'I don't know that that is a bad thing in a lawyer,' he reflected.

'It is a very excellent quality, and very much resembles the attitude of my own solicitor towards humanity,' said Anthony sedately. 'After all, lawyers are cautious souls, and the first element of caution is suspicion.'

Mr Frenchan got up.

'Come along. Let us see if we can find him. He is usually to be run to earth in

the neighbourhood of the Law Courts about this time and I'd like you to meet him.'

The reception clerk, who looked at him with pleading eyes as he passed, Anthony ignored. It was not desirable that the sordid question of deposits should be mentioned before his opulent friend.

Mr Frenchan called a cab, and they drove down the Strand, halting at the broad entrance of the Royal Courts of Justice.

'Here he is!' cried Mr Frenchan. 'What a bit of luck!'

A thin, cadaverous man, wearing a worried look and a black homburg, was standing on the steps of the Courts in a meditative attitude. He had an expression of profound melancholy and nodded curtly to Mr Frenchan. It was easy to imagine that he regarded the world as a sinful place. He reviewed the throng that hurried past the gates with the basilisk glare of a thwarted executioner.

'I want you to meet my friend Newton, Whipplewhite,' said Frenchan, and the lawyer extended a cold hand. 'Can you come along somewhere? I want to have a talk.'

Mr Whipplewhite shook his sad head.

'I am afraid I can't,' he said shortly. 'I have a case in Court No. 6 in half an hour.'

'Rubbish!' said Mr Frenchan loudly. 'You've got a counsel or whatever you call the fellow, haven't you? Come along.'

Still Mr Whipplewhite was reluctant. 'I'd much rather not,' he said, and looked at his watch. 'I can spare you five minutes, but I can't go very far from the Court.'

'We'll find a teashop, somewhere; a cup of tea won't hurt us, eh, Mr Newton?'

Anything to eat or drink would have hurt Anthony very much at that moment, but he acquiesced, and in a dimly lighted, pokey little teashop, to which the grumbling Mr Whipplewhite led them, Anthony's introduction was continued.

'This is a young gentleman I knew very well in South Africa. Newton — you've heard me speak of him.'

Anthony was still considerably puzzled. That he was being mistaken for somebody else, he had no doubt, but he was patient. The problem of lunch had been settled, dinner seemed a certainty, although he had less inclination for

food than he had had for a long time. On one matter he was perfectly satisfied; he would have to produce large and pretentious quantities of baggage before the sloe-eyed reception clerk would hand him the key of his suite. That was a fact. Mr Frenchan was a potential host —though he would not have guessed it.

'By the way, Frenchan, I've taken probate of your brother's will. The net personalty is not six hundred and forty thousand, but five hundred and twelve, six and nine-pence.'

Mr Frenchan made a snarling noise.

'I wish it were six and ninepence,' he said savagely, and the lawyer grunted impatiently. 'I know you think I'm daft,' Mr Frenchan went on, 'but Walter and I were very good pals and, eccentric though his wishes are I intend carrying them out.'

'Why not hand the money over to the church and let them dispose of it?' suggested the lawyer. 'It is the simplest way, and will save you a lot of trouble. Besides, they know more about their own people than you do.'

Mr Frenchan shook his head.

'That would not be carrying out Walter's wishes,' he said firmly. 'How does the will run? "On the first day of January in every year, one-fifth of the residue of my estate shall be placed in the hands of some responsible person for the purpose of distribution."'

""On the second of January," corrected the lawyer. 'But you've got the will a little wrong, Mr Frenchan—it says that "one fifth of my estate shall immediately—"'

'Of course, of course. And then the second fifth to be paid over on the 2nd January; I had forgotten that,' said Mr Frenchan.

The lawyer leant back and chewed a toothpick, his eyes gazing into vacancy.

'What I want to know is,' he said slowly, 'where are you going to find a respectable and responsible person to whom you can entrust these large sums of money? There is no sense in beating about the bush, Frenchan. If you're going to undertake the distribution, all well and good, but how do you know that this money is not going to pass into the hands of some common swindler? I know what you are going to say,' he said, raising a protesting hand, 'that I shall always be around to see that the money is not being put to an improper use: but I am a very busy man and I couldn't undertake the responsibility of guaranteeing that every penny of your brother's money goes to indigent Primitive Methodists. It is absurd to expect me to do so. What you want is a

substantial man who can be trusted implicitly, who has money of his own, and some sort of position. In those circumstances I should say go ahead, but unless you find that man, my dear Frenchan, you must remain in England for the next five years—you may groan, but I am talking practical common sense—and undertake the disbursement of the money yourself.'

'That I cannot do,' said Mr Frenchan, emphatically. 'Besides, I'm not a Primitive—by George!' He looked at Anthony. 'This gentleman is a Primitive Methodist.'

'You are not suggesting that you can place this heavy responsibility upon a young man who is probably making his way in the world, and either has not the, time or the inclination towards philanthropic enterprises?'

Anthony listened in silence, wondering... amazed... comprehending.

'Now, look here, Whipplewhite,' said Frenchan sharply. 'I can't allow you to speak in any way disparagingly of Mr Newton. You have known me for many years, and you are aware that my judgment is never at fault so far as human nature is concerned. I know Mr Newton's character almost as well as I know yours.'

'I agree that you are a pretty shrewd judge of men,' said the other reluctantly, 'but here we are dealing with a fantastic, if I may say so, a stupid will, the provisions of which can only be carried out—'

'Can only be carried out by a man of honour,' said Mr Frenchan shortly.

The lawyer shook his head.

'Honour is all very well,' he said doggedly, 'but it is money that counts. If this gentleman has money—if he can show me ten thousand pounds—'

The heart of Anthony Newton was singing a hymn of thankfulness, but his voice was a little husky when he spoke.

'If you will step round to my bankers—' he began, and then: 'I don't know that I want to undertake such a mission, and please, Mr Frenchan, do not insist, but if you are in any doubt as to my financial stability, and if you will come with me to my bank and see the manager, I have no doubt he will put your mind at rest.'

'What did I say?' said Mr Frenchan triumphantly. 'Will you oblige Mr Newton by walking round to his bank?'

'I haven't time to go to any banks,' snarled the lawyer. 'I told you I had a case.'

He rose as he spoke. 'But if Mr Newton can, between now and this evening, produce five thousand pounds, and can show me that sum in his possession, then I, as one of the trustees of your brother's estate, will agree.'

'You are too damned particular,' said Frenchan angrily, 'and I am not going to ask my friend Newton to do anything so absurd.'

'Not at all,' said Anthony politely. 'I quite understand Mr Whipplewhite's objection, and if you will name a time and a place, I shall be most happy to bring you five thousand pounds, though of course I am not prepared to hand it over to you.'

'I don't want you to hand it to me,' said Mr Whipplewhite sharply. 'I merely want to see it.'

Anthony breathed deeply.

'There is just time to get to the bank,' he said. 'Now, where shall I meet you?'

'Meet me at the Cambrai Restaurant, Regent Street, at half-past seven. I can't get away before. Will that suit you, Frenchan?'

'I object to the whole proceeding,' said Mr Frenchan, who appeared to be considerably ruffled. 'But if Mr Newton in his generosity agrees to your plan which is to my mind almost as eccentric as my poor brother's will, it is not for me to object.'

It was a quarter to three when Anthony hurried from the coffee house. He could have wished that he might, within view of his new-found friend, leap upon a taxi and give spectacular orders, but the truth was that he had not even a bus fare. He made his way on foot to the park, and strolled along the path looking for discarded newspapers. He found two, and, discovering a secluded seat, he sat down and carefully tore the newspapers into uniform oblong slips, stacking them one after the other into both sides of his faded wallet until it was swollen.

He was so intent upon his work that he did not notice the presence of a man who had approached across the grass, and now stood watching him.

'Making a collection of press cuttings?' asked the voice and Anthony looked round.

There was no reason for him to doubt the profession of his interrupter. Anthony nodded cheerfully. 'I am indeed,' he said.

'What is the idea?' said the man, in a more official tone.

'Each of these is a ten pound banknote,' said Anthony.

The man sat down on a seat beside him.

'It almost sounds as if you and I were going to get better acquainted,' he said.

'I admit it. You're an officer from Scotland Yard, aren't you?'

'I don't know how you guessed it, but you're nearer the truth than you're ever likely to be.'

'Are there many confidence gangs working in London just now?'

'There are about four,' said the officer. 'How people get taken in by them I don't know. Is somebody after you?'

Anthony nodded.

'Then you're a fellow to keep under observation,' said the detective with amusement.

'For the Lord's sake, don't,' replied Anthony in alarm. 'Tell me, what is their modus operandi?'

'Come again?' said the detective as a matter of principle.

'What is their method of working?'

'They've only got one method,' said the other, 'and if you've met them you ought to know all about them. They are generally people who have got money to distribute to the poor and needy. Somebody leaves money for that purpose and they are looking for an honest, respectable lad without brains to whom they can hand the money, without fear that he will blue it on champagne and girls.'

'They are very unoriginal,' smiled Anthony.

'As unoriginal as greed,' said the other, 'and it is the greed in human nature that they work on. Have they got you for a sucker?'

Anthony nodded.

'I am a young man from South Africa with great possessions,' he said, simply. 'This evening I am going to show them five thousand pounds in order to prove my bona fides.'

The detective glanced at the pocket book.

'Sic 'em!' he said, preparing to go. 'And if they give you any trouble afterwards, here's my card.'

At half past seven that night, Anthony kept his appointment. He found the lawyer already waiting for him, reading the evening newspaper, a small glass of absinthe before him.

'A pernicious drink, Mr Newton,' he said, 'but I find it is very beneficial. I suffer from indigestion. I suppose you haven't seen Mr Frenchan?'

Anthony shook his head.

'A strange man, a very trusting man, and how he ever keeps out of scrapes heaven only knows,' said the lawyer in despair. 'He would trust anybody. He would trust a tramp in the street. I hope, Mr Newton, that you are not feeling very sore with me, but a lawyer has to be a little inhuman.'

'That I understand,' said Anthony heartily, and at that moment Frenchan came in.

They talked for a while on an item of news which was being advertised on all newspaper bills and placards, and then Mr Frenchan, with a sigh, said: 'Well, let us to business, and get it over.'

He produced a heavy wallet and took out a wad of notes.

'What on earth did you bring that for?' asked the lawyer.

'Because,' said Mr Frenchan emphatically, 'I thought if you could not trust Mr Newton, there was no reason why Mr Newton should trust us. I do trust Mr Newton, I trust him implicitly.'

'Don't raise your voice,' said the lawyer. 'There is no need to make a disturbance.'

'And Mr Newton trusts me.'

'Have you brought the money?' asked the lawyer practically.

Anthony produced his heavy wallet.

'What did I tell you?' said Frenchan, for the second time that day. 'A man of substance and a man of honour, Whipplewhite. Will you do me a favour?'

He leant across the table and spoke earnestly to Anthony.

'Certainly, Mr Frenchan.'

Mr Frenchan tossed his wallet into Anthony's lap.

Take that wallet and go outside for five minutes, and then return,'

'But why?' asked Anthony, raising his eyebrows.

'To show that I trust you. And I daresay you would do the same for me?'

'Most certainly I would,' said Anthony.

He picked up the wallet.

'But there is a lot of money here, isn't there? I wish you would count it.'

'There is no necessity to count it,' said the other, loftily. Nevertheless, he pulled open the flap and took out a wad of notes. He turned over the first batch of notes and Anthony saw that they were each for ten pounds. Beneath were sham 'Bank of Engraving' notes, he guessed, but those on top were genuine enough.

'I don't like doing it,' he said, as he took the wallet from the other. 'After all, you don't know me.'

'I think I should accede to Mr Frenchan's rather remarkable request,' said the lawyer gently, and Anthony slipped the case into his pocket, and went slowly from the restaurant. A taxi cab was passing.

'Don't stop,' he said, as he ran up to the slowing vehicle. 'Drive me to Victoria.'

As the cab flashed through the darkening streets, he took the wallet and extracted its contents. The twenty top notes were gloriously genuine.

In the restaurant Mr Whipplewhite and Frenchan waited.

'A bright kid,' said Mr Frenchan.

'Ain't they all bright?' said the other contemptuously. 'Ain't they all clever? It is only the clever ones that fall. Hullo!' He looked up with a start to meet the eyes of a soldierly looking man.

'Hullo, Dan, waiting for a mug?'

'I don't know what you mean, sergeant,' said Frenchan. 'We are waiting for a friend of ours.'

'You'll wait a long time, that's my opinion,' said Sergeant Maud, of Scotland Yard. 'I have been watching that lad all the afternoon.'

He clicked his teeth cheerfully, and viewed with great joy the consternation and horror that was dawning on the faces of his victims.

'It is occasions like these, Dan, that make all the policemen in heaven rise up and sing hallelujah,' he added.

2. ON GETTING AN INTRODUCTION

Polite brigandage has its novel aspects and its moments of fascination. Vulgar men, crudely furnished in the matter of ideas, may find profit in violence, but the more subtle and the more delicate nuances of the art of gentle robbery had an especial attraction for one who, in fulfilment of the poet's ambition, could count the game before the prize.

So it came about that Mr Newton found himself in an awkward situation. The two rear wheels of his car were in a ditch; he with some difficulty had maintained himself at the steering wheel, though the branches of the overhanging hedge were so close to him that he had to twist his head on one side. Nevertheless, he maintained an attitude of supreme dignity as he climbed out of his car, and the eyes that met the girl's alarmed gaze were full of gentle reproach.

She sat bolt upright at the wheel of her beautiful Daimler, and for a while was speechless.

'You were on the wrong side of the road,' said Tony gently.

'I'm awfully sorry,' she gasped. 'I sounded my horn, but these wretched Sussex lanes are so blind...'

'Say no more about it,' said Anthony. He surveyed the ruins of his car gravely.

'I thought you would see me as you came down the hill,' she said in excuse. 'I saw you and I sounded my horn.'

'I didn't hear it,' said Anthony, 'but that is beside the question. The fault is entirely mine, but I fear my poor car is completely ruined.'

She got out and stood beside him, the figure of penitence, her eyes fixed upon the drunken wreck.

'If I had not turned immediately into the ditch,' said Anthony, 'there would

have been a collision. And it is better that I should ruin my car than I should occasion you the slightest apprehension.'

She drew a quick sigh.

'Thank goodness it is only an old car,' she said. 'Of course, Daddy will—'

Anthony could not allow the statement to pass unchallenged.

'It looks old now,' he said gently; 'it looks even decrepit. It has all the appearance of ruin which old age, alas, brings, but it is not an old car.'

'It is an old model,' she insisted. 'Why, that's about twenty years old—I can tell from the shape of the wing.'

'The wings of my car,' said Anthony, 'may be old fashioned. I am an old fashioned man, and I like old fashioned wings. In fact, I insisted upon having those old fashioned wings put on this perfectly new car. You have only to look at the beautiful coach work—the lacquer—'

'You lacquered it yourself,' she accused him. 'Anybody can see that that has been newly done.' She touched the paint with her finger, and it left a little black stain. 'There,' she said triumphantly, 'It has been done with "Binko", you can see the advertisements in all the papers: "Binko dries in two hours."' She touched the paint again and looked at the second stain on her finger. 'That means you painted it a fortnight ago,' she said, 'it always takes a month to dry.'

Anthony said nothing. He felt that her discovery called for silence. Moreover, he could not, for the moment, think of any appropriate rejoinder.

'Of course,' she went on more warmly, 'it was very fine of you to take such a dreadful risk. My father, I know, will be very grateful.'

She looked at the car again.

'You don't think you could get it up,' she said.

Anthony was very sure he could not restore the equilibrium of his car. He had bought it a week before for thirty pounds. The owner had stuck out for thirty-five, and Anthony had tossed him thirty pounds or forty, and had won. Anthony always won those tosses. He kept a halfpenny in his pocket which had a tail on each side, and since ninety-nine people out of a hundred say 'heads' when you flip a coin in the air, it was money for nothing.

'Shall I drive you into Pilbury?' she said.

'Is there anywhere I can find a telephone?' asked Anthony.

'I'll take you back to the house,' said Jane Mansar suddenly. 'It's quite near, you can telephone from there, and I'd like you to have a talk with father. Of course, we will not allow you to lose by your unselfish action, though I did sound my horn as I came round the corner.'

'I didn't hear it,' said Anthony gravely.

He climbed in, and she backed the car into a gateway, turned and sped at a reckless pace back the way she had come. She turned violently from the road, missed one of the lodge gates by a fraction of an inch and accelerated up a broad drive to a big white house that showed sketchily between the encircling elms. She braked suddenly and Anthony got out with relief.

Mr Gerald Mansar was a stout, bald man, whose fiery countenance was relieved by a pure white moustache and bristling white eyebrows. He listened with thunderous calm whilst his pretty daughter told the story of her narrow escape.

'You sounded your horn?' he insisted.

'Yes, father, I am sure I sounded the horn.'

'And you were going, of course, at a reasonable pace,' said Mr Mansar.

In his early days he had had some practice at the law in the County Courts. Anthony Newton recognised the style and felt it was an appropriate moment to step in.

'You quite understand, Mr Mansar, that I completely exonerate Miss Mansar from any responsibility,' he interjected. 'I am perfectly sure she sounded the horn, though I did not hear it. I am completely satisfied and can vouch for the fact that she was proceeding at a very leisurely pace, and whatever fault there was, was mine.'

Anthony Newton was a very keen student of men, particularly of rich men. He had studied them from many angles, and one of the first lessons he learnt in presenting a claim, was to exonerate these gentlemen from any legal responsibility. The rich hate and loathe the onus of legal responsibility. They will spend extravagant sums in law costs to demonstrate to the satisfaction of themselves and the world that they are not legally responsible for the payment of a boot-black's fee. The joy of wealth is generosity. There was never a millionaire born who would not prefer to give a thousand than to pay a disputed penny.

Mr Mansar's puckered face relaxed.

'I shall certainly not allow you to be the loser, Mr—'

'Newton is my name.'

'Newton. You are not in the firm of Newton, Boyd and Wilkins, are you, the rubber people?'

'No,' said Anthony. 'I never touch rubber.'

'You are not the pottery Newton, are you?' asked Mr Mansar hopefully.

'No,' said Anthony gravely, 'we have always kept clear of pots.'

After Mr Mansar had, by cross-examination, discovered that he wasn't one of the Warwickshire Newtons, or Monmouth Newtons, or a MacNewton of Ayr, or one of those Irish Newtons, or a Newton of Newton Abbot, but was just an ordinary London Newton, his interest momentarily relaxed.

'Well, my dear,' he said, 'what shall we do?'

The girl smiled.

'I think at least we ought to ask Mr Newton to lunch,' she said and the old man, who seemed at a loss as to how the proceedings might reasonably be terminated or developed, brightened up at the suggestion.

'I noticed that you mentioned me by name. Of course, my daughter told you—' he said.

Anthony smiled.

'No, sir,' he replied, 'but I know the city rather well and, of course, your residence in this part of the world is as well known as—'

'Naturally,' said Mr Gerald Mansar. He had no false ideas as to his fame. The man who had engineered the Nigerian oil boom, the Irish linen boom, who floated the Milwaukee paper syndicate for two millions, could have no illusions about his obscurity.

'You are in the city yourself, Mr Newton?'

'Yes,' admitted Anthony.

He was in the city to the extent of hiring an office on a first floor of a city building; and it was true he had his name painted on the door. It was an office not big enough to swing a cat, as one of his acquaintances had pointed out. Anthony however, did not keep cats. And if he had kept them, he would certainly have never been guilty of such cruelty.

The lunch was not an unpleasant function, for a quite unexpected factor had come into his great scheme. Nobody knew better than Anthony Newton that it was Mr Mansar himself who every Saturday morning drove the Daimler into Pullington, and when Anthony had purchased his racketty car, spending many hours in the application of 'Binko' to endow it with a more youthful complexion, he had not dreamt that the adventure would end so pleasantly. He knew that Mr Millionaire Mansar had a daughter—he had a vague idea that somebody had told him she was pretty. He did not anticipate when he engineered his accident so carefully, that it would be at her expense.

For, whatever else he was, Anthony Newton was an honest adventurer. He had decided that there was money in honest adventure; he had reached this conclusion after he had made a careful study of the press. There were other adventurers whose names figured conspicuously in the police court reports. They were all ingenious and painstaking men, but their ingenuity and foresight were employed in ways which made no appeal to one who had strict, but not too strict, views on the sacredness of property.

Some of these adventurers had walked into isolated post offices, a mask over their faces and a revolver in their hands and had carried off the contents of the till, amidst the loud protests of postal officials who were on the spot. Others had walked into banks similarly disguised and had drawn out balances which were certainly not due to them.

And Anthony, thinking out the matter, decided that it was quite possible, by the exercise of his mental talent, to secure quite a lot of money without taking the slightest risks.

He wished to know Mr Mansar. Mr Mansar, in ordinary circumstances, was unapproachable. To step into his office and demand an interview was almost as futile as stepping up to the stamp counter in St Martin's-le-Grand, and asking to see the Postmaster-General. Mr Mansar was surrounded by guards, inner and outer, by secretaries, by heads of departments, by general managers and managing directors, to say nothing of commissionaires, doorkeepers, messengers and plain clerks.

There are two ways of getting acquainted with the great. One is to discover their hobbies, which is the weakest side of their defence, and the other is to drop in upon them on their holidays. The man you cannot meet in the City of London is very accessible in the Hotel de la Paix.

But apparently Mr Mansar never took a holiday, and his only hobby was keeping alive an illusion of his profound genius.

Lunch over, and Anthony's object achieved, there seemed no excuse for his

lingering. He awaited, with some confidence, the grave intimation that a car was ready to take him to the station, and that Mr Mansar would be glad if he would dine with him at his London house on Thursday. Maybe it would be Wednesday. Possibly, thought Anthony, the function might be deferred for a week or two. But the intimation did not come. He was treated as though he had arrived for a permanent stay.

Mr Mansar showed him the library, and told him to make himself comfortable, pointing out certain books which had amused him (Mr Mansar) in his moments of leisure.

Anthony Newton cooed and settled himself, not perhaps to read, but to think large and beautiful thoughts of great financial coups which he might engineer with this prince of financiers, of partnerships maybe, certainly of profits.

There was a big window looking out upon a marble terrace and as he read, or pretended to read, Mr and Miss Mansar paced restlessly along the paved walk. They were talking in a low voice and Anthony, having surrendered all sense of decorum, crept nearer to the window and listened as they passed.

'He is much better looking than the last one,' murmured Jane, and he saw Mr Mansar nod.

Much better looking than the last one? Anthony scratched his head.

Presently they came back.

'He has a very clever face,' said Jane, and Mr Mansar grunted.

Anthony had not the slightest doubt as to whom they were talking about. When she said 'clever face' he knew it was himself.

They did not return again, and Anthony waited on, a little impatient, a little curious; he had decided that he himself would make a move to go, when Mr Mansar came into the library and carefully closed the door behind him.

'I want a little talk with you, Mr Newton,' he said solemnly. 'It has occurred to me that you might be of the very greatest service to my firm.'

Anthony cleared his throat. The same thought had occurred to him also.

'Do you know Brussels at all?'

'Intimately,' said Anthony promptly. He had never been to Brussels, but he knew that he could get a working knowledge of the city from any guide book.

Mr Mansar stroked his chin, pursed his lips, frowned, and then:

'It is providential your arriving,' he said. 'I have a very confidential mission which I have been looking for somebody to undertake. In fact, I thought of going to town this afternoon to find a man for the purpose but, as I say, your arrival has been miraculously providential. I have been discussing it with my daughter, I hope you will forgive that little impertinence,' he said, courteously.

Anthony Newton forgave him there and then.

'My daughter, who is a judge of character, is rather impressed by you.'

It was clear to Anthony now that he had been the subject of the conversation he had overheard. He was tingling with curiosity to discover exactly the nature of the mission which was to be entrusted to him. Mr Mansar did not keep him waiting long.

'I want you to go by tonight's train to Brussels. You will arrive on Sunday morning, and remain there until Wednesday morning. Have you sufficient money for your journey?'

'Oh, yes,' said Anthony, airily.

'Good.' Mr Mansar nodded gravely, as though he had never had any doubt upon the matter. 'You will carry with you a sealed envelope, which you will open on Wednesday morning in the presence of my Brussels agent, Monsieur Lament, of the firm of Lament and Lament, the great financiers, of whom you must have heard.'

'Naturally,' said Anthony.

'I want you to keep your mission a secret, tell nobody, you understand?'

Anthony understood perfectly.

'I leave the method of travel to you. There is a train to London in half an hour; here is the letter.'

He took it from his inside pocket. It was addressed to Mr Anthony Newton, and marked 'To be opened in the presence of Monsieur Cecil Lament, 119, Rue Partriele, Brussels.'

'I do not promise you that you will be paid very well or even be paid at all, for undertaking this mission,' said the millionaire. 'But I rather fancy this experience will be useful to you in more ways than one.'

Anthony detected a certain significance in this cautious promise and smiled happily.

'I think I'll go along now, sir,' he said briskly. 'When I carry out these missions—and as you may guess, this is not the first time that I have been—entrusted with important errands—I prefer that I should lose no time.'

'I think you're wise,' said Mr Mansar soberly.

Anthony hoped to see the girl before he went, but here he was disappointed. It was a very ordinary chauffeur who drove him to the station and, passing the wreckage of his car stranded in the ditch, Anthony did not regret one single penny of his expenditure. Anyway, the car would still sell for the price of old iron.

He reached Brussels in time for breakfast on Sunday morning, and on the Monday he made a call at Monsieur Lament's office. Monsieur Lament was a short, stout man, with a large and bushy beard, and seemed surprised at the advent of this spruce and mysterious young Englishman.

'From M'sieur Mansar,' he said with respect, even veneration. 'M'sieur Mansar did not tell me he was sending anybody. Is it in connection with the Rentes?'

'I am not at liberty to say,' said Anthony discreetly, 'In fact, sir, I am, so to speak, under sealed orders.'

Monsieur Lament heard the explanation and nodded.

'I honour your discretion, M'sieur,' he said. 'Now is there anything I can do for you while you are in Brussels? Perhaps you would dine with me tonight at my club.'

Anthony was very happy to dine with him at his club, because he had brought with him a grossly insufficient sum to pay his expenses.

Over the dinner that night, Monsieur Lament spoke reverently of the great English financier.

'What a wonderful man?' he said, with an expressive gesture. 'You are a friend of his, M'sieur Newton?'

'Not exactly a friend,' said Anthony carefully, 'how can one be a friend of a monument? One can only stand at a distance and admire.'

'True, true,' said the thoughtful Monsieur Lament. 'He is indeed, a remarkable character. And his daughter—' he kissed the tips of his fingers, 'what charm, what intelligence, what beauty!'

'Ah!' said Anthony, 'what!'

So charming a companion was he, that Monsieur Lament asked him to lunch with him the next day, and this time the Belgian showed some curiosity as to the object of Anthony's visit.

'Is it in connection with the Turkish loan?' he asked.

Anthony smiled.

'You will, I am sure, agree with me that I must maintain the utmost secrecy,' he said firmly.

'Naturally! Of course! Certainly!' said Monsieur Lament hastily. 'I honour your discretion. But if it is in connection with the Turkish loan, or the Viennese Municipal loan—'

Anthony raised his hand with a gesture of gentle insistence.

Monsieur Lament dissolved into apologies.

Anthony was himself curious and he attended M. Lament's office on Wednesday morning with a joyous sense of anticipation.

In that rosewood-panelled room standing with his back to the white marble fireplace, he tore the flap of the envelope with fingers that shook, for he realized that he might be at the very crisis of his career; and that his good plan to drop into financial society had succeeded beyond his wildest hope.

To his amazement, the letter was from Jane Mansar, and he read it, open-mouthed.

'DEAR MR NEWTON:

'Daddy wants to hand you over to the police or have you ducked in the pond. I chose this method of giving you a graceful exit from the scene, because I feel that such a man of genius and valour should not be subjected to so ignominious a fate. You are the thirty-fourth person who has secured an introduction to my father by novel, and in some cases, painful, methods. I have been rescued from terrifying tramps (who have been hired by my rescuer) some six times. I have been pushed into the river and rescued twice. Daddy has had three people accidentally wounded by him when he has been shooting rabbits, and at least five who have got into the way of his car when he has been driving between the house and the station.

'We do recognize and appreciate the novelty of your method, and I confess that for a moment I was deceived by the artistic wreckage of your poor little car. To make absolutely sure that I was not doing you an injustice, I telephoned the

local garage, and found, as I expected, that you had kept the car there for a fortnight before the 'accident'. Poor Mr Newton, better luck next time.

'Yours sincerely,

'JANE MANSAR.'

Anthony read the letter three times, and then looked mechanically at the slip of paper which was enclosed. It ran:

'To MONSIEUR LAMONT,

'Pay Mr Anthony Newton a sum sufficient to enable him to reach London, and to support him on the journey.

'GERALD MANSAR.'

Monsieur Lament was watching the dazed young man.

'Is it important?' he asked eagerly. 'Is it to be communicated to me?'

Anthony was never wholly overcome by the most tremendous circumstances. He folded the letter, put it in his pocket, looked at the slip again.

'I regret that I cannot tell you all that this contains,' he said. 'I am leaving immediately for Berlin. From Berlin I go to Vienna, from Vienna to Istanbul; from there I must make a hurried journey to Rome, and from Rome I have to get to Tangier. Then I shall reach Gibraltar in a month's time, and fly to England.'

He handed the slip to Monsieur Lament.

'Pay Mr Anthony Newton a sufficient sum to enable him to reach London and support him on the journey.'

Monsieur Lament looked at Anthony. 'How much will you require, M'sieur?' he asked respectfully.

'About nine hundred pounds, I think,' said Anthony softly.

Monsieur Lament gave him the money then and there and when Mansar got the account he was justifiably annoyed.

He came into Jane, storming.

'That... that...' he spluttered, 'rascal...'

'Which rascal, Daddy, you know so many,' she was half smiling.

'Newton... as you know, I gave Lament an order to pay his expenses to London?'

She nodded.

'Well, he drew nine hundred pounds.'

The girl opened her eyes with joyous amazement.

'He told Lament that he was coming home by way of Berlin, Vienna, Istanbul and Rome,' groaned Mr Mansar. 'Thank God the trans-Siberian railway isn't working!' he added. It was the one source of comfort he had.

3. BURIED TREASURE

Mr Tony Newton threw up the window of his sitting-room and looked across the chimney tops of Bloomsbury with a critical eye.

It was a sunny day, and even chimney stacks and gaunt dead-ends have a poetry in the golden light of an early morning in summer to a young man plentifully endowed with faith in his own capabilities.

Big Bill Farrel was his companion, and Bill had just finished at his leisure a large plateful of ham and eggs, and now, with a pipe between his teeth, was at peace with the world.

'Voila!' said Anthony gravely, and with a wave of his hand indicated a number of portraits (mainly cut from newspapers) which decorated one wall of his room.

He walked to the wall where his picture gallery offended the unities, and stabbed with his finger portrait after portrait, as he reeled off their titles and biographies.

'That's William O. McNeal, real name Adolph Bernsteiner, the Meat King; that is Harry V. Teckle, the Steel King; that is Theodore Match, the Shipping King; that is Montague G. Flake, the Provision King; this fellow with the funny nose is Michael O. Blogg, the Jam King—and that fellow with the glasses is the Cotton King; and that lad with the dyspeptic eye and the diamond pin is the Hardware King—bow to Their Majesties, Bill. They are going to make us rich!'

'Eh?' said the startled and baffled Mr Farrel.

They are our little Eldorados,' said Tony calmly, 'our Pay Cash or Bearers; our Money from Home!'

'Do you mean they're relations of yours?' asked Bill, in tones of awe.

'God forbid!' said Mr Newton piously. 'Sit you down and I'll expound the Plan of Operations and the General Idea.'

For an hour he expounded his scheme, and comprehension came very slowly to Bill, but it came.

'And now,' said Tony, getting up, 'we will go to the little office which I have rented in Theobald's Road.'

Painted on the uncleanly glass panel was the inscription:

'NEWTON'S DETECTIVE AGENCY'

From a drawer in the one table of the room, he took a large card, similarly painted.

'You will find two nails outside the door,' said Tony, 'and your job will be to hang it out every morning and take it in every night, providing the youth of Bloomsbury does not pinch it.'

When Bill returned, his friend was reading a newspaper cutting.

'Listen to this. It is a description of a sale at Floretti's. "A small box of miscellaneous manuscript went to the bid of Mr Montague Flake at 120 guineas. The box is of carved Spanish mahogany," etc., etc. I will not bother you with the details. The point is that Mr Flake is a great collector of old manuscript and a great hog.'

From his wallet he took another and a smaller cutting.

'Listen,' he said, and read: "'A bargain: Small cottage with one acre. Cottage could be made a comfortable weekend residence. Price £1000 for quick sale.'" He took a time table from his desk and turned the leaves. 'Here is the place: the train leaves at twelve.'

'I am to buy this property?' said Big Bill, open-mouthed. Tony nodded.

That is your job,' he said. 'It will interest you to know that I have already inspected it, and have an architect's plan in my bedroom. Nevertheless, don't close the deal until you get a telegram from me. You are not to communicate

with me except through this office, and under no circumstances are you to disclose the fact that you know me or have any business dealings with me.'

An hour later Big Bill left and Anthony returned to his little hotel, took off his coat and set to work. In a box in his bedroom were half a dozen sheets of age-stained parchment. He spent the rest of the morning and the greater part of the afternoon covering these with fine writing.

There is no more highly respected figure in financial and business circles than Mr Montague Flake, for Mr Flake controlled the butter markets of London, Copenhagen, Rotterdam and many others. From which it may be gathered that Mr Flake was a considerable personage even before the time he managed to corner the butter supplies, to say nothing of the cold storage butter and the butter in transit and the butter of unborn generations of cows.

Officially, Mr Flake did not control the market. Officially he had nothing to do with the cornering of margarine. In all his stores—and there were 631 branches of Flake U.P. Stores throughout the United Kingdom—the 'U.P.' standing for 'Universal Provisions'—there was a large notice respectfully informing customers that the management was doing its best to get supplies of butter and margarine, but that the failure of the hay crop in Denmark, and the root crop in Ireland, was causing much embarrassment, whilst the extra cost of freights (which really worked out at an additional farthing per pound), compelled the reluctant directors to raise the price of butter 3d per pound, and margarine 2d.

And the customers were duly impressed, and, what is more to the point, they paid, and millions of tuppence—ha'pennies went into Mr Flake's pocket, for he was the company, the directors and the shareholders.

Mr Flake had a large house in St John's Square, in the most fashionable part of London. He had a model farm in Norfolk, an estate in Kent, a shoot in Yorkshire and a salmon river in Scotland. He could neither farm, shoot nor fish, but these were the correct things to own, so he owned them.

It is said that his own idea of happiness was to sit in a secluded spot on the edge of the lake on his estate, dabbling his bare feet in the water and smoking a clay pipe, whilst he read the divorce cases in the Sunday newspapers.

He was a harsh-faced man, wholly unsuggestive of butter or anything oleaginous or suave. He was a widower, and lived alone, save for a housekeeper, three secretaries, four chauffeurs, twelve menservants and a small army of white-capped cooks, housemaids and the like.

Mr Flake sat in his magnificent library at a table much larger than the room in

which the majority of his customers slept, and he was nibbling his pen, for he was in the agony of composition. He had scratched out twenty lines when a visitor was announced. He took up the card that lay on the silver plate and read the inscription without any show of interest. It read:

'THE NEWTON PRIVATE DETECTIVE AGENCY Captain Anthony Newton, DSO, MC, late Blitheshire Fusiliers'

He glared up at his secretary, who had followed the footman into the room.

'What does he want? Tell him to write.'

'He insists upon seeing you, sir,' said the footman. 'I told him you were busy.'

'Show him in,' growled Mr Flake.

Tony was ushered in, very grave, very business—like and very well dressed.

'Sit down. Captain—er—Newton,' said Mr Flake, waving his lordly hand to a chair. 'What can I do for you?'

Mr Newton removed his gloves slowly, laid them beside his hat, took out his pocket-book and consulted the interior.

'A few days ago,' he said, 'you purchased a number of miscellaneous manuscripts at Floretti's sale.'

Mr Flake nodded.

'They were the property,' Tony went on, 'of the late Lord Witherall, who was a collector, and they comprised a number of more or less important documents —'

'More or less worthless,' interrupted Mr Flake brusquely. 'As a matter of fact, I bought that lot for the box more than for the manuscripts. I haven't had time to look through them yet.' Tony's eyes gleamed. 'And I don't suppose the manuscripts are worth tuppence.'

'It was on the subject of the manuscripts I wanted to see you,' said Tony. 'I have been employed by a client to interview you under peculiar circumstances. A former confidential servant of Lord Witherall gave into his lordship's custody certain documents, the particulars of which I am not at liberty to give, and these, according to the man's relatives—he has been dead some years, by the way—were kept by his lordship in that particular box. The man's name was Samuels, though that was not the name he was known by to Lord Witherall. If that document is in your possession—it is in the form of a letter addressed to Samuels—my client is willing to pay you £200 for its return.'

Now Mr Flake was, above all things, a good business man, and a good business man knows instinctively that a first offer of £100 for anything means that it is worth much more. And a good business man, moreover, has ever an eye to the main chance.

Mr Flake pressed a bell, and, when his secretary appeared:

'Bring me that box I bought at Floretti's the other day,' he said. 'I can tell you this,' he said, when the girl had gone, 'that I do not promise that I can return any document which may be in this box. A deal's a deal. Captain Newton, and I am a business man.'

Tony nodded.

'I can only remind you,' he said gently, 'that the relatives of Samuels are very poor people, and from what I gather that document may be of the greatest value to them.'

'And to me,' said Mr Flake pleasantly. 'I am poor, too. We are all poor—it is a relative term, as we are on the subject of relatives,' he added humorously.

'I don't think you can compare your condition with theirs, sir,' said Anthony with dignity, 'and I feel sure that you would not attempt to benefit at the expense of poor people—'

'Rubbish!' snapped Montague Flake. 'There is no sentiment in my composition, sir. I am a self-made man, and I have made my money without worrying very much about the people who have had to part. A bargain is a bargain. If I pay 120 guineas for a poke, I'm entitled to the pig I find in it. That's fair, ain't it—ain't it, I mean? Mind you, I'm not going to say I won't sell it,' he added, as the secretary placed the box on the big table before him, 'and I'm not going to say I will.'

He cut the sealed cords which bound the box, and threw open the lid. It was filled to the top with yellow manuscripts. Some were bound together in vellum books, and there were a large number of loose sheets.

Mr Flake hesitated and, lifting out the first stratum, laid it on the desk.

'You say it is a letter?' he said.

Tony nodded.

'This is evidently the manuscript of an old play,' said Mr Flake; 'and this'—he lifted another weighty pile—'seems to be the original manuscript of a story of some kind. Here are the letters.' He picked one up, turned it over to read the

signature, and laid it on the table.

Tony turned to the waiting secretary, and then to Mr Flake with an air of indecision.

'I wonder if your secretary would be good enough to look up the telephone number of Sir John Howard and Sons.'

He named the greatest of the London solicitors, a name which carried respect even to Mr Flake.

'Are you acting for Howard?' he asked quickly.

Anthony smiled.

'For the moment I cannot disclose my principals,' he said.

He looked round and waited until the door closed behind the girl; then he sidled close to Mr Flake.

'I can tell you this in confidence,' he said in a low voice. I am acting for—'

He whispered a name in Mr Flake's ear. To reach the financier he had to come round to the corner of the table. As he whispered, he obscured for a moment Mr Flake's view of the box. With somebody whispering in your ear, it is difficult to detect the rustle of parchment.

Tony's hand shot into the open box, and was out again before Mr Flake could recover from his surprise.

'Tup?' said Mr Flake irritably. 'Who the dickens is Tup?'

'That,' said the suave young man, 'I will reveal at some later stage of the enquiry. I thought you knew.'

Mr Flake looked at him searchingly, but the eyes of Tony Newton did not falter.

'Anyway,' said the financier, as he bundled the documents back into the box, 'I haven't time to go through these things now, and I shan't be able to give you an answer for a few days.'

'But it is urgent.' Tony was earnest again. 'If it is a question of money we shall not quarrel over a few hundreds. It is absolutely necessary that we should get this document back immediately.'

'And it is absolutely necessary,' said Mr Flake good-humouredly, 'that I should have my afternoon tea and that I should have time to examine the contents. I

will give you your answer tomorrow.'

With this the visitor had to be content. He left the house, curiously enough, without discovering the telephone number he had enquired for, and made his way to the nearest post office. He sent a telegram addressed to 'Smith, Bull Hotel, Little Wenson, Kent,' and the message was: 'Close the deal.'

Four days later a large car drew up before a very small cottage a mile from the village of Little Wenson, and Mr Flake descended.

The cottage was a poor sort of dwelling; the garden was neglected and the windows uncurtained; but he was less interested in the house than in the acre of kitchen garden, equally neglected, which stood at its rear.

Fortunately, he was able to make his reconnaissance without effort, for the cottage stood at the corner of a lane and the western limit of the garden ran flush with the hedge. There were two apple trees, and beyond the broken wall of a well with its crazy windlass.

Mr Flake walked slowly back to the front of the cottage, pushed open the gate, walked along the garden path and knocked at the door. A man in his shirt sleeves answered: a tall, solemn-looking man, who answered Mr Flake's cheery 'Good morning!' with a non-committal nod.

'Is this your house?' asked Mr Flake pleasantly.

'Yes, sir,' said Big Bill Farrel, the cottager.

'Rather nice situation,' said Mr Flake.

'It's not so bad,' said the other, cautiously.

'Been here long?'

'About a week,' said the occupant. 'I haven't been out of the army long, and I thought of starting a poultry farm.'

'Oh, so you were in the army?' said Mr Flake, patronisingly. 'Well, it doesn't seem the right kind of place to raise chickens. Who owned it before you?'

'I forget the name,' said the cottager, 'but it's been in the same family for hundreds of years.'

'H'm!' said Mr Flake. Then, carelessly: 'Can't you recall the name?'

'Something like Samson,' said the cottager, with an effort of memory.

'Was it Samuels?' asked Mr Flake, eagerly.

'Ah, that's the name, Samuels. They weren't the last tenants, but they were the people who owned it years ago.'

'H'm!' said Mr Flake again. 'If it isn't asking you a rude question, what did you pay for it?'

'All the money I had,' parried the other skilfully. 'And as the song says—'

'Yes, yes,' said Mr Flake. 'I know what the song says, but now, tell me—what would you sell this little property for?'

'I wouldn't sell it,' said the cottager.

'Come, come, you'd sell it for a hundred pounds' profit, surely?' said Mr Flake.

'Not for a thousand pounds' profit,' said the other, determinedly. 'Not for ten thousand pounds' profit. There's some funny tales going about this property. I had a lawyer down here the other day and a private detective.'

'The devil you did!' said Mr Flake. 'Come, now, let's talk business. I am a business man, and I will give you two thousand pounds for this property.'

'If you offered me twenty thousand pounds I wouldn't take it,' said the cottager, with greater determination than ever. 'I am satisfied with it, and, as Socrates says: "Contentment is natural wealth; luxury is artificial poverty."'

'Never mind about Socrates,' said the impatient Mr Flake. 'I will give you—'

'"'If man knew what felicity dwells in the cottage of a godly man," says Jeremy Taylor,' the cottager insisted.

'Now look here.' Mr Flake was aroused. 'Will you take a reasonable price for this property? I've got a fancy for it and I will pay anything in reason.'

'Come inside,' said the cottager opening the door. An hour later Mr Farrel shook the dust of Little Wenson from his feet. He was accompanied to London by Mr Flake, and together they journeyed to a bank in Lombard Street, for Mr Farrel admitted to a wholesome horror of cheques, and not until he had received large bundles of banknotes did he affix his signature to the deed which transferred his property to Mr Flake.

It was a long time since Mr Flake had done a day's hard digging, but he felt that he was being well repaid for his labours when, at six o'clock the next morning, he began his excavations. A line drawn at right angles from the centre of the two apple trees passed the well on the right hand side. This was exactly as the document in his possession said it should pass.

Those three sheets of parchment written in a crabbed hand, described how one William Samuels had in the year 1826 stolen from the strong rooms of Cheals Bank, at which he was employed as a porter, 'brilliant stones to the value of £120,000, the property of the French emigre, the Marquis du Thierry', and of how he had hidden that same in the garden of his brother, Henry Frederick Samuels, in the parish of Little Wenson. Mr Flake consulted them again and again. The directions worked out with magnificent accuracy. Nine feet three inches at the right angle from a line drawn between the two apple trees brought the seeker after stolen wealth to the centre of a newly dug garden plot. Four feet down Mr Flake's heart leapt when he came to the 'square flat stone which I have put atop of the Hole in which said Box is Hidden'.

The said box was there. A perspiring Mr Flake discovered it after three hours' strenuous digging and brought it to the light. It looked strangely new. Indeed an ordinary person might have confused it with one of those solid boxes which farmers employ to send eggs by rail. It was heavy, but Mr Flake did not feel its weight as he carried it to the seclusion of the cottage and prized off its top.

It was heavy because it was half-filled with sand. He ran his hand through the sand, and his fingers encountered a square piece of cardboard, which he took out and carried to the light, for he was a thought near-sighted.

There was one line of writing, and that in the same crabbed calligraphy as the letter he had found in his box of manuscript—though, if he had examined that box before Mr Newton had whispered in his ear, he might have saved himself a great deal of labour and no small amount of money.

The inscription ran:

'TUP means The Unfortunate People, on whose behalf I am acting.'

The next morning Mr Flake waited upon Mr Newton. 'You and your gang have swindled me out of twelve thousand pounds,' he said. 'You can either hand the money back or be prosecuted.'

'Thank you very kindly,' said Tony. 'I will be prosecuted.'

'You are a common swindler,' stormed Mr Flake.

'There are two ways out of this room,' said Tony. 'One is out of the window and one is out of the door. You have paid your money, so you can take your choice.'

'I shall go to the police,' fumed Mr Flake, taking up his hat. He was on the point of apoplexy.

'Now listen to me,' said Tony kindly. 'You got the worst of a deal. You thought you were going to make a lot of money at the expense of a poor family. You have spent your life getting fat on the money you have twisted from the public. You have scraped something from every slice of bread and butter in the kingdom. That you should get rich and have your shooting boxes and your country estates, quite a lot of people have gone hungry. The law cannot touch you. You are one of the thieves who keep within the law. I have taken twelve thousand pounds from you on a square deal and I tell you this'—he shook his finger in the purple face of the speechless financier—'that twelve thousand pounds will be 120 thousand before I have done with you.'

'You are a common thief!' spluttered Mr Flake.

'Bill,' called Tony sternly, and the big man appeared in the doorway, 'chuck this blighter out.'

Bill, the whilom cottager, opened the door and jerked his thumb.

4. A CONTRIBUTION TO CHARITY

Tony Newton was not given to indiscriminate charity. He believed in that variety which began at home and stayed there, for he had a profound lack of faith in the bona fides of charity organisers. He was not intensely interested in the Mercantile Marine, nor had he the slightest intention of founding cottage houses for disabled sailors—until he met Mr Match.

Tony always said that the affair of the shipowner was his greatest exploit—the greater perhaps since he gained no personal benefit from his ingenuity.

It must not be supposed that Scotland Yard could tolerate the existence and operations of a conscienceless brigand. But Scotland Yard is powerless without the support of a complainant who may develop into a prosecutor. Mr Newton owed his immunity partly to the shyness of certain wronged men to take action, and partly (and this was the greater part) to the inability of his victims to offer an interpretation of their own conduct that would look well in the printed report of an Old Bailey trial.

Tony and his brigands enjoyed a wider reputation than he guessed: this much he discovered one day when a 'case' took him to Newcastle.

He and Big Bill Farrel had sat for an hour in the fading light, smoking in

silence. The evening sky was still bright, and through the open window came the shrill voices of children at play. For in London the street is still the Coliseum of childhood, the course and arena of its Roman game, the very college where it graduates in the bitter science of life.

'Who is Theodore Match?' asked Anthony unexpectedly, and Bill started.

His friend had the bland tone of a schoolmaster extracting information from a nervous pupil.

'The Shipping King,' said Farrel, remembering.

'And what is a Shipping King?' demanded Tony.

'A Shipping King?' hesitated the other. 'Well, he's a fellow who owns ships.'

Tony smiled sadly.

'A Shipping King,' he explained, 'is a man who sees trouble ahead. He's always on the point of being ruined next year. If trade is good, he's going to be ruined through the shortage of shipping. If there are lots of ships he's ruined by the shortage of freights. Sometimes he's ruined by the charter rates, sometimes by the price of coal. He gets so ruined in one way and another, what with income tax and surtax and excess profits tax, that he doesn't know what to do with the money he can't spend.'

'Good Lord!' said Bill, who was brave but not bright.

'Anyway, Theodore Match, Esquire, who has never given a ha'penny to charity, is going to provide a start in life for the great-great-grandson of a man who fought at Trafalgar. That's me! My great-great-grandfather was a sailor—we kept his wooden leg for years as a souvenir.'

Bill knocked the ashes from his pipe.

'Match isn't a bad old stick,' he said, unconscious of his humour. 'He gave a new library—'

'You needn't praise Mr Match,' interrupted Tony. 'He'll be Sir Theodore Match in the next Honours List. Anyway, he doesn't know how generous he is going to be. Bill, is your tea dearer than it used to be? Is meat dearer—is bread dearer—is everything dearer that comes from overseas? Who do you think has got the extra ha'pence? The planter and the farmer have got a bit—they worked for it and good luck to them. But Theodore Match has got more than his whack. He's had a ha'penny of yours for tea and a farthing for your loaf of bread and something out of everything you eat or drink. He's raised his

freights. Coal is dear, labour is dearer—everything's dear. But he's the dearest thing of all. There's nothing cheap about Theodore except the souls he sends to sea and the men he employs and his charitable subscriptions. To cut short my introduction, I have put him down on the subscription list to Anthony Newton's Happy Evening Fund for the sum of twelve thousand pounds—and I'll get it.'

Mr Farrel nodded slowly, and there was admiration in his eyes.

'I bet you will,' he said enthusiastically.

The Theodore Steamship Line, as everybody knows, is one of the most important cargo lines in the United Kingdom. It had a fleet of 25 ships, it traded with South America, with the China seas and with the two coasts, and with India and Africa. Its head offices were in Newcastle; and to Newcastle Tony Newton journeyed next day, accompanied by his trusty lieutenant. They arrived late in the evening and went at once to the Station Hotel.

Early in the morning Anthony set forth on a voyage of discovery. The Theodore Steamship Line possessed an unpretentious block of offices not very far from the hotel, and by the energy of the clerks and the number of clients who waited in the various departments. Tony gathered that business was extensively brisk.

He passed into the office, handed his card to a clerk and presently was shown into the private room of Mr Theodore Match. It was a large room, half-panelled in oak and hung about with photographs of ships. Mr Match was a middle-aged man with one of those jovial, bearded countenances and those easily laughing eyes which are the possession of men upon whom the cares and worries of this world sit lightly.

He beamed at his visitor through gold-rimmed glasses.

'Glad to meet you, Mr Newton,' he said, to that adventurer's surprise. 'Sit you down and make yourself at home. Have a cigar.' He handed a silver box to the visitor and Tony slowly selected one. 'Now what is it you want?' smiled Mr Match. 'Ten thousand pounds for some buried treasure or a million pound partnership?'

For a second, but only for a second. Tony was surprised to silence.

'I think I'll take the partnership,' he said, 'though, as a matter of fact, I don't want anything like that sum.'

Mr Match leant back in his chair, shaking with laughter and rubbing his hands together as though he were a participant in the greatest joke in the world.

'You see, I know you, Newton. As a matter of fact, I've been warned about you. I'll tell you frankly, I know all about the little office you had in Theobald's Road. I know all about your portrait gallery—I sent a private detective there the other day to have a look round—I know all about your adventures with Mr Montague Flake, who is an old friend and client of ours, and Mr Gerald Mansar is another. I know how you diddled Flake out of twelve thousand pounds—I've been laughing over that ever since. Now let us come down to plain speaking, Mr Newton,' he said, leaning forward and resting his elbows on the arms of his chair. 'You imagine you have a mission in life to relieve rich men of their unearned surpluses. Am I right?'

Tony was now at his ease. He recognised the situation and his mind was working rapidly.

'That is perfectly true,' he said. 'I have.'

Now Tony had had no desire to help anybody but himself. But at that moment was born a righteous and philanthropic resolve.

'Good!' said Mr Match heartily. 'You have marked down a dozen disgustingly rich people to contribute to your comfort.'

'That also is true,' said Tony.

'Good again!' said Mr Match. 'You regard me as a profiteer and you have come to Newcastle with a grand little scheme in your head to make me contribute to—what?'

'I have been settling soldiers on the land,' said Tony. 'I want to provide a few homes for wives and children of the men of the Mercantile Marine,' he said slowly.

'Admirable philanthropist!'

The eyes of Mr Theodore Match were beaming with benevolent fun. He stroked his little beard thoughtfully.

'Admirable philanthropist!' he repeated. 'And how much am I supposed to contribute to this very interesting experiment of yours?'

'I have put you down for twelve thousand pounds,' said Tony.

'Why not twelve million pounds? I am as willing to give one as the other. And I suppose you have some little scheme to get it. Now be a sportsman, Newton,' he said banteringly. 'What shall it be? A grand confidence trick, buried treasure—won't you enlighten me as to the little trick you intended employing to

extract my hard-won wealth?'

Tony laughed.

'I will give you frankness for frankness,' he said. 'I hadn't quite made up my mind.'

'Come,' said the other, 'be friendly.'

The door opened at that moment and a young man came in, a tall, stoutly built young man, red and puffy of face.

'This is my son; this is Mr Newton, about whom I was speaking to you, Tom,' said Theodore Match.

'Tell me, before we go any farther,' said Tony, 'will you contribute anything to my scheme?'

'Not a bean,' smiled the other, 'not half a bean, not the very dust that lies at the bottom of a bag of beans. Why should I? Am I sitting here making money for my servants or for myself? Do I devote the whole of my day and the greater part of my night to working out schemes for increasing my surtax in order to bring trade and custom to a hundred local public-houses? No, sir!' He thumped his desk furiously. 'The welfare of my men does not interest me. What they do with their money does not interest me either. What I do with my own is no concern of theirs or yours or anybody else's in the world.'

'Do you want me, governor?' asked the young man.

'No, Tom, I merely wanted you to come in to see Mr Newton.'

With a nod to the visitor and a meaning grin to his parent Tom Match left the room.

'I make more money than the able seaman because I am cleverer than the able seaman. It is the triumph of intellect over brute strength. Show me anybody who is cleverer than I and let him take it out of me, and I am perfectly willing that he shall get away with it. If you'—he pointed a pencil at Tony and spoke more slowly—'or your military attache, who I understand bears the name of Farrel, can by any trick or dodge or act of artfulness, short of forgery or burglary or robbery, extract from me twelve thousand pounds or twenty thousand pounds, you are at liberty to do so. I tell you this frankly, and as man to man, Newton, that the welfare of the seaman is of no interest to me. I don't for one moment imagine that it is of much interest to you. That Mercantile Marine Home was an inspiration. You came here to carry out a private swindle—but we'll let that go. If you can find a way of getting the better of me, if you

can trap me in an unguarded moment by any trick you may choose into giving you the money you require, I promise you that I will not prosecute you even though the act by which you extract the money may be a criminal one in the eyes of the law.'

He stood up, still smiling, and thrust out his big hand, and Tony was smiling as he gripped it. There was something about this Philistine that he liked. If he were a brute, he was an honest brute.

'I accept your challenge,' he said. 'Within a week you will have contributed twelve thousand pounds to an unexpected charity.'

'You can't do it,' said Mr Match decidedly. 'Why, my dear man, I have successfully resisted an appeal of the highest people in the land. Look here!' He walked back to his desk, pulled open a drawer and flung out half a dozen printed documents, attached by a fastener. 'It came this morning—the Prince's Appeal for Merchant Seamen. That's one better than yours. They want a million,' he chuckled. 'Did I refuse it? No, sir, I ignored it. If I refused I should get into bad odour—you realize we are speaking in confidence as men of honour. If the Prince comes to Newcastle I shall dodge him. If he writes me a personal letter I shall be on a bed of sickness and unable to reply. I have never given a ha'porth of charity in my life and, please heaven, I never shall! When I die I shall leave nothing to build hospitals or found churches, nothing for the indigent poor, nothing for anybody who hasn't the right to it.'

He was a shrewd man, in many ways brilliant. He had one of those extraordinarily nimble minds which are the peculiar possession of the accountant and the bookmaker. There was no need for him to take any extra precautions. He had sized up Tony and knew that he had a foe worthy of his steel, but felt quite competent to meet all the machinations which the most ingenious and most unscrupulous philanthropist could devise. If he scrutinised a little more closely the documents which came before him in the ordinary course of business for his signature, if he watched with a little more care the companions of his son, if he was a little more suspicious of all the business proposals which came before him from outside sources, and read into them some sinister scheme of Newton to secure his subscription, it was not an unusual care for an unprecedented suspicion, nor a particularly remarkable scrutiny which he exercised, for he was by nature careful.

Of Tony he saw nothing for the first three days. A private detective whom he had employed to shadow the philanthropist reported that he spent most of his time in the private sitting-room of his hotel with his companion, the tall, solemn soldier with whom he occasionally went abroad.

He met Tony in the street by accident on the fourth day and crossed the road to greet him.

'Well,' demanded Mr Match boisterously, his eyes agleam, 'how goes the robbery under arms—the Great-Turf-Fraud—the Jim-the-Penman- Ship?'

Tony laughed.

'Fine,' he said. 'I reckon your money is as good as in my pocket.'

Match roared his merriment.

'Have you found a scheme?'

Tony shook his head.

'Not really—but I'm picking it up little by little. Watts invented the steam engine through seeing a kettle boil—I'm watching the extraordinary effect of large self-confidence upon the security of wealth.'

'Watch!' said the other, and put out his hand. 'You're going to get eyestrain.'

He was going on, but Tony laid his hand on his arm.

'Wait—there's one thing I want to tell you,' he said. 'There are a dozen ways I could get the money from you, but they're all dishonest. I could forge your name as easily as anything—I should have made a most successful criminal—I could burgle your stately mansion at Morpeth—I've reconnoitered the ground and it's dead easy to get through the window above the portico—'

'Try it,' said the other significantly.

'Oh, I know all about the burglar alarms, but I could make them inoperative with a gimlet and a wire in a matter of moments. I could impersonate you so that your own son would be deceived. But none of these things appeal to me. There isn't any art in them—I should just hate to take the money. But you're a difficult proposition. You're too big —there's nothing really mean about you.'

'Flatterer,' smiled Mr Match.

'It's a fact. I could never get you to buy a share in buried treasure, or bluff you into believing that I know all about your past life. You're just an honest rascal making a fortune out of people's necessity and so far as I can see you have only one weak spot.'

Mr Match looked at him quizzically.

'Let me know that and I am fortified,' he said.

'You are too confident of yourself,' said Tony. 'That's where your undoing lies.'

'Prove it.'

'I can prove it all right,' said Tony.

They were near his hotel and the hour was one.

'Come and lunch with me, if I promise you that I will neither dope, sandbag nor hypnotise you.'

'Done!' said Mr Match heartily. 'We will discuss this matter further —you amuse me.'

It was not until the lunch was over that Mr Match again approached the subject. Throughout the meal Tony kept up a light, continuous flow of amusing reminiscence and Mr Match found him an agreeable companion.

'You were talking about my self-confidence and how it might ruin me. I am interested. Please elucidate.'

Mr Newton shrugged his shoulders.

'What I mean is that you have confidence in the processes of business and in your own ability to handle any situation which has to do with the transference of money. For example, if I asked you for a cheque for twelve thousand pounds at this moment and you gave me that cheque, you would be quite satisfied in your mind that you would be able to prevent that money from going to charity.'

The shipper thought for a moment.

'Yes,' he said. 'I think I can say with confidence—it may be over-confidence but I don't think it is—that I could give you—in fact, I am quite willing to give you at this moment—a crossed cheque for twelve thousand pounds.'

'You think that you could stop it.'

The other nodded.

'You would probably post-date it till tomorrow.'

Match nodded again.

'And such is your confidence in the etiquette and practice of banking that you would not be one penny the worse off.'

'Exactly,' said the other, 'though it might put you in rather a hole, my friend.'

'Whether it would or not,' said Tony, offering his cigarette case, 'I challenge you to do so, and I promise you that if I do not get the value of that cheque applied to the purpose I design it, I will not bother you again.'

For a moment the shipping man looked at him and then, with a little grin and with that quickness which characterised all his movements, he slipped a chequebook from one pocket and a fountain pen from another, and wrote. Tony, looking across the table, saw that the cheque was dated for the following day. He noted that under the amount Mr Match wrote:

'This cheque must only be passed on the personal authorisation of the payer.'

He signed it with a flourish, crossed it with two heavy strokes and handed it to his companion with a smile. Tony drew a long sigh of relief.

'Thank you,' he said. 'I see you have made it payable to bearer.'

'The bearer will have some difficulty in getting it,' said Mr Match.

Mr Match drove straight back to his office and without a moment's delay called up his bank on the telephone.

'That you, Gilbert? It's Theodore Match speaking. I have just given a cheque for twelve thousand pounds, payable to bearer—got that? The number of the cheque is A.B.714312—got that? I stop payment of that cheque and it is not to be cashed or debited to my account under any circumstances. I will give you confirmation in writing.'

It may be said of Theodore Match that his pleasures were mainly intellectual. He had found his principal joy in life in pitting his wits against wits as shrewd or nearly as shrewd as his own, and it is true that he accounted success less by the money that that success brought to him than by the satisfaction of having outwitted his opponent. Whether or not Tony knew his man before he came to Newcastle, it is certain that he understood him now.

Match did not regard the money as of any great consequence. He took a keen pleasure in the game for the game's sake and it was in this spirit of eager interest that he awaited the culmination of his enemy's plan.

His watcher brought him two items of news that afternoon, one that Big Bill Farrel had gone to London by the first train, the second that Tony had hired the window of a small confectioner's shop in the main street for two days, and that the contents of that window were being hurriedly removed to make way for an interesting exhibit. No other happening marked that afternoon. Having secured his window, Tony did not fill it. It was not until the following afternoon that he showed his hand, simultaneously with the issue of the evening papers.

At half past two Mr Match received a telegram from London.

'Heartiest congratulations and thanks for your help.'

It was signed 'Farrel'.

'Now who the dickens is Farrel?' asked Match with a frown.

He was cogitating when Tom, his young hopeful, burst into the room.

'I say, father,' he gasped, 'you didn't tell me you were going to do it!'

'Do what?' asked Mr Match, suspiciously.

'Why,' said the young hopeful, 'that Prince's Fund; you told me you would not contribute a cent!'

Mr Match was on his feet.

'And how much have I contributed?' he asked quietly.

'Twelve thousand pounds. It's in the evening papers. That fellow Newton has got a window in High Street pasted round with appeals for the Prince's Fund, and a photographic enlargement of your cheque in the centre.'

Mr Match collapsed into his chair. 'Good lord!' he said. Then: 'What do the papers say?'

The young man took a paper and read:

'We understand that the Prince's Fund for Merchant Seamen is the richer by 12,000 through the generosity of Mr Theodore Match of this city, a cheque for this amount having been given by our patriotic fellow-citizen.'

'Good lord!' said Match again. 'So that was his dodge! He couldn't get it for himself, and so he got it for the fund.'

'Did you give him a cheque?'

Mr Match nodded. 'But I stopped it,' he said. 'That fellow's too clever for me.'

'But you aren't going to let it go through?' said his agitated hopeful.

'Don't be a fool, Tom,' said Mr Match calmly. 'Stopping a cheque for one of Newton's infernal schemes and stopping a cheque for a big national fund are two different matters. He's got me all right. Don't you see what would happen if I repudiated my gift? I should be pilloried from one end of the country to the other.'

With a deep sigh he reached for the telephone and gave the number.

'That you, Gilbert? With reference to that cheque I stopped yesterday—yes, the one for twelve thousand pounds. It is now in order. Let it go through.'

He pressed a bell, summoned his secretary, and dictated a confirmation. He went home that night a silent, thoughtful man, and answered the congratulations of the few privileged friends who could approach him on the subject somewhat absently.

The next morning when he got to his office, he found his banker waiting for him.

'That cheque was cleared very quickly,' said Gilbert.

'Cleared?' said Mr Match in surprise.

The other nodded.

'It was cleared soon after I got your message yesterday afternoon, through the London and Midland Bank of Newcastle. By the way, I see that there is a contradiction about your gift in this morning's paper.'

Mr Match took the paper in his hand without a word.

We find we were in error in describing the charity which benefited by Mr Match's munificence as the Prince's Fund. This error was due to the fact that a facsimile of the cheque was shown in the High Street amidst a number of appeals to support the Prince's charity. The money has been devoted to Captain Newton's Cottage Homes for Seamen's Families.

Mr Match put down the paper.

'I gave the cheque,' he said, talking aloud to himself, 'I stopped the cheque and then I authorised its payment, just as he said I would. It was clever. He took the cheque, paid it into the London and Midland—he must have opened a special account in Newcastle for some such purpose—and started the story about my having subscribed to the Prince's Fund knowing that the first thing I would do would be to cancel the stoppage of the cheque—clever! Yes, I was overconfident, all right!'

He picked up the telephone.

'Give me the Station Hotel.' Then after a pause: 'Is Mr Anthony Newton there? Put him through, please. Is that you, Newton?'

'Yes,' said the cheerful voice of Tony.

'When you get tired of your career of crime,' said Mr Match, 'I can give you a partnership in this firm.'

'Not on your life,' said Tony. 'You're not going to get your money back that way!'

When Mr Match put down the telephone he was laughing softly to himself.

5. A LADY IN GREY

During the hectic days of war, Anthony Newton had met Sybil Martin. He called her 'The Lady in Grey', and was a little terrified of her. It was not that she was haughty, or that she was of herself terrifying. Hers was a peculiar loveliness; a patrician type of beauty which awed without inspiring.

The daughter of a poor nobleman, she possessed the qualities of the grand dame to this extent, that, without effort on her own part, she impressed people with a sense of their inferiority.

Jim Martin was Tony's colonel. Anthony was always puzzled when he met people of Martin's position. He never knew whether they were rich or poor. They seemed to have been born to the use of great houses and the rights of perambulating vast estates, carrying under their arms guns of costly make, wherewith to shoot expensively-reared partridges. They had the entree to other great houses, and were free of shootings and fishings. They called one another by their Christian names, and had a host of mutual friends. Jim Martin was fatally wounded in the second year of the war.

'Do what you can for the missus,' he said, just before he died.

At the first opportunity, Anthony had sought her out in her little house in Curzon Street. She was disconcertingly cool and unemotional. Anthony was hot and stammering before he had been with her ten minutes. Was there anything he could do? Oh, no, nothing at all. She thanked him very much, asked him to stay to lunch, and discussed air raids and a new war book that was creating a sensation at the moment.

Anthony crawled out of her presence.

He had seen her three times since. Once, in the direst days of his poverty, he had been loafing in Hyde Park and she passed in a beautiful car. He raised his hat and she stared past him. Perhaps she had not seen him? She was in grey, as

usual, a silvery dove-like grey that suited her.

The second time was after his excellent encounter with certain confidence tricksters. It was in the vestibule of a theatre and she was waiting for somebody. This time she smiled an acknowledgment to his bow and moved toward him.

'I have an idea I saw you in the park a month ago, Mr Newton. My mind was so occupied that I did not remember you until I had passed. Won't you come and see me some day?'

'I shall be delighted,' said Anthony, sincerely. At any rate, his mind was relieved as to her financial status. He sometimes wondered exactly what he would have done if it had been less satisfactory.

At the moment he was engineering a coup, and it came in the nature of an unpleasant shock to see the 'objective' hurrying to meet the girl he had just left.

'Oh. blow!' said Anthony.

The squat, bald figure that sidled up to his queen in grey had been the object of his very earnest study.

Mr Jepburn had not been born with that name. There had been a 'ski and a 'vitch' in it somewhere before he had left his native Poland, and he had acquired 'Jepburn' from a packing-case he had seen lying on the quay at Dover, when he landed as a third-class passenger with exactly twenty roubles in his pocket and a passionate antipathy to the land of his birth.

So 'Mr Jepburn' he became in those lax days, when men could change their names with greater facility than they could change their shirts, and in course of time he became rich. Many and interesting were the methods he employed to acquire his wealth.

An East End Club, with a polyglot membership, started him on the road to prosperity. Then his fortune took a sudden rise as a result of judicious contracts placed by the Government. Later he formed what was subsequently known as the 'Jepburn Circle'. In various parts of the West End, he either acquired or rented houses, furnished or unfurnished, staffed them with compatriot men and women upon whom he could rely, roped in a few impecunious members of the nobility and gentry to act as hosts and touts, and in an amazingly short time had seven gambling hells in full swing.

The name of Jepburn was associated with none of these. When you went to Mrs Keluer Buizan's Belgian dances, you could not guess that Mrs Keluer Buizan owned not a stick of the handsome furniture at 43, Flowerview

Gardens, S.W.; that she was neither the lessee nor the proprietor of the house in which she lived, and that her household expenses, plus a thousand a year, were paid for by a stout little man with a bald head, who lived in a modest Bloomsbury flat.

People came to the dance and stayed to play, and the usual game was trente-et-quarante. The croupiers were Mr Jepburn's own, the profits of the game were also Mr Jepburn's, and they were invariably large, for his croupiers were even better paid than his hostesses, and the gentlemen who dealt the pack could, by the transposition of one card from the bottom to the top, decide whether black or red would win. And that colour won which was supported for the least amount.

Despite his enormous expenses, Mr Jepburn made thirty thousand pounds a year out of each of his seven houses, and it was an awkward matter for the police to deal with him, because the hostesses were people whose names were known, the game was, to all appearances, a friendly game, and the law is peculiarly respectful to the rights of individuals, especially when those individuals are in their own houses.

Anthony mentioned Jepburn's name casually when he made his promised call.

'Jepburn?' said the lady in grey carelessly. 'Yes, I know him slightly. He is rather amusing, and he knows all the best people. I suppose you thought it was strange that he should be my escort?'

Anthony smiled.

'I never think about such things,' he said, untruthfully, 'He is not a friend of yours?'

'No!'

The answer was instant, and the vehemence in her tone was unusual. She evidently realised this, for she went on in her languid voice.

'Oh, no. There was to have been a big party, and really Lady Mambury was my hostess, only three of the people, including Lady Mambury, had influenza—it was rather tiresome.' He was relieved and she was quick to notice. 'You don't like him?'

'I don't like or dislike,' said the diplomatic young man, 'but he has rather a reputation.'

'What sort of a reputation?' she asked.

Anthony was in a quandary. He had no wish that Mr Jepburn should hear at second-hand that he was suspect.

'Well... one hears things. About his gambling clubs?'

She was silent. 'Is that... a fact? I mean, is it generally believed that he is... that kind of person?'

'I shouldn't say "generally believed,"' he said, 'but that is the impression I received.'

There was another silence.

'How perfectly dreadful,' she said at last. 'Does Mr Jepburn know you?' Mr Jepburn did not know him, confessed Anthony. He might have added his gratification, for it was essential to his happiness and well-being that Mr Jepburn should be ignorant of his identity.

Three nights later Anthony Newton came into contact with that gentleman. Jepburn dined always at a famous restaurant and had a table reserved for himself.

To this table one night came Anthony Newton, to all appearances, a young man slightly drunk. And because he doggedly refused to rise from the reserved table, and seemed willing and able to create a scene, Mr Jepburn signalled to the head waiter to let him remain.

'You seem a particularly determined young man,' said Mr Jepburn, beaming over his gold-rimmed glasses.

'You bet I am,' replied Anthony, with a certain shrill accent which was foreign to him. 'Say! I'm a democrat! I don't stand for any of this reservation business. In my country all men are equal. Get that!'

'You are an American?' said Mr Jepburn.

'I surely am,' replied Anthony, 'and I'll be mighty glad to get back home again, for this is certainly the dullest little village I have ever struck. Gee, it is about as bright as Gopher Prairies! I guess you've read that book, mister?'

Mr Jepburn had never read any books except his passbook.

'You can't spend money in this little burg,' complained Anthony. 'I'm going to Paris next week to see if I can't get one small piece of gaiety into my system.'

Mr Jepburn was interested.

'It all depends upon what you call gaiety, hein? Some people call one thing gay, some another. You can get anything if you pay for it. Perhaps you cannot afford to pay, my friend.'

Anthony snorted.

'Can't afford to pay? Look here.' He thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled out a great roll of notes, which Mr Jepburn observed with peculiar interest. 'No, sir, this city is certainly Deadville all right,' said Anthony. 'Why, I tried to get some guys into a game at my hotel, and they thought I was a burglar when I wanted to make it twenty pounds to open a jack-pot! They surely did!'

Mr Jepburn's faded eyes wandered round the room, and presently he saw one of his men. He beckoned him across.

'Meet my friend Mr—?'

'Swashbuck—Arthur B. Swashbuck, from Kansas City,' said Anthony.

'My friend's name is Smith,' said Mr Jepburn. 'Maybe he can show you round town, there are plenty of things to see, hey?'

He glanced significantly at Mr Smith. Mr Smith agreed that there were many things that ought to be seen.

'I will leave you two young men to talk,' said Mr Jepburn, and shook hands sedately. 'Perhaps you will come and sit here whenever you wish.'

'You bet I will,' said Anthony.

Mr Smith was a small-featured young man, immaculately dressed.

'Who's that guy, anyway?' asked Anthony, looking after the departing Jepburn.

'Oh, he's an old gentleman I have met several times, quite a nice man,' said Smith, carelessly. 'How long are you staying in London, Mr Swashbuck?'

'Well, it depends what London can give me,' said Anthony. 'It is a blank city to me, so far.'

'It will not be blank after this night,' said Mr Smith with conviction, and he led forth his victim to the slaughter.

Mr Smith was evidently a person of some social standing. His car was small but beautiful to look upon. He had a chauffeur excellently arrayed.

'There are a lot of places here that people know nothing about,' said Smith, as they drove through the brightly lighted streets, 'and a man could search

without success from year in to year out and never hit upon the bright spots. I am taking you now to the house of a friend of mine, Mr Westbury Vach.'

'It is very kind of you,' said Anthony warmly.

'Not a bit,' replied the other. 'I have had so many kindnesses shown to me by Americans that it is a pleasure to pay back something I owe.'

Mr Westbury Vach's house was a large mansion in Cadogan Gardens, and there was apparently a dance in progress. The big saloon on the ground floor was crowded with prettily dressed women and young and reputable men. Later, Anthony was introduced into a saloon on the next floor, which was not so crowded.

'They play a little game here,' said Mr Smith carelessly. 'Trente-et- quarante. It is rather amusing to watch, but I wouldn't advise you to play, although it is the straightest game in London.'

It was also the smallest game that was played in any of Mr Jepburn's houses. His establishments were graduated according to the means of his victims...—

'Yes, it is a small game,' said Mr Smith apologetically. 'Come along, I'll show you another place.'

He had some friends, he explained in the car, a Mr and Mrs Cresslewaite. Their house was in a street off Berkeley Square. A footman admitted them and again Anthony found a dance in progress; on the next floor, however, seated round a large green table, were about fifty men and women, and here the game was certainly more exciting.

'Yes, it is trente-et-quarante,' said Mr Smith, 'with a fifty pound limit.'

At three o'clock that morning Anthony took leave of his new-found friend. He was a hundred pounds poorer than he had been when he started out, but he was more than a hundred pounds richer in experience. He had seen four of Mr Jepburn's houses.

Anthony Newton had a small city office. It served less as a place of business than a rendezvous for certain poverty-stricken young ex-officers of infantry, for now that Anthony had become semi-prosperous there was always a whisky and soda for callers. Here they forgathered, smoking until the air was thick and blue, talking less of old battles than of new struggles; and on the Monday morning following his exploits, Anthony, coming into the office, found the room in the possession of five bright young men who had shone on the battlefield, but whose glories were now somewhat diminished.

'The fact is. Tony,' said Big Bill Farrel, 'there isn't a ghost of a chance for us respectable murderers.'

Anthony surveyed the crowd in their shabby gratuity suits, relics of those halcyon days when subalterns with a hundred pounds' worth of bank notes in their pockets were as common as blackberries in September, and he wondered and he grinned.

'I am rather glad to see you fellows here this morning,' he said, 'and if you hadn't been here, I should have written to most of you.'

'What's the idea, Tony?' asked Bill.

'Brigandage,' said Tony.

Bill sighed.

'I've got to the stage now,' he said, 'where I find myself cutting black masks out of old socks and polishing up my Webley in odd moments.'

There was a murmur of agreement.

'Nobody expects preferential treatment because one has been through the war,' said Farrel. 'The only thing we ask is, that it shouldn't be regarded as a drawback. I'm thinking seriously of holding up the bank in my neighbourhood. It is run by three conscientious objectors and a spiritualist!'

'You can cut that out,' said Tony promptly, 'and listen to your uncle's new system of ethics. Smouching is an ancient and honourable practice recognised in the best army circles, but it can only be carried out in a gentlemanly manner if operations are directed against a sap-headed government, a quartermaster-general, or a recognised tyrant. Don't you fellows recognise that the surplus of wealth is in the hands of two classes—the honourable and the dishonourable—the honest and the thief? And as there are quite a large surplus of thieves to operate upon, you needn't worry about holding up a post office or busting a bank! The thing is to find a man with ill-gotten gains. If he is a murderer, too, so much the better. We, being soldiers of considerable merit and valour, find ourselves still at war with the enemies of honest finance and lawful behaviour!'

'That is the line, Tony,' said Bob. 'But where is the victim?'

'The victim is on view daily from seven until eight at Parent's Restaurant. He is a bloodsucker, a blackmailer, a man of no country, an eater-up of gratuities, and he is other things as well.'

He looked round the crowded room at the youthful and eager faces.

'Boys,' he said solemnly, 'my several names are Ali Baba, Chu-Chin- Chow and Robin Hood, and I am getting together a band for one performance only. The path of glory may lead you to Wandsworth Gaol but it is unlikely. You will have the sympathies of the public if you are pinched, though that might not prevent your doing time. Are you with me?'

The yell they raised was very much resented by the indent firm of solicitors that occupied the suite below.

'Go down and tell your boss,' said Anthony to the clerk who was sent up to expostulate, 'that we are extremely sorry to have inconvenienced him, and that if the worst comes to the worst he is retained for the defence.'

The bewildered clerk went down with the message, which did not enlighten his employer to any great extent.

On the following Wednesday night, when the street was practically deserted, a large car drew up to the door of 903, Cadogan Gardens. It was an old car, and it made wheezy noises. It was entitled to utter some protest, for it was grossly overloaded. From a body designed to hold four people, or five at a squeeze, eight men descended.

Tony knocked at the door and it was opened by the liveried servant. Before he could shout, before he could reach the little bell in the wainscoting. Big Bill Farrel's hand was over his mouth, he was jerked to the floor, and a voice whispered horrific threats in his ear.

One man took his station at the door of the saloon where dancing was in progress; the remainder, led by Anthony, raced up the stairs into the gambling saloon.

'Keep quiet!' shouted Anthony in an authoritative voice, 'you are all under arrest. Take that man, sergeant.' He pointed to the shrinking croupier.

Instantly there was a babel of sound, a shriek, and a woman fainted, but these were casualties which could not be avoided. Anthony produced a large canvas bag from his pocket, swept all the stock of money at the croupier's side into its depth, while Bill Farrel marshalled the servants, and marching them into a small adjoining room locked them in.

'I know all your names and addresses,' said Anthony, 'and I do not intend arresting you tonight. You will remain here in this room until my sergeant, who will be on guard outside, allows you to go.'

Five minutes later the car was driving wildly to the house off Berkeley Square. Here the procedure was the same, except that the liveried man at the door made less resistance. Anthony ran up the stairs and burst into the gambling room and stopped dead.

For the first two people he saw were Jepburn and the lady in grey. She sprang to her feet in alarm at the sight of the men who crowded the doorway. Jepburn, less energetic, glared around and rose more slowly.

'What is the meaning of this?' he asked, but Anthony did not answer. He was looking at the girl, whose wide-eyed horror was pathetic to see.

'The police,' she breathed and then Anthony woke from his trance.

'All the players stand against the wall,' he commanded, and in three strides he was at the croupier's side, and swept a huge pile of bank notes into the open mouth of his bag. This done, he rejoined the girl.

'I want to speak to you,' he said quietly.

He took her outside to the deserted landing.

'What are you doing here, Mrs Martin?' he asked quietly.

'I'm—I'm the new hostess,' she faltered.

'The new hostess?' repeated Anthony, unable to believe his ears, 'what do you mean?'

'I'm in Jepburn's debt. He holds three thousand pounds' worth of IOUs of mine,' she said and avoided his eyes.

'But I thought—' he began.

'You thought I was rich,' she said bitterly, 'but I'm not. Poor Jim left very little money, and that I have—spent.'

'This way?' he jerked his head to the room and she nodded.

'Just wait.'

He went back to Jepburn, expostulating in strange and excited tones in a language which was half French and half Polish, to the imperturbable Farrel. He turned a glance of hate on Anthony.

'So you were the police all the time, eh? You were very clever, hein! By God, if I had known who you were, I'd have—'

'Shut up,' said Anthony. 'You've got some IOUs of Mrs Martin's —where are they?'

The man's eyes narrowed.

'Why do you want them?' he said.

'It comes to this, Jepburn—I either put you where I can find you and have you deported to your own country, or I withdraw my men and say no more about this business, on condition that you hand me Mrs Martin's IOUs.'

Mr Jepburn was a quick thinker.

'You shall have them,' he said, 'if you will accompany me to my house. But what of the money you have taken—?'

'That is going to a charity,' said Anthony virtuously. 'The Ex- Officers' Subsistence Fund.'

6. ANTHONY THE BOOKMAKER

'Human nature,' said Anthony Newton, 'is dominated by two vices —credulity and stupidity. It is said that a fool is born every minute, which is true, but it takes a long time for him to grow up, and the chances are that somebody will skin him before you meet him.'

'Spoken like a heartless criminal,' said Big Bill Farrel lazily.

They were at dinner at the Empress Hotel, and they were dining on the fat of the land.

'I make these few remarks,' said Anthony, looking at his cigar thoughtfully, 'because I have just come from an interview with the amiable Inspector Parrit of Scotland Yard. Something of an exploit, carried out apparently by persons with no particular regard for the law, has come to the ears of the police. In other words, the story is going around official circles than an unofficial police force raided two gambling houses, got away with eight thousand pounds, and added to the infamy of their conduct by robbing Mr Jepburn, the noble proprietor, of certain objects of art which took their fancy when they visited him in his flat.'

'I didn't take the gold snuff box,' said Bill Farrel.

'I did,' admitted Anthony calmly. 'I have a passion for gold snuff boxes set with rubies. Besides, it has an historical interest. I believe it came down from one of the Czars. It was a gift of Peter the Great to Mr Jepburn's ancestor. Not that Mr Jepburn ever had an ancestor worth mentioning, but it is a weakness of rich men to acquire ancestry at his time of life.'

'What did the police say?' asked Farrel, interested.

'They knew I was the villain,' said Anthony coolly, 'and that they hoped I wouldn't make a practice of impersonating the constabulary. I asked whether it had been stated that the raiders had described themselves as police at all, and he admitted that they hadn't, and that it was the guilty consciences of the ladies and gentlemen who patronised Mr Jepburn's establishments, which led them to believe that the eight stalwart and good looking men, who had marched so sternly, who had interrupted so rudely their little game, had some association with Scotland Yard.'

He chuckled softly.

'It isn't a laughing matter,' said the serious Bill. 'I'm sure that that crazy Greek who attacked you the other night in the street was set on the job by Jepburn.'

'You are not surer than I am,' said Anthony, carefully removing the ashes of his cigar. In fact, I saw Jepburn this morning, and told him that if it happened again, that a lunatic foreigner tried to knife me on the King's highway, I should come round to his flat with my confederates, tie him to a bed and tickle the soles of his feet with feathers until he went mad.'

Farrel gasped.

That's a pretty blood-thirsty threat.'

'He wouldn't understand any other,' said Anthony. 'These eastern people are not to be dealt with in any other way. Where is the gang?'

Bill grinned.

'The gang is enjoying its ill gotten gain according to its several temperaments. Dinky Brown is opening a hat shop off Regent Street. Tommy Barlow is working a new racing system. Foreman has bought a pub.'

Anthony nodded.

'You didn't make much out of the job yourself,' said Farrel.

'I got my whack,' replied Anthony, 'and quite enough for my little investment.'

'Your investment?' said the puzzled Bill.

Anthony nodded, felt in his waistcoat pocket, and produced a small newspaper cutting.

Bill took it from his hand and read:

'Sleeping partner wanted with a thousand pounds. Huge profit; no risks. Apply Box 943 Daily Megaphone.'

'The gentleman's name is Yarrow,' explained Anthony, between puffs at his cigar, 'and he is a bookmaker—'

'A bookmaker,' said the incredulous Bill.

Anthony nodded.

'A bookmaker with a fairly strange record. He has had other partners who have put in a thousand pounds, only this time he is not going to get a sleeping partner.'

'But what sense is there in investing a thousand pounds in a shady bookmaker's business,' said Bill, 'besides, he won't have any clients.'

'Oh yes he will,' said Anthony. 'He will have at least one client. Yarrow's father,' he explained, 'is something big on the Stock Exchange. He's big but he's a crook. In fact, he is as much of a rascal as his son. But don't forget that, Bill,' he emphasised his point with his cigar, 'that Yarrow senior is a man of substance.'

'Mind you don't get stung,' warned Bill, and Anthony smiled.

He had his interview with Mr Silvester Yarrow the following morning. Mr Yarrow occupied two rooms on the third floor of a building off Piccadilly. It was handsomely furnished and equipped with the usual tape machine and telephone.

Mr Yarrow himself was a sleek, perfectly dressed young man, whose hair was heavily brilliantined. He brought to the outer office, to where he came to meet the newcomer, a delicate fragrance of some exotic scent, and he offered a white, well manicured hand to his caller.

'Good morning, Mr Newton,' he said with a smile. 'Will you come into my office?'

Anthony followed him into a room which might more fittingly and accurately have been described as a boudoir. Mr Yarrow liked pretty things, hangings,

heavy carpets of a peculiarly aesthetic hue, heavy notepaper and purple sealing wax.

He was a thin, sallow-faced young man, with bright black eyes, and his voice was gentle, even languorous.

'I don't keep a clerk. One can never trust those fellows,' he explained. 'Now, Mr Newton, you have read my proposition: will you come into the business?'

'That is my intention,' said Anthony, 'except—' Mr Yarrow shot a swift glance at him. 'Except that I do not like the idea of being just an investor; I should like to play some active part.'

Mr Yarrow's eyes went down to the desk.

'Do you know anything about bookmaking—it is a perfectly horrid profession and I am awfully ashamed of being associated with it,' he said, 'but one must live.'

'I don't know anything about it at all,' said Anthony, 'except that people send you money to put on horses. If they win, you pay them: and if they lose, they pay you.'

Mr Yarrow's smile was beatific.

'It is interesting, I admit it, devilishly interesting,' he said. 'Very well, if you wish to work and if you do not mind taking the desk at the outer office, I shall be happy for you to play an active part. As I say, I have no clerk, and you will be able to answer the telephone, open the telegrams, and make a note upon a voucher form of all the bets which are made.'

It seemed a rather dull business to Anthony. The whole of the afternoon nobody telephoned, no telegrams came.

'It is the first day of Newmarket,' explained Mr Yarrow, 'there is very little betting.' He looked at his watch. 'Go out and have a cup of tea like a good chap, and when you come back, I'll go.'

Anthony thought it an excellent idea. He was gone a quarter of an hour and when he returned, the face of Mr Yarrow was long and lugubrious.

'A perfectly vexing thing has happened,' he said. 'Just after you went, a fellow named Bertie Feener called up and had fifty on "Merriboy" and the infernal thing has won at six to one!'

'Fine,' said Anthony, watching him rise and disappear. The next afternoon was much more busy. Strange people called on the telephone, made bets of a very

small amount, which were duly recorded and reported to the head of the business, who sat at ease in his scented room, polishing his nails incessantly. At four o'clock Anthony went out for a cup of tea and was met by Mr Yarrow on his return.

'That fellow Feener has got the devil's own luck,' he said. 'He's just had a hundred on a horse that started at four to one!'

'Good business,' said Anthony heartily, 'I suppose you have these runs of luck —'

'Oh yes,' said the other palpably relieved that his partner had taken the matter so calmly. 'And then, of course, we get a run of luck the other way, and thousands simply roll into the office.'

On the following afternoon Anthony did not go out to tea.

'It is too expensive,' he said, 'and besides, I'd like to talk to Bertie Feener.'

Mr Yarrow seemed a little uncomfortable. 'Hang the fellow,' he said, 'I wish he'd have a thousand on a horse that wasn't trying, but that's the sort of thing he'll never do.'

Apparently Bertie was not betting that day, for he did not call up, and the few bets which were made over the telephone showed a profit to the firm.

The fourth day was a Friday. About three o'clock in the afternoon the bell rang, and Yarrow went hurriedly to the telephone. Tony pretended to be very busy at his desk, but he paid particular attention to the monosyllabic answers which the usually voluble and polite Mr Yarrow was returning to the person at the other end of the wire. Presently Mr Yarrow grew more genial.

'Yes, old thing,' he said, 'certainly, old thing, I'll do so with pleasure. Two hundred pounds you say, three hundred, good!'

The tape at Tony's elbow began to whirr, then to tick furiously. The result of the 2.30 race was coming through.

'Yes, yes... I'll lay it to you, three hundred pounds—certainly.' Mr Yarrow glanced across at Tony and whispered: 'What has won?'

'Black Emperor' said Tony, and a look of pain crept into Mr Yarrow's face.

'Now, isn't that annoying? The devil's backed another winner,' he said.

'Ask him if he's sure he meant "Black Emperor"?' hissed Tony, with an agonised expression, and the obliging Mr Yarrow nodded.

'Is that you Bertie?' he said, 'what was that horse you wanted to back for three hundred? Black Emperor? You're sure? You are certain that is the horse? Well, you lucky devil, it has won!'

He hung up the receiver and came disconsolately across to the tape.

'Isn't that exasperating?' he asked. His tone suggested enthusiasm rather than sorrow. 'Just my luck to have him back the horse a minute before the message came through.'

He glanced at the tape and his face changed.

'Black Emperor didn't win,' he said sharply. 'Rare-bell won.'

'My mistake,' said Anthony coolly.

By Mr Yarrow's annoyance it almost seemed that he was sorry the firm of Yarrow had won three hundred pounds.

'Deuced careless of you, old fellow,' he said, trying hard to recover some of his natural politeness. 'I told Bertie it had won. He may take away his business from us.'

'That would break my heart,' said Anthony.

He saw Bill Farrel that night.

'How's it going?' said Bill.

'Fine,' said Tony with enthusiasm. 'But Yarrow has no clients at all. He fakes them while I'm out. The whole thing is deliciously simple. As soon as my back turns, some mythical person telephones through a winner which takes four or five hundred out of my pocket. When my funds are exhausted, friend Yarrow will get another partner.'

'Who is this Bertie Feener?'

'There is no "Bertie Feener"—he is like Mrs Harris. When Yarrow was having that delightful conversation which resulted in his friend backing "Black Emperor," his finger was on the phone rest. He had finished the real conversation with whoever it was three minutes before.'

The next afternoon, to Mr Yarrow's surprise, as it was a big race day, Anthony went out to tea. Before he went, he asked a rather important question.

'Have you a limit to the bets you lay to Mr Feener?' he asked.

'No,' said the other with a smile. 'It wouldn't be advisable, would it, old boy,

when he is so much in our debt? No, give the jolly old rascal enough rope and he'll hang himself.'

On Anthony's return Mr Yarrow had a tale of sorrow to relate. He was stalking up and down the office giving evidence of great mental distress.

'Confound that beastly chap,' he moaned. 'I wish to heaven I'd never had his name on the books.'

'Bertie Feener?' asked Anthony innocently. 'What has he done?'

'Had two hundred on a four to one chance! You had hardly got down the stairs before the beggar rung up. At first I thought of turning him down, and then like a fool I laid him the bet.'

'So we lost eight hundred pounds?' asked Anthony thoughtfully.

Mr Yarrow nodded.

'It is beastly hard luck on you, old boy,' he said. 'Such a thing has never happened in this office before. Why, we've practically lost over a thousand pounds this week.'

'It can't be helped,' said Anthony cheerfully. 'Go and get your tea, Yarrow, I'll make the cheque out to Mr Feener if you will give me his address when you come back.'

Mr Yarrow bounced forth gaily.

The last race had been run and the result had been through twenty minutes when he returned.

'Well, old boy, anything happened?' he asked cheerfully, as he hung up his hat.

'Yes,' said Anthony, 'Bertie Feener came through and had twelve hundred pounds on "Blue Diamond." We are square with Bertie now.'

Mr Yarrow looked at him open-mouthed. 'Bertie Feener did what?' he asked hollowly. It was as though he could not believe his ears.

'He had twelve hundred pounds on "Blue Diamond". It was beaten in the last race but one,' said Anthony confidentially. 'As a matter of fact, he rang up just as you were going down the stairs, and for a moment I hesitated as to whether I should lay him the bet, but then realising that you had no limit, I thought we'd take a chance. Congratulations, partner.'

He put out his hand, but Mr Yarrow did not take it.

'But Bertie Feener went away to the country: he caught the four o'clock train, in fact, he told me so when I was talking to him this afternoon on the telephone.'

'He telephoned from the railway station,' said Anthony calmly.

Mr Yarrow's sallow face was white.

'Very good,' he said.

'I don't think we'll have these telephone bets. It is much more satisfactory if our clients send telegrams,' said Anthony.

'Very good,' said Mr Yarrow shortly.

'How providential it was,' mused Anthony, 'that I was here when Bertie called! May I call him Bertie? You don't think he would be very much annoyed, do you?'

Mr Yarrow at his desk did not raise his eyes.

'If you had been here you might have hesitated about laying such a huge wager,' said Anthony. 'Happily we are all square on the week.'

'I don't see how you can do a telegraph business,' Mr Yarrow was stung into saying. 'No starting price offices accept more than fifty up to the time the race starts, and very few accept that.'

'Let us be the exception,' said Anthony, and he saw a glad light come into his partner's eyes.

'Why not,' said Anthony recklessly, 'give them an option of putting a thousand or two thousand up to the "off" as long as they sign their names to their telegrams and we know them. Why, Yarrow, we might get a tremendous business that way!'

'So we might,' said Mr Yarrow with a return to his old cheerfulness. 'I'll think it out and let you know on Monday morning.'

On Monday morning Mr Yarrow was almost gay.

'You are a deuced clever fellow, Newton,' he said. 'I've been thinking it out, and your scheme is a jolly good idea. I consulted my governor, who doesn't approve of this business, as you can well understand, and he says it is an excellent notion. He does a bit of racing himself, Newton, in fact, he owns a half a dozen horses, and he says that if we are willing to make those terms, he is quite willing to put all his business in our hands. We'll have a new code

typewritten and sent to our clients, so that they can wire to the fullest extent without exciting comment. What do you say to that?'

To judge by Tony Newton's attitude, facial expression and gurgling speech, he was beside himself with delight.

'We'll try it anyway for a week,' he said. 'On Wednesday I have to go down into Gloucester, but there is nothing much happening on Wednesday.'

'There is racing at Hurst Park,' said the other, breathing heavily and trying to appear wholly indifferent. 'But we shan't have any very heavy betting on that day. There is nothing to bet on. To what part of Gloucester are you going?'

'To Gloucester itself. I shall be back by night. Will you send me a telegram if anything unusual happens?'

Anthony left by the ten o'clock train which had the advantage of stopping at Reading. Mr Yarrow who, to make absolutely sure, had come down to Paddington to see his partner safely out of London, did not know about the stop at Reading.

'It is deuced curious my being here,' he said, at the carriage door, 'but I've got to meet an aunt who is coming up from Cardiff in a quarter of an hour, so I thought I'd stroll round and have a look at you. What time will you be back?'

'About six o'clock tonight,' said Anthony. 'I shall only be an hour in the town.'

At Reading he chartered a taxi to carry him the not very considerable distance which separated him from Hurst Park. Mr Yarrow senior did not know Anthony, but Anthony knew Mr Yarrow senior. A tallish, bent man, with a loose lip and a pendulous nose, Mr Yarrow had, in his day, many choice adventures which, were he writing the recollections of his racing career, he would never have put into print. A Justice of the Peace, a prospective candidate for Parliament, his wealth was held to atone for the method by which it was secured. Not that Mr Yarrow was ever guilty nowadays of the indiscretion which had made his name a term of reproach in the best sporting and book-making circles.

The third race of the day was one of those events which are frequently found on the card at most big meetings, a Foal Plate for horses which had been entered as yearlings by their optimistic owners. Three years after their entry, all that had survived the severe test of the racecourse, met to do battle for a thousand pound trophy. There remained exactly three horses of the original ninety-five entered, and it was on this race, as Anthony had guessed, when he searched the programme, that Mr Yarrow would help assist his son to the

fulfilment of his heart's desire —which was the acquirement of Anthony's thousand pounds.

Of the three horses left, obviously only two had a chance. The third, as he had proved on every racecourse in England, might have won a selling race if the class had been extremely poor, but Mr Yarrow was taking no chances.

Tony, watching him, with his back to the unsaddling enclosure, saw him take down three telegraph forms and write on each. He wormed his way into the field immediately behind Yarrow, and saw the old man pass the three forms into the cubby hole where the clerk sat. They were all addressed to 'Yoxi, London,' Mr Yarrow's telegraphic address, and they each had a name of a different horse with a code word 'Yail', which Yarrow and he had agreed should stand for two thousand pounds.

There is no sin in backing three horses in one race. Many sportsmen have done this and are still walking about, though sadly deficient in shoe leather. There was nothing exactly criminal in backing three horses in a race where there were only three runners. It is, to put it mildly, foolish, but it is not sinful.

Anthony strolled into the ring.

'Bird's Eye' was favourite, and an odds on favourite: 'Morton's Pride' was second favourite, two to one against, and the third horse was quoted at twenty to one.

He stood in the ring and watched the race being run. It was less of a race than a procession, for 'Bird's Eye' led from start to finish, and won in a canter.

Satisfied, Anthony went back to London and at a quarter past six strolled into his office.

Mr Yarrow made no attempt to conceal his gratification.

'Old boy, we are done in the eye!' he said.

'What has happened?' asked Anthony.

'My governor had two thousand on "Bird's Eye". It is unfortunate, old chap, but there, what can you do? Here is the telegram, time all correct.'

Anthony took the telegram.

'Yes,' he said, 'that's in order.'

'We've lost a thousand, and that's just about burst the till, unless you can get a little more capital,' said Mr Yarrow.

'I reckon that we've made three thousand,' said Anthony thoughtfully.

'What do you mean?' gasped Yarrow.

'Where are the other two telegrams your father sent?' asked Tony.

Mr Yarrow Hushed red.

'What the devil do you mean?' he demanded, but Anthony stopped him with a gesture.

'Your father sent three wires, one backing each horse. The only chance of his winning from us would have been if an outsider had come in first. As a matter of fact, he finished so far last, that I doubt if he has passed the winning post yet. You will greatly oblige me, Yarrow, if you call on your parent this evening and tell him that unless three thousand pounds is placed in my hands by tomorrow morning, I will have you both arrested for conspiracy to defraud. I am well aware, and you need not tell me, that it is in itself a felony to demand money by threats of prosecution, but there it is, Yarrow; I am sinning with my eyes open.'

'I tell you there were no other telegrams,' screamed the young man.

'There are two others,' said Anthony, patiently, 'but you have burnt them or got rid of them some way. They are probably in your trouser pocket, crumpled up. Anyway, that's an easy thing to find out, because the post office would give me copies of all the telegrams your father sent from Hurst Park. Now be a good lad and see the old man, and tell him I give him till twelve o'clock, failing which, I will go to Scotland Yard and swear an information. And,' he added, standing at the door as he walked out, 'tell your fond parent that I prefer bank notes of small denomination.'

7. THE PLUM-PUDDING GIRL

No man,' said Tony Newton oracularly, 'was ever ruined by taking small profits.'

'Seems familiar to me,' said Pinkey. 'I must have read it in a book.'

They were dining together at the Sorbet, which, in spite of its name, was known by press, police and punters, the three supreme estates of the realm, as 'hot'. About the Sorbet a story can be told, though, for the moment, that page

may be skipped.

'The curious thing about me,' said the reminiscent Tony, 'is that I'm never beaten. I've made money out of the greatest besters in town; I've diddled confidence men and I've had money from a moneylender who went to bed Stahlstein and woke to find himself one of the proud Macgregors, and never even paid him back. I have met in single combat the Scot and the Armenian, and I have wrenched from their maws the wherewithal to live. The pup that other men buy licks my hand and develops into a pedigree show dog.'

'The funny thing about you,' said Pinkey, 'is your unblushing modesty.'

Pinkey Stephens was a lawyer who lived in the Temple and earned a very good living from writing love stories for cheap magazines. From his practice as a barrister-at-law of the Middle Temple, he derived an income which was more than sufficient to pay for his cigarettes and nearly covered his bus-fares.

Pinkey was young and bald. From brow to occiput he was all shining pink. He smoked a big pipe and never rode on buses.

'I'm sorry to hear you say that,' said Tony thoughtfully. 'I always thought that diffidence was my weakness. Maybe I'm wrong. But there is the fact. I founded my slender fortune on taking money from a crowd of crooks. Success begets success. The name of the competent man flashes from lip to lip. For example, I have been sent for by an eminent city firm to carry out delicate negotiations when, apparently, other—I will not say "better"—men have failed.'

'Who sent for you—Rothschilds?' asked Pinkey, and Tony shook his head.

'I am not at liberty to say,' he replied gravely, as he rose from the table, leaving Pinkey to pay the bill. 'Excuse me if I rush off; I have some papers to—look through.'

'I haven't read the Star either,' said Pinkey. 'What won that apprentice race?'

Tony Newton had his weaknesses. He admitted them, but in such a manner as to suggest that they were in reality the underpinnings of strength. The most deplorable of these was his passion for beauty. It was, he often said, a purely detached passion and wholly impersonal.

He saw the plum pudding girl as he came downstairs from his expensive bedroom in Russell Square next morning, and wondered why, if Nature insisted upon creating anything quite as helpless as a girl, she did not make a good job of it and create something good to look at. And the plum pudding girl was not good to look at. She was plump and dumpy. Her hair had the

appearance of having been dressed with a vacuum cleaner; there was a certain irregularity of complexion which suggested that she had been sunburnt through a strainer; and when she smiled, as she frequently did, for she had a friendly disposition, she told all the world that the interior of a dental parlour was terra incognita.

'Who is the beauty?' asked Tony of the porter.

'Miss Jibble, sir—Miss Eliza Jibble.'

'She looks it,' said Tony ungallantly.

He thought of her as the plum pudding girl—a plum pudding made by a cook who wasn't really a cook, but was taking the cook's place whilst she was on a holiday.

The first time he had seen her was in the lounge. Miss Jibble was taking tea with a dark, fat young man and a very stout and elderly woman who must have been Miss Jibble's mother. She afforded the only possible explanation for Miss Jibble. Mrs Jibble wore diamonds wherever diamonds could be worn.

They were talking together eagerly and in low tones when he came opposite the curtained opening. Standing there, he saw the young man pinch Miss Jibble's ear playfully, and Tony shuddered.

'You'll 'ave to take that off, Liz,' said Miss Jibble's mother, and at that moment the plum pudding girl, looking up, saw Tony and snatched her plump hand from the table.

All this Tony noted idly as he passed out of the hotel. This happened a few days before he knew her name and before there came to him the extraordinary commission from Tanker and Tanker.

Tony was comparatively well off, and was determined to be weller. He had that sublime faith in himself which is the chief asset of the general and the commercial traveller. Tony felt that, if there was anything easier than winning a battle, it was selling a line of last year's hats to an open-air colony that wore sandals, went bareheaded, and lived exclusively on love and monkey-nuts.

He had found the world, on his return from active service, a hard and bitter place, plastered with notices that read: 'No ex-officer or ex-convict need apply.' Yet he applied, being one and seriously considering the advisability of being the other.

Leaving the hotel, he walked briskly cityward, swinging a nearly gold-headed cane and glancing from time to time at his fine platinum watch. His dark suit

was new. He wore a black homburg and carried pigskin gloves.

The office of Tanker and Tanker is up a narrow flight of stairs leading from almost as narrow a side street in the city of London, where, from morning until night, three heavy vans obstruct the traffic and make the road impassable except for the attenuated and the reckless. The city is full of such streets, and each street has its three vans and its gloomy drivers, waiting doggedly for the van ahead to sink through the earth. Tony went up the stairs two at a time, squeezed himself through a door that was just big enough to make the interior draughty and, by manoeuvring his feet, came to the high counter where, behind a brass grille, sat a woman who, Tony liked to believe, had once been a barmaid and had seen better times.

'Mr Tanker is expecting you; will you step in?' she asked sadly, and Tony went sideways through another door and into a room which overlooked the vans.

An elderly man at the worn desk looked over his glasses at the visitor.

'Ah, Mr Newton: come in, come in. What a glorious day, what a glorious day!'

'It is, it is,' said Tony.

Mr Tanker had a peculiar habit of repeating almost every commonplace he uttered.

'Sit down, sit down. Now, Mr Newton, I think I can settle this business in a very short time—a very short time. I wrote to you because I'd heard about you,' said Mr Tanker, speaking very rapidly. 'Young man, eh? Young man? Full of life and go and all that sort of thing? Got money?'

'I have a little,' said Tony modestly.

'Of course you have! My friend Belter told me that you were thinking of buying up the Medusa Hotel.'

Tony had thought of buying up many hotels. In his spare time he cultivated estate agents and his room was full of their publications. And beautiful publications they were, showing, as they did, photographically (and on art paper) a view of The Hall from the Park, a glimpse of the Rosery from the Terrace, the Banqueting Room from the Music Gallery, and the Gardens from almost anywhere. He used to lie in bed and open his mail, undecided as to whether he would be happy at Fothingay Manor ('383 acres: more can be acquired, 4 cottages: every modern convenience') or at Soke Priory ('Owner has spent nearly 10,000 on improvements. Sandy soil and glorious view of the Chilterns').

And then he used to get out of bed and check his passbook to make absolutely sure whether the bank manager, in writing that he was £1 7s 4d overdrawn, wasn't guilty of the grossest libel.

'Yes; but I'm not buying property just now,' said Tony. He had no idea that Tanker and Tanker were house agents. Their letterhead had simply said 'General and Confidential Agency'. And there is nothing confidential about an estate agent. He has no reticence whatever except about defective drains and leaking roofs.

'I see, I see,' said Mr Tanker, not for a moment put out. 'And really, Mr Newton, I think you are wise. I think you are wise. House Property is a drug in the market and a bad investment, a bad investment.'

He wasn't an estate agent, Tony decided.

'What I want to see you about is a very delicate matter. I will make a confession to you, shall I—shall I?'

'Do, do,' said Tony.

'I came to your hotel last night specially to see you! Not to speak to you, oh no, oh no! I just wanted to see you. I am a remarkable judge of character. I wasn't sure that you were the right kind of man. Not even after I had your letter. But now I know. Mr Newton, you are the man; you are the man.'

He extended his hand. Tony took it. Even though it was empty.

'Now here is the case in a nutshell,' said Mr Tanker briskly. 'We are not lawyers, I and my son: I have been a solicitor, but—well, I'm not now. There was an unfortunate happening, years ago—I was not responsible, being abroad at the time, and I was made a scapegoat. But no matter, no matter!'

He waved his hand airily: such a little thing as having been struck off the rolls was not worth discussing.

'But although we are not lawyers, we have clients. People of title, people of immense wealth. Immense! And naturally, we have some curious and remarkable commissions.'

'Naturally,' said Tony with great heartiness. 'Anything over ten per cent is both remarkable and curious.'

Mr Tanker frowned.

'I am not referring to—er—monetary commissions: no, no. Although we are paid well and pay well.'

He opened a drawer of his desk and took out a bundle of papers tied with red tape. The tape he did not remove, but looked up at Tony. 'Have you ever written love letters?' he asked unexpectedly.

'Hundreds,' said Tony. 'I might even say thousands.'

Mr Tanker nodded.

'Would you, for a fee, let us say £20 a letter, write love letters to one whom you have not seen—let me explain,' he said as he saw the look of blank astonishment on the other's face. 'My client is a wealthy widow: she has a daughter, young, gloriously beautiful, romantic. Unfortunately this unhappy girl has formed an attachment for the chauffeur of Her Grace—forget that I said "Her Grace" and think of her only as a woman of the world. My client has sent away the chauffeur. The girl is pining. She is not in love with him—she is in love with love, if you understand what I mean.'

He stopped and eyed his visitor pathetically.

'What do you want me to do?' asked Tony, who was now intrigued.

'Write to her: say that you have seen her in the park. Tell her the very sight of her—is—er sunshine and all that sort of stuff. Say you—er—prostrate yourself at her feet. Dear me, dear me, you know what to write: We want to get the chauffeur out of the girl's life: we want to drive his memory forth. Le clou chase les autres. My French is bad, but you understand: "One nail drives out another." The only question is, and I am being perfectly frank with you, is your style sufficiently flowery?'

'Don't worry about that,' said Tony. 'I've got a style that makes flowers look like watercress. Do I sign the letters?'

Mr Tanker shrugged his thin shoulders.

'An initial would do: you can sign if you wish. I don't want the girl to fall in love with you, Mr Newton. She is an heiress in her own right, and that would mean complications. The only thing I demand is that you shall not see her without my consent, and that all letters come through me.'

'I'll think about it,' said Tony.

That night he wrote to Mr Tanker and enclosed a sample letter. It described at length the physiological reactions which had followed his first glance at her 'flower face'. It described the action of his heart and pulse that she had produced, with the exactitude one might have expected from an enthusiastic medical student after his first clinic. He mentioned how his brain reeled and

the colour of the world toned up three shades, and he spoke of the memory that he had carried to his lonely room and how he treasured one little blade of grass that she had trodden with her fairy feet.

The reply came by hand. It was a letter containing twenty £1 notes. Later in the morning, Mr Tanker rang him up.

'Excellent: pray continue. The second letter, if I may suggest, should be just a trifle more passionate—just a trifle. And in re blade of grass: the lady keeps to the paths, which are asphalt. You don't mind my mentioning this?'

'I am greatly obliged,' said Tony. 'Do I get any reply?'

'It is possible,' said the diplomatic Tanker. 'If any come they will be forwarded.'

The answer arrived two days later. It was ecstatic. It told him that already the memory of a horrid affair had almost faded from her mind. And how she longed to see her unknown lover. Was he ever at Baden-Baden or Aix?

Tony looked up the hotel Bradshaw to find the cost of living at these resorts. He wrote again, and the second letter covered ten sheets. When he received from Tanker the twenty pounds, he felt that it was a shame to take the money. The third letter went on the following Sunday. It was a Nature letter and dealt familiarly with the stars, moon and skies, lilies, clouds, roses, scented nights, seas, winds (gentle), dreams, visions and Baden-Baden.

Within twenty-four hours a letter came to him. It was the outpourings of a young and girlish heart; it spoke of dogs, dresses, bishops, love, motor-cycles, heaven, hair-styles, death and marrons glacees.

Tony choked as he read and, without one mercenary thought, sat up half the night replying, and was only stopped when the supply of stationery ran out. He sent the letter off next day to Tanker. The porter, weighing the package in his hand, suggested that it would be cheaper to send it by parcel post.

The day passed slowly; the morning brought no balm to his anguished soul. He loved her, this little duchess. Her name was Phyllis. Lady Phyllis Blank. He sat back in his chair, dreaming of her. The limpid purity of her grave blue eyes. The glory of her golden hair. He knew that she was petite and beautiful, with a complexion that was like ivory. She sang, of course. He pictured her in a dusky room with French windows that opened to the slope of the lawn. Far away, the wooded hills stood purple against the amethystine skies. And she was playing a strange tune, plaintive, sad with the sadness of dead years and loves that were yet fragrant memories.

On the third day, the letter came, and to his surprise it came direct to him. 'Anthony Newton, Esq', and his address. The first words thrilled him.

'My own darling dream boy,' it began. She wanted to see him, to be near him. She wanted to look into his eyes and hear the soft caress of his voice—

Tony wiped his forehead and smiled seraphically—yet tenderly. He was all in all to her. Relations, wealth, even amorous chauffeurs, were as nothing. And so it went on until the postscript.

There was a postscript.

'Oh, Anthony, what am I to do? My mother has found one of your letters, and my dear brother is furious. He says that I must marry you at once.'

Anthony staggered for a second. He was in his room, happily. He would have hated to be seen dithering in public.

'He says there was an excuse for the chauffeur holding my hand when he was driving, and he even forgave him for the damage he did to the radiator when the car hit the tree, but he cannot and will not forgive me. He is turning me out! Anthony, I come to you, my love!'

Tony crushed the letter into his pocket, thrust his hat upon his head and went down the stairs at a rush.

He seized the porter.

'If any woman comes here and asks for me—I'm out. Went abroad yesterday. If a man comes, tell him I went abroad last week. If she asks you whether I'm rich, say no! If she says: "Is he good-looking?" say NO!'

'I can easily say that, sir,' said the porter.

Tony jumped into the first taxi that he found and rode furiously cityward. The street in which the office of Tanker and Tanker was situated was blocked by three dark brown vans. Numbly Tony recalled that last time there were three dark red vans. He squeezed into the outer office and without a word to the prisoner behind the grille, turned the handle and fell into Mr Tanker's presence. And Mr Tanker looked at him over his glasses and beamed.

'Come for your money, Mr Newton? I was just about to send it—to send it.'

'No.' Tony was breathless. 'I haven't—don't want money. She wants to marry me!'

'The lady you were writing to? Of course!'

'What!' screeched Tony.

'Of course, of course! What is wrong?'

'Her brother found my letters. Now Mr Tanker, you've got to get me out of this. I want a note from you stating the circumstances under which I wrote to her.'

Mr Tanker shook his head sorrowfully. 'That would be betraying the confidence of a client. I will go further and say this, Mr—er—Newton: that I shall deny any knowledge of the business. You were well paid for any risk you took. I am sorry—very sorry. But I do not know you officially.'

Tony sat in the chair and gasped.

'The confidence of a client is a sacred trust,' Mr Tanker went on soberly. 'We would no more dream of betraying that confidence than—er—we should dream of standing on our heads—our heads.'

'But I'll take you into court, you old scoundrel!' said Anthony in a fury; and Mr Tanker smiled sadly.

'How? It is impossible. You would find it difficult even to get my name mentioned—except that you might make certain charges, if—er—a breach of promise case came along. But there would be no proof. Perhaps, no breach of promise case.'

'Who is this woman?' demanded Tony, mastering his emotions.

'She is a lady of a very good family and she loves you. Make no mistake about that—she loves you. In fact, she loves you so much that she spent a week at your hotel, long before—er—she induced us to approach you.'

'Hotel... good family,' repeated Tony hollowly, and Mr Tanker nodded. 'She is a Miss Jibble—one of the Jibbles of Stoke Poges—'

'Jibble!' The young man's voice was hoarse. 'The plum pudding girl?'

'I see you have met her,' said Mr Tanker complacently. 'I see you have met her: you might do worse. She is a very comfortable girl.'

Tony went down the stairs very slowly and stood in a dazed condition on the edge of the pavement between two of the dark-brown vans. He thought of Pinkey, and bent his steps toward the quiet of Temple Gardens.

Pinkey did not welcome visitors at any time, and it was a long while before he would open the door to Tony, being under the impression that the caller was a

client. He never saw clients if he could help it.

'Hullo!' he said ungraciously. 'What do you want?'

'Pinkey, I'm ruined, old boy,' groaned Tony, and the lawyer was alarmed.

'You haven't come here for legal advice, have you?' he asked anxiously. 'I've practically chucked the law, since the Megaphone bought "Sundered Souls". Have a drink?'

Tony shook his head.

'Do you know Tanker?' he asked, and Mr Stephens brightened up. It so happened that Tanker was one of the few people he did know outside a certain literary circle that met in the bar of the Green Dragon and discussed the weather and the three o'clock race, and cures for dyspepsia, and other matters pertaining to art and the higher life.

Tanker was a lawyer. He was kicked out because he did something shady, before I was born. Now he runs a matrimonial bureau—'

Tony uttered a deep, shuddering groan.

'Suppose you've got a daughter and can't get her off,' Pinkey went on, warming to his subject. 'You call in old man Tanker. It's a great idea; I'm going to make a story about it one of these days and call it "A Wife by Arrangement."'

'Don't let us discuss your plans,' begged Tony. 'What happens when you call in Tanker?'

'He finds a husband. He's the most ingenious devil in the world. He lands the most unexpected coups. He was the fellow that married Lola Sabino, the Girl with the Swansdown Feet—married her to Lord Pinnutt—she's Lola Countess of Pinnutt now; got a house in Regent's Park and never speaks to anybody who hasn't been to Eton. Then he got that girl whose mother was in the old clothes business and paired her up with Leslie Majest, the film star. Then—'

'How does he do it?' wailed Tony.

Here Pinkey could give no information.

'It's a mystery. Most people think that old Tanker mixes matrimony with blackmail. All his matches aren't made. Some of 'em are broken off at the last minute by arrangement with the old man. I happen to know all about him because he caught a pal of mine, a fellow with pots of money. His father was in the brass business.'

'How did he catch him?'

'It was so simple that I can't understand how Bob fell,' said Pinkey scornfully. 'This old bird got Bob to write some love letters to an unknown girl—what's the matter?'

'Nothing!' said Tony hastily. 'How did he persuade him?'

'Said she was just getting over a love affair and wanted an interest in life. Said the father would pay. Naturally, Bob jumped at the chance. There isn't a man in the world who doesn't think he can write much better than the next man. That poor gink fell absolutely in love with her—until he saw her. It cost him five thousand to save a breach of promise case. How he could have been such a blithering fool—'

'Yes, yes, we know all about that,' said Tony testily. 'Let me think.'

Pinkey opened his blue eyes.

'Good Lord! He hasn't caught you?' he gasped.

'Nobody has ever caught me,' snarled Tony. 'Don't worry: I'm thinking how I can catch him.'

And then suddenly he smiled, as he remembered something. Tony's memory was one of his assets.

He went back to his hotel. A lady had called and asked for him: she was waiting in the lounge with her mother.

'Miss Jibble, sir. She was staying here a week ago: you remember?' asked the porter.

'Ask them to come up to my room,' said Tony gravely.

He was hardly in his little sitting-room before there came a knock at the door. 'Entrez,' said Tony foreignly.

Miss Jibble came in, blinking shyly, seemingly agitated. Mrs Jibble was pompous and awful.

'Sit down.' said Tony.

'I shall not sit down,' said the elderly lady. She had a deep bass voice that made the windows rattle. 'I shall stay no longer in this home of licence and heartlessness than is necessary.'

'Oh, mother, spare him,' said Miss Jibble convulsively. 'I am sure he is good.'

Tell her, Anthony.'

'You have tampered with the affections of a young and innocent child. I demand from you an explanation.'

'No explanation is necessary,' said Tony. 'I saw your daughter in the park and, struck by her transcendent beauty, fell madly in love with her.'

For a second even the hardened Mrs Jibble was staggered.

'Nobody who has seen her,' said Tony, with a rapt glance at the plum pudding girl, who stood open-mouthed, listening, 'could be insensible to her charms. To see her is to love her: Elizamdash;!'

He spread out his arms, but Eliza stepped back a pace.

'You will marry my daughter, of course?' said the agitated Mrs Jibble. 'You have smirched her fair name—'

'Marry her?' said Tony ecstatically. 'I ask for nothing more!'

'You'll marry her?' There was a note of incredulity in Mrs Jibble's voice which was not flattering to her daughter.

'Of course. It is the dream of my life. Eliza—at last!'

Again Miss Jibble shrank back, and for a second the eyes of mother and daughter met.

'There is no need for you to marry her,' said Mrs Jibble hurriedly. 'My daughter must go away to the South of France to recover from—from the shock. You as a gentleman will not hesitate to defray the expenses of that trip. What is a thousand pounds to you?'

'A thousand pounds,' said Anthony promptly; 'and the South of France is the very place I had chosen for my honeymoon.'

It seemed that Mrs Jibble was breathing heavily.

'It is not a matter to be decided in a hurry,' she said. 'Perhaps in the morning you will realise the folly of it. Perhaps you will see that such a match will bring nothing but unhappiness for you. Here is my card, Mr Newton.'

She laid a large oblong of engraving on the table.

'Tomorrow you may think better of your determination to ruin my dear child's life. Come, Elizabeth.'

They swept out of the room. Eliza was out first.

Tony spent one hour at a public office, then he made a call on a real lawyer, a man who had never written a love story in his life or read anything more erotic than 'Einstein on the Building Laws'. Tony knew him slightly. He was a successful man, and his office looked like a ragshop. There wasn't a chair that had a whole seat, and the carpet had worn into the floor. It was a business with six names, and was eminently respectable.

'I want you to issue without delay a writ against Eliza Jibble, of the Clarence, Palace Hotel, Regent's Park.'

'What is the subject?' asked the impassive man of law, scribbling the address.

'Breach of promise,' said Tony calmly, and such was the lawyer's imperturbability that he did not so much as lower an eyelash.

'And it is very urgent,' said Tony. 'I'll stay here all the afternoon if necessary.'

'It is neither necessary nor desirable,' said the lawyer, and rang for his clerk.

At eleven o'clock the next morning his telephone bell rang and the voice of Mr Tanker greeted him sharply.

'I've just had a man in from Hall, Bennett, Smith, Pollock, Wild and Bosanquet,' he said, and his voice was trembling.

'Did they all come?' asked Tony sympathetically.

'He's served me with a subpoena,' said Mr Tanker, 'In a breach of promise case. What the devil do you mean by it?'

Tony's voice was like cold custard. 'You said I wouldn't get your name into the court except in a breach action—well, I've brought it. I assess the damages at a thousand pounds,' said Tony firmly, 'and when I've got that, anybody can laugh who wants to.'

'You're mad!' screamed Mr Tanker. 'It's disgraceful! Suing a girl for breach of promise! Now be a sensible boy—'

'I'm being one,' said Tony. 'Us boys have got to be protected from designing females.'

There was a silence, and then:

'I suppose a hundred would settle it?' asked Mr Tanker. 'A hundred is a lot of money, a lot of money.'

'It is, it is,' said Tony; 'but not a thousand—not a thousand.'

He heard the old man's receiver click.

Later came Mrs Jibble in a condition bordering upon frenzy.

'What's the meaning of this, mister?' she demanded, nourishing a white paper in Tony's face.

'It means that your daughter either marries me, or she shall pay for my lacerated feeling,' said Tony. 'I will not be played with! The plum pud—your daughter has blighted my life. I am determined to make her pay for her behaviour!'

'But, mister,' Mrs Jibble was almost in tears, 'a thousand will ruin us.'

'Sell your jewellery,' said the inexorable Tony. 'You've got too much anyway. As your future son-in-law—'

'You're not!' screeched the woman. 'I'd sooner—I'd sooner...'

The interview ended unsatisfactorily for Mrs Jibble.

At tea-time came Mr Tanker himself.

'Now see here, Newton, we're not going to quarrel. Mrs Jibble doesn't want this marriage to go through. She's willing to buy you off for two hundred and fifty. Here's the money.'

He slammed a pad of notes on the table, and for one moment Tony was tempted.

'No,' he said, 'I can't sell the most holy of my aspirations for a paltry two-fifty. That's the curious thing about me, Tanker—principles.'

'I daresay,' snorted Mr Tanker. 'But we're not discussing the mythical. We're dealing with facts, and here are two hundred and fifty of them.'

'Satan, avaunt!' said Tony loftily.

At eleven o'clock that night Tony made a call on Pinkey Stephens, and Pinkey was glad to see him, for he had news to tell.

'My boy—a bottle!' He rummaged in a cupboard and produced a black and golden headed vessel. 'I've just sold a story for three hundred!'

'And I've sold one for a thousand,' said Tony. 'It is called "Never Wear Your Wedding Ring in Public". The villain is a wicked ex-lawyer who hired a

married beauty to entangle the hero, but forgot to warn her against wearing her wedding ring. The beauty, who is as attractive as a bombed tannery, is chosen with the idea of making the hero—a young and handsome and singularly brainy man—so fed up that he would pay a fortune to get rid of her. In the end the hero triumphs. He is, if I didn't mention the fact before, a tall, handsome man with a boyish smile and a carriage that attracts instant attention. As he walks in the street, women turn to look at him—'

'Sounds like that actor chap,' said Pinkey, and Tony Newton was annoyed.

8. THE GUEST OF THE MINNOWS

Tony Newton was strong in the faith that if he cast his bread upon the waters it would come back cake. And not ordinary cake either. It would be of the richest quality and covered with almond icing. To most people life is full of promise. To Anthony Newton the promise bore a contract stamp. The art and practice of optimism is based upon the faith that Something is Due. Nothing comes to Hope, but a wistfulness turning sour. The man who gets there looks to the future with the same confidence and certainty as the tradesman who sends in his bill to a Rothschild looks for payment.

Tony believed that the world revolved about him once in twenty-four hours. He also believed that the world was created for him and that the Lord rested on the seventh day to check the result and see if He had forgotten anything that Tony might want.

When Pinkey was working out a most difficult situation in his newest story ('Should he have married her?' A Drama of Love and Passion) Tony strolled into his chambers and was greeted by his unwilling host with a scowl. 'Hello!' said Pinkey unpleasantly. 'Haven't you any work to do?'

Tony seated himself with great care, pulling up the knees of his nicely creased trousers and setting down his hat gingerly on the sideboard.

'I want a secretary,' he said.

Pinkey made a gurgling and indignant noise.

'Am I running an employment bureau?' he demanded, but Tony raised a dignified hand.

'This is serious, Pinkey,' he said quietly. 'I want a secretary. I've been thinking

things out. I've got an office with furniture complete. I've bought a typewriter and had my name painted on the door. All I want now is a secretary. I don't want any flighty girl; at the same time I don't want one who looks like Auntie Rosa. She must be neat, pretty, in a business- like way, quiet, dignified, capable and appreciative.'

'Need she type?' asked the other sarcastically.

Tony nodded.

That is necessary, I think,' he answered gravely. 'I have a typewriter, so perhaps it would be better if she typed.'

Pinkey put down his pen and leant back in his chair, frowning. 'Ordinarily, your coming to me to find you a secretary would have been an act of lunacy. As it is, you've happened to arrive at an auspicious moment.' He searched his table and presently found a slip of paper.

'Miss Ann Portland,' he read, and passed the paper to the other. 'She came in this morning—a friend of mine sent her to see if I could give her a job. She is a good typist, has done secretarial work, and is capable. At least, that is the recommendation which came with her.'

'Is she—?' Tony hesitated.

'She's pretty but sedate. How sedate I don't know. I couldn't find a job for her—all my work is done by an agency in Temple Chambers. Her address is written on the back. And now, old friend, if you will excuse me, I have a whole lot of writing to do.'

Anthony rose, smoothed himself and took up his hat.

'What the devil do you want a secretary for, anyway?' asked Pinkey, his curiosity getting the better of him, and Tony sighed.

'You are out of touch with realities Pinkey,' he said, a little sadly. 'In the old days the hallmark of a man of affairs was a smart gig and a tiger. Today it is an office and a secretary. I am for the moment a pariah in City circles. People look askance at me. Wherever I go men whisper behind their hands in horrified tones "He hasn't got a secretary!" It is getting on my nerves.'

'Twiff!' sneered Pinkey. 'It is sheer bluff on your part!'

Tony did not deny the charge. There was no necessity. He had in truth taken a new office at the top of a small building near Piccadilly Circus. He had printed notepaper and, as he said, a typewriter, a telephone, indeed all the

appurtenances of a business man—except business. As to this, Tony was satisfied that business would come.

The next morning Miss Portland arrived. She was young, pretty, self-possessed and remarkably frank. She examined Tony's bargain typewriter and passed sentence of death without holding out any hope of reprieve. She sorted Tony's letters and discreetly omitted to read, or said that she had omitted to read, any that had the appearance of privacy. She herself took back the typewriter to the gentleman who had sold it to Tony, and returned, flushed and happy, with an older looking machine that really worked. Tony was enchanted.

They had tea together in the office, and Tony told her the sad story of his life. She believed as much as she wanted, and told him a few vital facts about her own career.

'I suppose you ought to get some sort of reference from my last employer,' said Miss Portland toward the end of the afternoon, 'though I don't know that it will help you much.'

'I employ people on their faces,' said Tony loftily, 'I have seldom made a mistake.'

The girl smiled.

'Mr Anquilina thinks the same,' she said drily, 'But he made one big mistake—'

'Anquilina?' Tony was interested. The South American millionaire?

'He's South American all right,' replied Miss Portland, 'but I'm not giving him a million.'

'But, my dear child!' Tony could be very bland and fatherly. 'It is in the newspapers. He has bought the Treforium Theatre and the Jollity and the New Hippoceum and Merry's—'

She faced him, a smile on her pretty face and a twinkle of fun in her eyes. Young, shrewd, without illusions. The product of bureaux, wise in the ways of the Employing Male.

'Mr Newton,' she said, 'if Anquilina had been buying shops or business sites, would a line have got into the newspapers? If he had come to buy up half Threadneedle Street, would anybody have worried? Yes, the bankers would. They'd have put through enquiries about his financial position. But because he is supposed to be buying theatres, he has all the publicity in the world—theatres have a journalism of their own. Anquilina is a bluff. He lives in the best hotel in London and pays his bills. He has a secretary—or he had till I left him—and

he has got to know almost every theatrical celebrity in London. That's easy. He has "talked" buying—but I've seen the inside of his mind. A man is pretty frank with a girl he wants to take to supper. I don't eat suppers. They're bad for the complexion—especially suppers at Cavolo's. I don't like Cavolo's or any other restaurant where the waiter knocks before he comes in.'

'Then what on earth is he?' asked the astonished Tony.

'I shouldn't like to tell you,' said Ann demurely. 'But if you ask me what his profession is, I'll tell you. He has a sitting-room at the hotel and gives little parties. He can play baccarat better than most people. That is why he had to leave the Rex Hotel—the manager said that people were complaining about the bad language his guests used when they went home at two in the morning. I suppose you think I'm being unpardonable in betraying my late employer—but some people are outside consideration, and Antonio Anquilina is one.'

Tony was pinching his chin thoughtfully.

'Then he's a crook?'

'I don't know. Men who get their livings by their wits can't very well be straight, because straight wits run to straight business.'

Tony nodded gravely. 'Thank you, Ann,' he said.

It was that same night that Tony heard of the Minnows. The Minnow Club was not as well known as it deserved to be. The membership was limited, its financial resources were practically nil. Originally designed as a club for important managers of West End dress shops, its title was chosen in a sense of pompous self-abnegation on the part of its founders, and was intended to be wholly derisory. For the gentlemen who chose this and its furnishings were the Tritons of the Ready-to-Wear world, that is contained within the north and south boundaries of Piccadilly and Wigmore Street.

In what manner the Minnows really became veritable minnows, common twopenny-ha'penny people could be told. The war had something to do with it; the bankruptcy of one and the imprisonment of another great patron contributed to its deterioration.

Felix Sandyman bought the benefit of the lease, the furniture and whatever goodwill it possessed for the sum of one thousand pounds, payable as to £300 on the signing of the agreement and thereafter regular monthly payments of £50 (say Fifty pounds). For this sum he received from The Vendors the articles set forth in the schedule, a depleted stock of third-class refreshments, a billiard table and a French chef who was known professionally as Henri and privately

as 'Youngarry'.

Tony Newton met Felix that night by accident. They drank together, and Felix who was an earnest, round-faced young man who wore glasses and had no sense of humour, suggested that Tony should become a member of the dub.

'Thanks,' said Tony. 'I don't fish, though haddock with a poached egg is my favourite breakfast.'

'There's nothing about fishing in this club,' said Felix sombrely. 'It's called "The Minnows" for no reason at all. I bought it from a man named Aaronson who had it for bad debt. I wish people would pay their debts. If they did, I shouldn't have been stuck with the Minnows.'

'Doesn't it pay?' asked Tony, interested.

'Pay?' Mr Sandyman made or performed a gesture to signify the futility of the question. 'I thought of selling it to that South American that everybody is talking about—' he began, and Tony half rose from the table, gaping.

'A fellow named Angelina—'

'Anquilina.' corrected Felix, and added ungrammatically: 'That's him. He's buying property in London for a trust, theatres and things.'

Tony was breathing heavily.

'I'll buy your club' he said. It was unlike Tony to buy anything without haggling over the price. Yet this he did and more. By noon the next day he was proprietor of 'The Minnows', its springless chairs and wonky billiard table. Its sets of sporting prints and odd table services.

He had the right (which he did not exercise) of dismissing Youngarry, the French chef—whose real name was Jackson—and of appointing waiters. Instead, he hired furniture and cutlery and bought a new carpet for the card room. Had a big lock put upon the door of the same, hired a carpenter to cut a hole in the card-room door, and had a trap fixed so that it could be opened from the inside. All this he did before he made his call at another and respectable club.

The men in the big reading-room greeted him with enthusiasm, for in bygone days Tony had been the most anarchistic and revolutionary member of their party.

'No, I haven't lost my job—I never had one to lose,' explained Tony. 'I'm living on my wits.' A picture of the wise Miss Portland rose to his vision. 'Well, not

exactly that—anyway, I'm living, and I've got three nights' work for any of you lads who can play baccarat and own a dress suit. The pay is good, the commission, ten per cent of my profits, is likely to be respectable, and the joke is on a gory villain with a name like a new table waiter.'

There were ten men in the room and there were ten volunteers, nine of whom had the requisite habiliments. As to the tenth...

'You'll be door-keeper, Fairy,' said Tony, and the unprepossessing young man he addressed grinned. 'You have the pug' mug and that's going to be an asset. Gather round and listen...'

Mr Antonio Anquilina was a stoutish and exquisitely-dressed man of middle age. He occupied one of the most expensive suites that the Hotel Belleami boasted, and in truth he found that his extravagance was well justified. He was a member of a luncheon club where theatrical magnates forgathered (his lamentations at luncheon over his last night's losses were the frequent cause for his jubilation at breakfast—all the world loves a loser) and he had the entry to some of the best theatrical circles in London.

Though he never made a purchase, he had pursued encouraging enquiries. Money was no object. He made this clear. If he got the right kind of theatre, he would pay. Unfortunately he never found the right kind of theatre. He was open, too, to finance theatrical productions if the scheme appealed to him. For a month he lunched at the expense of fevered producers, authors and actor-managers, but no scheme quite satisfied him. And in the meantime, men who had money and wanted more, preferably his, gladly accepted his return invitations to a cold bird and a bottle in his rooms. There was also a stone-cold deck of cards, but this was not on the menu... his visitors accepted the subsequent misfortune which came their way with the gambler's philosophy. That is to say, they returned the next night to win back their losses. And they never did.

There was trouble at the hotel. A polite manager interviewed Sen. A. Anquilina, and with many regrets informed him that his room had been let as from next week. Antonio, who had been kicked out of more hotels than any other man living, was indignant, talked of actions at law and behaved exactly as he had behaved on hundreds of similar occasions.

He was making his plans for the future when a card was brought up to him.

'Who is Meester Anthony Newton?' he demanded of his new secretary.

'Never heard of him, sir,' said the young man.

Mr Anthony Newton was shown up. Thus did Anthony and Antonio meet, the one dark and smiling and oozing an almost oriental affability, the other slim and cold and most business-like.

'I have heard that you are in want of a theatre,' said Tony, and Mr Anquilina, inwardly speculating, outwardly eager, nodded.

'I also am in want of a theatre,' said Tony to the other's surprise. 'The fact is, Mr Anquilina, it occurred to me that, if you had succeeded, I might secure a partnership in your enterprise. I have a play which I am anxious to produce...'

They talked plays and theatres throughout the afternoon.

'Money, with me,' said Tony as he rose to go, 'is no object. I feel that if I can get the right theatre I'll buy it. Frankly, I am not anxious for a partnership; I prefer to take over the full responsibility. It isn't fair to one's partner...'

Mr Anquilina agreed. He not only agreed, but he praised Tony shamelessly for his amiable and honourable viewpoint. Would Tony dine with him?

'Dine with me at the Minnows,' said Tony.

'The—?'

The Minnows,' Tony smiled darkly. 'I don't suppose you've ever heard of the place? It is select, and we do not advertise it—I must tell you in confidence that it is my own club—I bought it some time ago, and it is rather a worry. Upon my word, if I were offered £10,000 for it I'd sell it.'

'Doesn't it pay?'

But Tony did not answer. 'It isn't a question of paying—it is the responsibility. I come from a very straight-laced family, and sometimes I am afraid that, with all the precautions I take, I shall one day find myself in trouble.'

Mr Anquilina accepted the invitation with alacrity.

And yet, to his experienced eyes, there was nothing unusual about the club. It seemed at first a little pokey and a little shabby. The members who were dining were certainly good class people. He guessed them to be rich, and when in twos and threes they went out, leaving Tony and his guest alone, he was intrigued.

'Do all the members leave so early?' he asked.

Tony shrugged his shoulders.

'There are very few here tonight... State Ball and all that sort of thing.'

'But are they leaving the club?' persisted the other.

Tony hesitated.

'I don't know whether I ought to embarrass you by taking you into my confidence,' he said, 'but if you are interested... no, no, I won't.'

Mr Anquilina was visibly agitated. 'I assure you of the great emphasis that I am most fascinated to share your confidence,' he said, and Tony looked at him sombrely.

'Come,' he said, and got up.

Mr Anquilina followed, scenting romance. They passed up a narrow flight of stairs into a small ante-room. There was a door in this room, and upon it Tony knocked three times. A trap in the panel opened and a fierce face glared at them.

'It is all right, Fairy,' said Tony soothingly. 'This is a friend of mine.'

The head shook.

'I don't think you ought to bring anybody in, Mr Newton, unless he is vouched for by the other guests.'

Tony frowned.

'Am I not the proprietor of this club?' he demanded angrily and the trap closed.

The fascinated Mr Anquilina heard the sound of bolts being drawn and the door was opened. Ushered by his host, he found himself in a medium-sized room, in the middle of which was a green baize-covered table. There was no need for the visitor to ask what the nine solemn men were doing. One in shirt sleeves was dealing cards from a 'boot'. But it was not the game that left the South American gasping. It was the wagering.

They were betting in hundreds, in thousands, with a coolness which staggered even Mr Anquilina. The only protest came from one who, as he signed a cheque and threw it across to the dealer, uttered a curse.

'That's sixteen thousand I've lost in two days,' he said bitterly and the visitor gasped.

They stood watching the game for a while, and then Tony tapped his guest on the shoulder and silently they withdrew.

'What do you think of it?'

Mr Anquilina could only shake his head.

'You understand why I am worried? Play is too high—of course they can afford to lose, and it's their look out anyway. The profits are good and the game is straight—I see to that—but—'

He shook his head sadly.

'My dear fellow,' said Anquilina, when he had recovered his breath, 'I understand.. I sympathise... You are a gentleman of character. I would buy the club from you... at a price. I am rich, but I must have hobbies. Being English, you will understand. Now, if you had said six thousand... '

'Ten,' said Anthony.

'Or seven... '

'Nine.' said Tony decisively. 'I would not dream of selling it at a loss. Besides which, I have no great desire to sell. I, too, need a hobby... '

Eventually he sold it for eight thousand five hundred, and when Mr Anquilina's bank opened in the morning, Tony was waiting on the doorstep with the cheque in his hand. And round the corner, oblivious of the pouring rain, ten dead broke young men, who only the night before had been playing for mythical thousands were waiting for their commissions.

9. THE BURSTED ELECTION

First published as "Vote For Tony Newton," The Novel Magazine, Feb 1923

In the centuries ahead, writers of the period, taking as their models those of our authors who effect the historical novel as the medium of their genius, may tell the story of Master Anthony Newton and of How He Came to Bursted, and of What Fell Out.

In the meantime let us have the truth.

Tony was neither ambitious nor vindictive in the baser sense. His only ambitions were to make a lot of money and to be talked about by everybody. Otherwise he was an extraordinarily modest man. As to his vengefulness—he never wanted any more than to get even with his enemies. Which brings us to

Bursted, appropriately enough, with the great protagonist of these adventures.

Tony Newton, being in that condition of prosperity which makes for restlessness, saw two announcements in the press. And they both had to do with the Borough of Bursted, though this he did not know until he had interviewed an agent and discovered that the

'Thriving Country weekly. Largest circulation in prosperous agricultural district. Great opportunity for pushful man,'

which was advertised for sale was the Rocket of that town. That Mr Josias Longwirt had been chosen as the Conservative candidate for Bursted, was announced more openly.

The appearance of Mr Longwirt's name in print aroused in Tony's heart a passionate desire for justice. For years he had carried in his mind's eye a mental picture of an exquisitely dressed and painfully rich young man, to whom he had once appealed for the price of a dinner. And Tony had needed that meal pretty badly. It was in the days when he tramped London, looking for the job to which his services and genius entitled him.

Mr Longwirt had also an excellent memory. He recalled three lickings at school at the hands of a prefect named Newton, and his little soul rejoiced at the opportunity which this appeal gave to him.

'Awfully sorry, Newton—can't help you... so many calls on my purse—why don't you try for National Assistance...'

Those were the sage and healing words which Mr Josias Longwirt addressed to his sometime schoolfellow. And the next time they had met, he had cut Anthony dead.

Tony was no journalist, but the possibilities of the Rocket were very apparent.

His intention was wholly mischievous. Beyond a desire to annoy and worry Mr Longwirt, to expose certain of his weaknesses and act as general thorn in the side, he had no other intention or purpose. So strangely does fate shape the lives of men that no unkind reference to Josias Longwirt, Esq, ever appeared in the columns of the 'Bursted Rocket.' And for this reason.

Anthony Newton, with a chequebook in his inside pocket and a newspaper advertisement cut from the 'Stationers' Gazette' in his cigarette case, walked with stately strides down No 4 platform at Waterloo Station, looking for a compartment that promised to offer an adequate return in comfort for the excessive sum he had been charged for a first- class return. He was also looking for a man. So doing, he saw a familiar face through a window and,

although the scared proprietor of the face instantly raised his newspaper to blot out his identity. Tony saw him, turned the handle of the carriage door and sat down opposite. 'Bug-face,' said Tony, calmly and dispassionately.

The young man thus addressed put down his paper with an all- simulated expression of surprise.

'Why, it's Newton!' he said, and offered a feeble hand.

'Well, how are you, and how is the old rag and bone business?'

'I'm fine,' said the other without enthusiasm.

He was sallow and small and his eyes were pale. Mr Longwirt was the son of Longwirt, who made millions out of the sale and purchase of rags. This fact was never mentioned by anybody but Tony Newton. Therefore, J. P. Longwirt disliked A. Newton excessively.

'I hear that you're doing well, Newton,' said Mr Longwirt, hoping that the unpleasant past had been forgotten. 'I like to hear that fellows are doing well. I'm going into Parliament. I shouldn't be surprised, from what I've heard, if I didn't get a jolly good position in the Government.'

'For Bursted,' said Anthony with a curious emphasis. 'I saw the announcement in the papers. A walk over?'

Mr Longwirt hesitated.

'It may be,' he said. There's an Independent chap standing, and he hasn't an earthly. Not an earthly! Besides,' he smiled secretly, 'he may not stand.'

Tony winked. Mr Longwirt winked back.

'Paying him to stand down?'

Mr Longwirt smiled.

'I should be mad to do a thing like that,' and he winked again.

'Hence the expression "honest politics",' said Tony. 'I've no doubt you've heard of the Bursted Rocket?'

Mr Longwirt had.

'Belongs to old Murkle, a silly old ass. I shall be very nearly the youngest Member of Parliament, Newton.'

'Will you?' stated, rather than asked Tony. 'Bug-face, do you remember

meeting me in the Strand about ten months ago?'

The other frowned.

'I've an idea I did see you,' he confessed; 'but I've got such a rotten memory for faces—'

'You saw me—you spoke to me, and you made a reference to National Assistance. I looked seedy and down and out. I nearly was. Bug- face, you perished at that moment!'

Mr Longwirt first squirmed and then stood on his dignity.

'If you're offended, I can't help it,' he said. 'I can't give money to everybody.'

'You will have all your work cut out to help yourself,' said Tony darkly; and at that moment the train began to move out of the station.

It was gathering speed when a man opened the carriage door and fell in. And as he fell, he cursed.

He was a gentleman of sixty, very short and very bald. He had a jaw of great strength and breadth, and eyes that glared naturally.

'... all stationmasters, ticket collectors and porters!' he said, violently.

'Are you hurt, sir?' asked Tony, politely.

'No, sir, I'm not hurt.' Suddenly he lowered his brows and looked hard at Tony. 'For the moment I thought that your face was asymmetrical,' he said. 'I now perceive that it was the shadow. Forgive me. A more normal face I have not seen for years.'

Tony inclined his head gravely.

'May I return the compliment—' he began.

'No, sir, you may not!' snapped the other. 'My lower jaw is distinctly prognathic—my right ear is abnormal, and the processes of the parietal bones are frantically abnormal. Some of the finest scientists of the day have said that it is humanly impossible that I can be sane with such parietals.'

He glared at the open-mouthed Mr Longwirt.

'Good God!' gasped the short man profanely. 'Here is the most remarkable face I have ever seen.'

'You interest me,' said Tony. 'Pray tell me some more.'

Mr Longwirt was speechless.

'The recessive frontal indicates a low mentality; the ears, standing out as they do, suggest homicidal tendencies; the lower maxilla is weak and recessed—do you mind turning your head sir?'

'I will not turn my head!' said the indignant Mr Longwirt, recovering his breath. 'How dare you, sir! How dare you!'

'That,' explained the little stranger with a certain satisfaction, 'explains the ears. Unbalanced... lack of mental equilibrium—the queer traits of personal vanity one sees in such cases.'

'I am Mr Longwirt, of Leathbro' Hall,' said that gentleman awfully.

'I'm Dr Clayfield, of Clayfield Mental Hospital,' introduced the other briskly. 'Longwirt-Longwirt—didn't one of your relations poison his mother?'

'No, sir,' roared Josias.

'Are you sure. Bug-face?' asked Tony gently.

'Of course I'm sure!' Dr Clayfield exchanged glances with the sympathetic Tony. 'And I'd like you to know, sir, that I am the Member for Bursted—practically.'

The doctor looked at Tony questioningly: Tony shook his head, and tapped his forehead.

'All people are mad,' said Dr Clayfield calmly. 'That is my theory. It is borne out by experiment. You, sir,' he addressed Tony impressively, 'are the only sane person I have met today. Are you going to Bursted? Good —I go to Larchleigh which is two stations beyond. Yes, sir, you are one of three sane people I have met this week. Staying at Bursted?'

'Yes, doctor; I am thinking of buying a newspaper—the Rocket.'

'You're mad!' said the doctor. 'Anybody who elects to live in Bursted is a fool, anybody who pays threepence to read the Rocket is an imbecile, but a man who buys it is certifiably insane!'

So Tony came to Bursted, parting with Josias stiffly; with the doctor mournfully. Josias heard of his possible entry into the realms of country journalism with considerable misgiving.

The circulation of the Bursted Rocket was a large one; on the occasion of the opening of the new Parish Hall, as many as a thousand copies were printed,

though they were not all sold. Covering, as it does, the villages of Blackpond, Marblevale, Crasted, Mordon Hanel and Little Murstead, the organ of public opinion may be said to enjoy the largest circulation of any weekly journal published in a radius of twenty miles. Such was Mr Murkle's proud claim. And if his detractors point sneeringly to the fact that there is no other newspaper published within a radius of twenty miles, all the more credit to Mr Murkle that any is published at all.

The Rocket was issued from Mr Murkle's news and stationery shop in the High Street. It was printed in a shed at the back of the shop and advertisements for the current issue were accepted over the counter up to the time of publication. If the advertisement was big enough, it was accepted after publication, the machines stopped, and the new advertisement inserted.

Roffles, the local poet, complained bitterly that in such circumstances it was invariably his contribution which was lifted out—a somewhat unjust complaint, for Mr Murkle invariably paid him the five shillings, whether the poem was printed or not.

The people of Bursted took their views on the world's happenings from the Rocket and naturally so, since in all the county there was not a better informed man on public affairs than Mr Murkle. He often admitted this much to those of his friends who had the inestimable privilege of hearing, at first hand, the views, which he expressed in more classic language in the Rocket. The editor and proprietor of the Rocket, and prospective Independent candidate for the borough of Bursted, was a gentleman of sixty, with a short-clipped white beard and shell spectacles. Dogbery, a disappointed man, whose contributions to the Rocket had again and again been rejected, to the knowledge of all, said that Mr Murkle looked like almost anybody who has been cured by a patent medicine, and had his picture in the papers.

'Dogbery doesn't like the article I had about the Liberals last week,' said Mr Murkle, chewing contemplatively upon a straw—he was standing at the door of the shop on a bright afternoon, watching the pageant of life pass. And Bursted is a busy place on Saturday evenings. Close observers have seen as many as three cars passing down the street at one time. His companion was a prospective advertiser.

'But then, Dogbery doesn't like anything. That attack I had on the Americans the other day made him feel sick, so he says, and my remarks about the Navy gave him a pain in his solar regions. But Mr Walsh, I've got my duty to the country. That's how I feel. The Americans don't advertise in the Rocket—nor the Liberals. So far as the Navy goes, I've had one three-inch across two columns in the last five years!'

'As to that Geneva Conference,' Mr Murkle went on, 'I can't allow it. Dogbery will be wild, but I've got my duty. Where is Geneva, anyway? I never heard of it till this affair started. I wouldn't be surprised if it wasn't in Russia... in Switzerland, is it? They may say so, but you know what these Government people are. Mark my words, they're keeping something back. Wait till you see my leader next week! I've given it to the Government hot and strong. I don't care what Dogbery says. I can tell you all about that Lausanne conference, but it is *entre noo*, which means that it mustn't go any further. I got it from the right source—my daughter's married to a Government official... yes, I know what Dogbery says... he says my son-in-law cleans the windows at the Admiralty. It would surprise Dogbery to know that he doesn't clean the windows—he carries up the coal. If a man who wears brass buttons and a uniform isn't a Government official, I don't know who is. But that's neither here nor there. The Rocket knows. If you see it in the Rocket, it's so. That's our motto... Eh? Well, maybe another paper has it, too, but they copied it out of the Rocket.'

'As to this here election that's coming along, I ain't decided who I'm supporting. Maybe one side, maybe the other. Which ever side I support will get in.'

In some respects, Mr Murkle maintained the style and traditions of the London press.

'There's some talk about me standing as an Independent. I've been asked. If I stand I'll get in. Longwirt is afraid of me an' afraid of the Rocket. I don't blame him. You believe me, Mr What's—your—name, that paper is going to make a fortune one of these days. It's the only paper in the county that's making money. That's something to say! The only paper that's making money. You can take it from me sir, that when you put money into advertisements in the Rocket, you're pickin' it up as fast, an' faster than when you put it down. And I've got a four inch double column solus on the leader page that I'd like to keep for you, but I don't know that I can. Beecham's is after it, an' Fry's Chocolates' fightin' for it and a motor car company. Rolls something—never heard of 'um before—they're after it. An' for forty-five shillings, it's yours.'

The prospective advertiser murmured something about 'seeing' and 'consulting my partner,' and melted away. Mr Murkle glared after him murderously for a few minutes, then turned and walked back into his shop, and for the first time became aware that a customer had been waiting all this time.

'What can I do for you, sir?' asked Mr Murkle.

'My name is Newton, Anthony Newton,' said Tony. 'I've come down in

reference to your advertisement in the Stationers' Gazette.'

'Come in,' said Mr Murkle and, seizing upon his possible benefactor, led him to the parlour.

'I wouldn't sell it, Mr What's-your-name,' said Mr Murkle at the end of an hour's bargaining, 'only I'm disgusted with the Government. I'm going out of public life for good. So long as I can do the printing, I'll let you have an office here for thirty shillings a week; and ten per cent on all the ads. taken over the counter is fair...'

Thus Tony Newton became the editor of the Rocket, and Josias learnt of the happening with something akin to terror, though it seemed remarkable that his only possible opponent should have disposed of that important vehicle of public opinion if he had any serious pretensions to Parliamentary honours.

Tony settled himself down to the business of journalism with all the zest and enthusiasm of a scientifically minded child possessed of a mechanical toy. He watched its workings with awe and proceeded to delve into its interior to discover how.

Two numbers he issued, when the General Election exploded like a bombshell upon Bursted and transformed an ordinarily respectable community into frenzied, teeth-gnashing and altogether hateful factions. And the first of the bills to appear were those which extolled the merits, literary qualities, administrative genius and political integrity of Mr Murkle—'A Bursted Man for Bursted.' Mr Murkle was both author and printer.

Tony, strolling along the High Street, met Mr Josias Longwirt, and the young man was troubled.

'I say Anthony, that old devil isn't really standing, is he?' he asked, anxiously. 'Not that it makes a lot of difference, except that it is going to cost money.'

'I sympathise with you,' said Tony, 'and I will do what is possible to relieve your mind. The bigger show old Murkle makes, the more it will cost you to withdraw his candidature. The locals say that Murkle has been a candidate in every election for thirty years, and on each occasion he has withdrawn at the last minute. It costs him nothing: he does his own printing and bill posting. In fact, it is the jolliest scheme for ensuring a steady income that I know.'

Josias pulled at his nose thoughtfully.

'I can't understand what the dooce made you come down,' he said dubiously. 'I thought you had bought the Rocket to slate me, but your article on me was jolly decent.'

'Decency is my weakness,' said Tony gravely. 'The great idea behind my presence will one day be revealed. In the meantime, what are you going to do with Murkle?'

'Buy him off, I suppose—every member has had to do it. It's blackmail—what does he want?'

'Ask him,' said Tony significantly.

There was an interview between the candidates, and two days before the nomination, Mr Murkle's bills were covered over by white sheets of paper. That night, Tony made a pilgrimage of the public houses and found many friends. What Tony did that night can never be properly known. Such evidence as is available is emphatic upon one point, namely, that he produced a paper which he said was a petition for the reprieve of a man who was going to be hanged, and every person he asked signed.

Mr Miller, a staunch Conservative, Mr Jordan, as staunch a Liberal, Mr Hallingay, who had Communistic leanings—all signed the 'petition'.

The day following, the excitement in Bursted fell to nothing. The promised contest was not to eventuate. To the last there were people who hoped against hope that Mr Murkle would stand.

'No,' said Mr Murkle sadly, 'it's not to be. When I parted with the Rocket I parted with ambition. It was a mistake.'

He was entertained to dinner that evening by Tony. There were no other guests, and the dinner was given in a private room at the Wheatsheaf and Tony drank ginger ale. Mr Murkle, who did not drink ginger ale, was political at eight o'clock, musical at nine, boastful and tearful by turns at ten—at eleven he grew immensely confidential, and told Anthony Newton the story of his life...

Nomination day dawned brightly. To Mr Josias Longwirt it seemed that heaven smiled upon his enterprise. What greatness the day held for him he did not guess.

He had finished dressing (he was staying at the Roebuck, the most important hotel in Bursted) when a letter came for him. It arrived by the hands of a commissionaire and was heavily sealed and bore over his name 'Secret and Confidential.' There was a coat of arms on the back. Inside, written on stiff vellum and bearing no address but the simple words The Inner Cabinet. Most Secret.' was a letter:

'DEAR MR LONGWIRT,

'A crisis has arisen. We are meeting at Malby House, Blackpond, and require your immediate advice and presence. Do not ask for S—B —or anybody by name. Do not give your own name. Call yourself Nelson and ask to see the King of Greece. Be sure to do this, and under no circumstances mention names. THIS IS VITAL AND IMPORTANT. A—C —is coming by special train. Remember not a word! Malby House is the white house on the left of the road before you get to Blackpond.

'S.B. (P.M.)'

Mr Longwirt did not swoon. In his dreams such things had happened. He went down and ordered his car.

'Draw the blinds,' he said firmly. His wondering chauffeur obeyed.

Clear of the town, Mr Longwirt drew aside the curtains and gave himself up to pleasant speculation. It seemed that the burden of Empire had fallen upon him, for his face was grave and his brows knitted. Nearing Blackpond (which he had once visited) he saw the white house and signalled to his chauffeur. They passed through heavy iron gates and drew up before the pillared portico. Instantly the door was opened and a man in a white jacket came out.

'I am Nelson,' he said in a low vibrant voice, 'and I wish to speak to the King of Greece.'

The man nodded.

'Certainly, Admiral,' he said. 'Will you step in?'

Mr Longwirt found himself in a panelled office, and presently a stout man came in. Mr Longwirt had a faint idea that he had met him before.

'I am Nelson, and I wish to see the King of Greece,' he said.

Dr Clayfield glared benevolently at the visitor. 'And you shall see him, Admiral, and Napoleon and the Rajah of Bhong!'

He rang a bell, and this time two men in white appeared.

'No. 8 Observation,' said the doctor briskly, and Mr Longwirt went joyously forth.

A few minutes before noon, the returning officer waited for the arrival of Mr Josias Longwirt. Instead, arrived Anthony Newton, who laid a sum of money on the table and an extensively signed nomination paper.

'I hadn't any idea you were standing, Mr Newton,' said the officer in surprise.

'Neither had I,' said Tony.

It took three solicitors four hours to secure the release of Mr Josias Longwirt from the Claverly Mental Hospital.

There's no sense in getting angry, my good man,' snarled the doctor. 'When a fellow comes here calling himself Nelson and asking to see august personages, I'm entitled to detain him.'

'I'll sue you!' screamed Josias. 'I'll have questions asked in the House of Commons.'

But he didn't.

Mr Anthony Newton, MP for the Borough of Burstled (unopposed) advised him against such a course of action.

'It is unfortunate, Bug-face, but more unfortunate if I reveal the bribery and corruption of old Murkle. Got it all down in black and white. Come up and see me at Westminster one day—I'll show you round!'

10. THE JOKER

First published as "The Joke Of A Lifetime," The Novel Magazine, Mar 1923

Mr Anthony Newton had enjoyed many experiences. There were others which he had not enjoyed, but, rather, had endured. He had, for example, enjoyed his return to Parliament for a constituency which was very much surprised to find it was represented in the House of Commons by a gentleman of whose existence it was almost unaware. He had endured the petition for his unseating and, after one hectic and not wholly happy week in the Mother of Parliaments, he had applied for the Chiltern Hundreds.

'Because, dear old boy,' said his legal adviser, 'it is better to walk out than to be chucked out with a charge of conspiracy to follow.'

One excellent result had followed Tony Newton's 'election' to Parliament. He had secured for himself an extraordinary amount of publicity and the consequences of this advertisement were to prove both exhilarating and profitable. For he came under the notice of Lammer Green. He was sitting in the lounge of his hotel, smoking an after dinner cigar when the acquaintanceship began. A pair of huge hands descended upon his shoulders,

he was lifted bodily from his chair and a raucous voice demanded:

'Give me back that shilling.'

The request was followed by a vigorous shake, at the end of which time there was a clang of metal.

'Thank you,' said the voice, and Mr Lammer Green stooped and picked up the shilling which had fallen down the leg of Tony's trousers. Incidentally it had been slipped down between his collar and his neck by the joker and the shaking had brought it to the tiled floor.

Tony struggled to his feet, murder in his heart and glowered into the grinning face of Lammer Green.

'Oh, it's you, is it?' he growled, for he knew the king of practical jokers slightly.

The Hon. Lammer Green stood six feet four in his stockinged feet, a large rawboned young man who lived for no other object than to perpetrate practical jokes upon an unoffending world. It was he who had appeared on board the French Cruiser 'Arlot' in the guise of the Sultan of Muskwash and had fooled the admiral into giving him a royal salute on his departure. It was he who had arrived with a gang of labourers and had torn up the roadway of Piccadilly Circus just before the theatres closed, and held up the traffic in the heart of London for twelve hours. It was Lammer Green who arrested the mayors of three prosperous boroughs and brought them to London in a Black Maria built specially for the purpose.

He was heir to a title, incredibly rich and a bachelor.

'Men have died for less than that,' said Tony, ruffled, 'sit down, you long and useless slab.'

They had not met since their army days, a fact of which Tony reminded his beaming companion.

'War isn't my game,' said Mr Green decidedly, 'there isn't a joke in it, old boy. Give me peace! Did you hear about my Greenwich coup? Nearly got three months for it, but, by gad, it was amusing! I hired a fellow to climb up to the observatory telescope and paint black spots on the lens. Sun spots, old boy!'

He chuckled and slapped his bony knee in an ecstasy of joyousness.

Tony looked at him wonderingly.

'I can't understand why a fellow like you, with all the money in the world,

should spend your time footling with life. Why the devil don't you get married and settle down?'

'I should hate it, old boy,' said Lammer Green with a shudder, 'I'm scared of women—scared of 'em, old man! If I had a wife I'd be a slave—any woman could boss me—that's my weakness.'

And then to Tony's surprise he began laughing again.

'Odd, deuced odd you should mention marriage. Newton, I've been hearing about you.'

'About me?' said Anthony, startled, 'In connection with marriage?'

Mr Green nodded violently.

'Do you remember fooling a lawyer johnny—a sort of marriage broker?'

Tony remembered the incident perfectly.

'I heard about it—and this election joke of yours,' said Mr Green, 'and thinking it over, said I to myself, "I must see this Newton johnny."'

Now Tony Newton was anything but a practical joker. He regarded such practices as had earned fame for Lammer Green as childish and contemptible. The two men had served together in the same regiment, but could not by any stretch of imagination be described as friends. Green was looked upon as an amiable fool, though a man of considerable courage. His was the last acquaintance that Tony had any desire to renew, and even in the days of his direst misfortune it had never occurred to him that he might seek help in that quarter.

'The fact is, old boy, I've got a joke on,' said Lammer Green, lowering his voice, 'a real topping joke, better than my coup with the admiral. And in all the circumstances, it is remarkable that you should have mentioned marriage. Do you know old Gaggle?'

Tony shook his head.

'Made millions out of margarine,' explained Green rapidly, 'got a country seat at Oxton, Bucks, and a knighthood and a daughter of thirty with a face that would stop the traffic! She's horrible, old boy. She's perfectly ghastly. Dyes her hair, old man. Got feet like rowing boats. And old Gaggle's mad keen to get her married into the aristocracy—do you get me?'

His eyes were blazing with excitement, his voice was a squeak at the thought of his splendid project. Tony could only look at the fatuous young man open

mouthed. He knew that it was Lammer Green's practice to enlist the aid of supporters, but never in his wildest dreams had he imagined that he would be so honoured. And he was very curious. As Lammer Green saw a crude jest at the end of all his schemings, so Anthony Newton saw money.

'What is the great idea?' he asked and it was some time before the Joker could compose himself to answer.

'Old Gaggle is keen on lords; he openly states that if his daughter marries one, he'll give her half a million. My father heard about it and sent on the news to me—he loves a joke.'

Lammer Green's father was Lord Latherton, who loved many other things than jokes, if rumour did not lie.

'My scheme is this,' said Mr Green confidentially, 'accompanied by my faithful secretary—that's you, Newton, old boy—I'll be touring in the neighbourhood and my car will break down near old man Gaggle's house. I will say nothing. You'll go for assistance and let slip the words 'his highness'—get me? Old man Gaggle will invite us up to the house. If I speak it will be in a foreign accent. Old man Gaggle will say "Ah, ha! A foreign prince! Let's get him for Gertie"—or whatever her name is. I will say, "Yes, I will be married very quietly —nobody must know or I shall lose my throne"—get me?'

'I get you,' said Tony, recovering his breath.

'Papa, prince and Gertie will travel to a house, parson waiting —you'll have to fake the parson, one of your pals will do it for you—and then prince has to go to town. Mysteriously disappears. Papers full of it—"Romantic Wedding. Disappearance of princely bridegroom—where is Prince Opskotch?" What do you think of that?'

'And what happens to me—do I disappear too?' said Anthony drily.

It was on the tip of his tongue to refuse all participation in the fantastic 'joke' which did not err on the side of kindness. Tony had a nice feeling for most women, even women with 'feet like boats', and he was momentarily wrathful that this futile jester should have thought that he would be a willing agent.

But Tony was also a quick thinker and the rejection was not made.

'It's a strange plan and rather cruel on the girl,' he said mildly.

'Pshaw!' said the other contemptuously. 'What does that matter? My dear old fellow, this is my chef d'oeuvre—the inspiration—the grandest scheme that has ever come into my head. The whole world will be talking about it. It will

create more sensation than anything that's been done before!'

'I'll think it over,' said Tony.

He thought it over to such purpose that when Mr Lammer Green called the next day he found an apparently willing helper.

Sir Joshua Gaggie lived at Oxton Manor, a Georgian residence that had once been the property of a Norman baron. But it was less because of its ancient associations that Sir Joshua purchased the estate than because of its title. For Sir Joshua had been born and bred in another Oxton.

'Mark my words, Tilda, that's 'ow it ought to be spelt. Personally I've never called 'Oxton any other way.'

His daughter was a slim woman of twenty-nine, whose rubicund face shone with good health.

Such ruddiness might well have gone with a genial and generous nature, but Matilda had a sharp tongue and a nature embittered by the neglect of eligible bachelors. There were not wanting young men who would gladly have led Matilda to the altar, but she was a woman with ambitions.

'I don't know that this country manor idea is going to bring anything,' she said petulantly, 'we'd better by half have stayed at Hampstead, father—with your knighthood you'd have been somebody in Hampstead, but this place is full of lords and people and nobody thinks anything of a plain 'sir'. And when we ask them to dinner they've always got other engagements.'

'Somebody will turn up, my love,' said Sir Joshua hopefully, 'you couldn't meet anybody at 'Ampstead except a few low-down clurks and whippersnappers.'

'I don't even meet those here,' said Matilda plaintively.

They were sitting in the drawing-room overlooking the park and her eyes were arrested by the sight of a stranger walking up the drive.

He was young and well dressed. Moreover, he was good looking. She got up and walked to the window.

'Who's that, father?' she asked and Sir Joshua joined her.

'I don't know who it is,' he frowned and walked out into the hall to await the stranger's arrival.

'I am sorry to trouble you. Sir Joshua,' said the stranger respectfully, 'but his

Highness—I mean my employer—has had a slight fainting fit and I wonder if you would allow him to rest here awhile?’

‘Certainly... certainly!’ said Sir Joshua urgently, ‘ask his Highness—what name did you say?’

Tony bit his lip.

‘Did I say "highness"? How indiscreet of me,’ he said, obviously annoyed. ‘My employer’s name is Smith—’

‘Exactly,’ said Sir Joshua, ‘will you tell his—Mr Smith, that he is welcome.’

When Tony had gone, the agitated knight flew back into the drawing-room, his eyes bulging.

‘It’s a prince!’ he quavered. ‘Tilda, it’s an ighness! No, not the man who came to the door—he’s an understrapper or something. The other fellow... ‘ad a fainting fit outside and wanted to know if he could come in.’

Miss Gaggle rose.

‘Father, mind your "h's",’ she warned, and swept out to the door.

A magnificent car was coming up the drive, the young man at the wheel, and in the back, wrapped in a fur-lined overcoat, a tall and (as she afterwards described him) noble figure.

His eyes were closed, and when the car had stopped and Tony had assisted him to alight, he appeared to wilt.

‘It is goot of you, my dear yo'ng lady,’ he murmured. ‘We shall not forget your kindness to us.’

Tilda dropped a curtsey.

‘I’m sure we’re very honoured, your—Mr Smith,’ she said breathlessly.

The newcomer was escorted to the guest room and a few minutes later Tony descended, his face grave.

‘I am afraid we shall have to trespass on your hospitality for tonight—I simply cannot allow him to be moved. No, no, he will not see a doctor,’ he added hastily, as Sir Joshua made a suggestion.

Mr Smith was destined to enjoy the hospitality of his host for many days; and they were days of hope for Sir Joshua Gaggle and hours of joy for his daughter.

'I don't know whether he's a prince or not,' she said to her father in the seclusion of his study, 'but he's a somebody—I've seen enough of nobodies to know that. And such a fine big man too! And he'd be an easy man to manage, father—he's almost scared of me.'

In the privacy of his own suite, the Hon. Mr Lammer Green expressed his own hopes and fears.

'I hate bossy women, Newton, and she's the bossiest girl I've ever met. We'd better get this over—I'm bored already. Have you fixed a parson?'

Tony nodded.

'Then I'll propose to her tomorrow,' said the joker. 'Gosh! She'll be surprised!'

'I think she will,' agreed Tony.

That night he sat up late with his host and after a few preliminaries. Sir Joshua spoke.

'Look here, Mr Newton,' he said (Tony had given his real name). 'I'm a plain man and I like to talk plainly—who is his highness?'

Tony shook his head.

'I'm not at liberty to say,' he said.

'Is he—anybody? I mean is he really a titled person?'

Tony nodded. If the prefix 'honourable' was a title, then certainly the Hon. John Lammer Green was a titled person.

'That's all I want to know,' said Sir Joshua, 'has he got any money?'

'Pots of it,' said Tony promptly and Sir Joshua seemed disappointed.

'I was 'oping he was broke,' he said. 'The fact is my girl's took a fancy to him. He's not married?'

'No.'

'Look here, Mr What's—your—name, have you any influence with him?'

'I think I have,' said Tony, and Sir Joshua took the plunge.

'To put it plump and plain, if you could influence him to marry my daughter, there's a couple of thousand pounds for you.'

Tony looked at the tempter for a long time before he spoke.

'I'm a business man too,' he said, 'and I'd like to have that in writing.'

Sir Joshua put out his hand.

'Business is business,' he said cryptically, and, going to his writing table produced with some labour a document which had the advantage of being in plain English. 'That suit you?'

Tony read the document through and nodded.

'If this is carried through,' he said, 'you quite understand that the wedding would have to be of a strictly private nature? That it might even be necessary for my friend to marry in his assumed name?'

'I've thought of that,' said the businesslike Sir Joshua. 'I know a bit of law—you can't be successful in trade unless you do—and I know that a marriage is a marriage whether it's in one name or another. I know he's somebody because I got my valet to look through his letters the other day—I daresay you'll think I was taking a liberty, but I'd rather take that than a risk—and he saw a letter with a crown or coronet that began "My dear son."' "

Tony was staggered for a moment. Evidently Sir Joshua was not as foolish as Mr Lammer Green thought him to be.

'I'm not expectin' a prince for a son-in-law,' the stout little man went on, 'and I'm willing to be pleasantly surprised. Fix that marriage, my boy, and there's two thousand of the best for you.'

Mr Lammer Green was reading in bed when Tony went into his room that night.

'Shut the door,' said Mr Green, 'and have a look at the press notices I've written. Get 'em typed after the wedding and send 'em round to the press. I shall tell her I'm the Grand Duke John of Lithuania—'

'You won't be married in that name?' suggested Tony.

'Why not? That's the best part of the joke,' said the surprised young man. 'Have you fixed the parson?'

'And the church,' said Tony and Mr Green sat up in bed.

'What?'

'I've got the loan of a church—a little wayside kirk about twelve miles from here—it is attached to a bigger parish and the parson only goes there once a week. My friend has the keys.'

Mr Lammer Green threw himself on his pillow and shrieked with joy.

'You're certainly the best assistant I've ever had,' he said, wiping his eyes. 'It was an inspiration getting you, Newton. By gad! This is going to make London howl! This is going to beat the Piccadilly Circus stunt—'

'There is one thing I want to ask you,' interrupted Tony. 'Granted that this is the most wonderful practical joke that has been played since the Albert Memorial was built, do you think that you're quite playing the game? After all, this unfortunate young woman has never done you any harm—'

'Hasn't she?' snorted the jester. 'She's trying to lure me into marriage. And she's bossy! She orders roe about and I obey so naturally that my blood runs cold! She's bossy, Newton! I never met a bossier.'

Anthony left him to work out his part of the joke.

It was on the following afternoon that Miss Matilda Gaggle heard her fate. The scene was the rosery and the principal actor reclined on a long cane settee.

'Ah, Miss Giggles,' he sighed. 'We shall always remember zis happy, happy time!'

He covered his eyes with a huge hand and the practical Miss Gaggle thrust her handkerchief into his fingers.

'It has been happy,' she agreed. 'Don't move your foot or you'll upset the grapes. Mr Smith, why don't you wear your hair parted on the side—I don't like hair that's brushed back.'

Lammer Green heard and quaked.

'And your valet hasn't brushed your coat,' she said, sweeping it daintily with the tips of her fingers. Mr Lammer Green shivered. She was certainly the bossiest girl he'd ever met.

'Matilda,' he murmured, and Matilda forgot to be tidy. 'Matilda... need we part?'

'I don't see why we should,' said Matilda and kissed him on the ear... .

Tony Newton arranged everything.

'That young man has a future, my dear,' beamed Sir Joshua.

'I daresay he has,' agreed Matilda briskly, 'though I don't know that I shall want to see much of him after we're married. The idea of delaying the

honeymoon—'

'That was John's,' said her father, 'he has to go to town immediately after the wedding to get the family jewels.'

'Why couldn't we both go?' demanded Matilda. 'No, I don't like Mr Newton—he's a bit too bossy.'

Upon Tony, the bridegroom placed the heaviest of charges. 'Don't leave us alone, old boy,' he begged. 'She started kissing my ear without the slightest encouragement. She's one of those horrible women who simply can't be trusted. Keep with me, old boy, until the ceremony. I promised you a hundred for the job—I'll make it two hundred. But don't let her kiss me.'

'A girl has her rights,' said Tony sternly. 'If she wants to kiss you, she must.'

Nevertheless, he kept close company with his employer and escorted him to bed on the eve of the ceremony, to the intense annoyance of Miss Gaggle.

For Tony had something serious to say. 'I've been thinking things over, Lammer Green,' he said, 'and it seems to me that this little joke of yours is going to turn out very serious for you—you know the law on the subject?'

'Blow the law!' said the scornful suitor.

'There's one chance of escaping a prison sentence,' said Tony, 'and that is to prove that you were the victim and I the villain of the piece.'

Tony explained his plan. On the morning on his way to church, Mr Lammer Green was to stuff his ears with cotton wool.

'But, my dear old boy, I shall hear nothing!' protested the bridegroom.

'That will save you,' said Tony. 'When I nod, you'll say "yes." When I wink you'll say "I, so and so and so and so take thee, etc." You'd better mumble the words—people always do when they get married. If there's any fuss you can say you didn't hear and that you thought you were acting as best man to me—it will make a great story for the newspapers.'

They were at the church a quarter of an hour before the arrival of the bride. She wore, by arrangement, a very plain frock and Mr Lammer Green shuddered at the sight. But he was immensely pleased with Tony. For the 'parson' looked like a parson. He had a cold in the head, just as a real country parson might have and his surplice was an old one and his fingers were blue with cold; and he was obviously bored. Mr Lammer Green, with his eye on Tony, said "Yes" as the ceremony demanded and he mumbled huskily the

necessary formula when hands were joined.

As the happy couple passed into the vestry, Tony drew Sir Joshua aside.

'I am afraid I shall have to leave early,' he said, and Sir Joshua took a cheque from his waistcoat pocket.

'I saw two cars waiting outside,' he said, 'one of them yours?'

'Hired,' said Tony laconically, 'I always hire a car when I want to get away in a hurry.'

Sir Joshua hurried into the vestry in time to check the first of many family quarrels.

'Your name is John Lammer Green,' said the new Honourable Mrs Green shrilly. 'That's the name the marriage licence was issued in and that's the name you were married in—so don't be silly.'

Mr Lammer Green was very white and the hand that held the pen shook. He had taken out the cotton wool and could hear quite well.

He stared wildly at the parson.

'Excuse me... are you a clergyman?'

The clergyman inclined his head.

'I am curate of St Margaret's,' he said.

The bridegroom's jaw dropped.

'And I'm... married?'

'Of course... married by special licence—your friend arranged it all.'

Mr Lammer Green breathed heavily through his nose.

'No friend of mine,' he wailed. 'No friend of mine!'

11. KATO

Brigandage, Mr Newton admitted, must be gentle to be thoroughly effective. Only once in his life did he descend to the other kind, and the memory of Kato

and that ill-considered burglary kept him supplied in nightmare material for years afterwards.

The burglary was an error: its consequence almost turned white the hair of one young man. If Mr Newton ever wrote his autobiography he would probably omit all reference to Poltue and his emerald; and to Kato who hated his master.

The story starts when two men sat upon two park chairs, watching the procession of fashion and beauty along Rotten Row one spring morning. They were well-dressed idlers of the type which may be seen in Hyde Park on any such morning and they had, apparently, no other interest in life than an examination of humanity.

The two chairs had been so drawn together and so placed that they were isolated from the remaining spectators, and they might, as they did, carry on a conversation without any fear that their words would carry to their nearest neighbours.

Tony Newton tilted his hat forward on his brow, and crossed his well-tailored legs. Neither he nor his companion had the appearance of birds of prey; yet, for the moment, society knew fewer efficient, and none more amiable, hawk than he.

'There is our man. Bill,' said Tony, nodding his head slightly in the direction of a stout horseman who was jogging a painful way along the Row. 'Mr Poltue, the eminent millionaire from Japan.'

'I knew he was a millionaire the moment I saw him,' said Bill. 'He looks so darned uninteresting.'

Tony nodded.

'It is possibly because I am a brigand,' he said, carefully choosing his words, 'and therefore, possessed of the artistic temperament, that the sight of a fat millionaire upon a beautiful Arab horse, invariably rouses all that is basest within me. Lest that conscience of yours should grow active, Bill, I will assure you that Mr Poltue is well deserving of the doom that is about to overtake him.'

Bill Farrel started under the accusation.

'Conscience—me!' he protested hoarsely, 'listen—'

But Tony was a bad listener.

'Poltue has made millions out of everything,' he said. 'He has made businesses

and coal mines and ships—in fact, he's made everything except sacrifices. At the outbreak of the war he found himself in Japan, and got himself appointed as buying agent for one of the Allies. That Ally he fleeced left and right.'

'It seems right to me,' said Bill. 'Allies are made to be fleeced, aren't they? What has he done which is really naughty? Forgive me for asking the question, but I've been out of touch with the crime reports, and I take very little interest in sociological matters, anyway.'

'He's a bad egg,' said Tony, watching the retreating figure of the portly Mr Poltue. 'He's not only a bad egg because he made money which we didn't make—and that, heaven knows, is sufficient offence. He not only put it together whilst we were being taken apart, but he has a moral reputation which you could cut with a knife. He runs a sort of establishment in Grosvenor Square, and they say that when he left Japan he had to be smuggled on board a boat to avoid the attentions of a number of good natured sons of Nippon who were most anxious to—give him a farewell presentation.'

'He's like that, is he?' said Bill, thoughtfully. 'It's rum how these big gross devils manage to get away with that sort of stuff. Now, what's the scheme?'

Anthony Newton lowered his voice by the fraction of a tone.

'He has a Japanese servant named Kato,' he said, 'and I have an idea that Kato has been almost as bad an egg as his boss. But for some reason the rascals have quarrelled, and the other day Mr Poltue gave Kato the licking of his life. Kato tried to put some jiu-jitsu hooks on the big man, but Poltue knew the game backwards, and the upshot of it was that Kato took the floor and the count.'

'Where did you learn this?' asked Bill, without surprise.

'From Kato,' said Tony. 'I was engaged last week in the beginnings of a great enterprise. Unfortunately, my objective had to leave for America. It was annoying, because I had gone to a lot of trouble and expense. For one week I have been arrayed in the base uniform of a chauffeur, and as a chauffeur I used the same Japanese restaurant as Kato. There's a place just off Wardour Street—you know Ho Sing's restaurant—it was there that I met Kato, having industriously followed quite another Jap for weeks. Happily, the little chap speaks English, or I should have been in the can, because my knowledge of Japanese is restricted to about three bad words.'

'What was the result of it all?' demanded Bill.

The result of it all was that I have conveyed, by my subtle and Machiavellian

methods, the suggestion that I am really a gentleman burglar.'

Bill looked at him a little startled.

'There are times when one must be frank,' said Tony, in his more oracular manner. 'I have reached that point. Kato believes that I am one of an American gang which has been working Paris, and he takes almost a tender interest in my future career.'

Again his voice lowered until it was little more than a murmur. 'Have you heard of Poltue's emerald?'

Bill shook his head.

'It is the most wonderful thing in the world,' said Tony, with a tremble of enthusiasm. 'Its nett value today is fifty thousand pounds. Doesn't that make your mouth water? And Poltue keeps it in a little safe let into the wall by the side of his bed. I tell you he is a great athlete, a dead shot with a revolver, and that the safe is electrically wired, because it is right that you should know these things, since you are going to be asked to risk your life in securing this emerald of great price.'

'Have you squared Kato?'

'Not yet,' admitted Tony, 'but he is on the way to being squared, and then—'

Three hours later a businesslike young chauffeur with a peaked cap on the back of his head turned briskly into Ho Sing's restaurant. There was a sprinkling of lunchers, half of whom were unmistakably oriental, the other half being European; for Ho Sing's had a reputation which appealed to epicureans.

He nodded to a little man sitting at one of the tables, and turned down the chair which had been tilted against the edge, and the little man grinned sympathetically.

'I thought I would not be able to come,' he said, with a slight accent, and in the staccato tone which the educated Japanese employs when speaking English. 'But that pig he goes riding, and after he lunches. Consider it! He lunches in his riding clothes because he is a low swank.'

Tony was visibly amused.

'By golly!' said the Japanese, viciously. 'I'd like to see him get a bad time! Suppose one day he lose that emerald, he be a mighty sick fellow.'

His eyes were fixed on Tony and Tony nodded.

'I endorse all that you say, my amiable son of Nippon,' he said. 'But how is he going to lose this wonderful emerald?'

The beady eyes of the Jap were fixed on the other in an inscrutable stare.

'Suppose burglars come on Thursday night,' he said, 'through the kitchen door, which would be open, and up the stairs? And suppose they find a little Japanese lantern outside the door of this pig's room?'

Only for a moment did Tony's heart quake.

That seems a fairly healthy possibility,' he said, to say nothing of being somewhat ingenious. It would save all bother of making plans of the house, or having a guide—in other words, Kato, it would save you from being mixed up in the affair.'

That is true,' said Kato calmly. 'I have thought of it very carefully.'

'And suppose,' said Tony, 'we get away with the emerald—when I say "we", he corrected himself, 'I mean this hideous burglar—and dispose of the stuff, where would we send the share which would be due to the gentleman who left the kitchen door open and put the little Japanese lantern in front of Mr Poltue's door?'

The Jap shook his head.

'I don't want anything,' he said, emphatically. 'I'll be pleased if this pig gets a bad time.'

'We'll give him a bad time!' said Tony. Then he asked bluntly: 'What has he done to you, Kato?'

The man pressed his lips together and shook his head and it seemed that Tony's curiosity was to be denied. Then he suddenly burst forth in a torrent of broken English, and in low, passionate tones told the story of yet another wrong which was to be added to Poltue's unsavoury record.

'And I wasn't greatly impressed,' said Tony, relating the circumstances that evening to his companion. 'Because Kato is as bad as the other fellow, and I should say there was nothing very much to choose between them. Kato was the man who carried out all Poltue's dirty work in Japan, and he himself had to be given police protection in the days before he shook the dust of his native land from his feet. The fact that the two beggars have quarrelled doesn't make very much difference except that it helps us considerably in relieving this bloated Japanese merchant of his ill-gotten gains—or some of them.'

'Is it Thursday, then?' asked the interested Bill, and Tony nodded.

'Felt slippers, a car waiting at the entrance to the mews—you'd better bring the fastest you can get, by the way—masks and dummy revolvers, a few yards of thick rope and some big silk handkerchiefs, in case the gentleman shows fight. You'll attend to that, Bill?'

Bill hesitated.

'It sounds awfully like robbery with violence to me,' he said, 'and I don't mind admitting that I'm a little shy of it.'

'It's rather out of our line of business,' agreed Tony, 'but the prize is so precious and the opportunity of avenging outraged society—'

'Don't bother about that,' said Bill. 'The question is, how are we going to dispose of the emerald when we get it?'

'Let's get it first,' suggested Mr Newton. And there they were in complete agreement.

Thursday night was a rainy one—a night of wind and drizzle—and this was all to the good, for the streets were empty as the big car, containing the muffled figures of two men, came to a halt at the end of the mews leading to the back of Mr Poltue's palatial residence.

The mews itself was deserted.

Mr Poltue had apparently one virtue. He went to bed at nine o'clock every night of his life and rose at six. He was, according to Kato, a heavy sleeper; and, what was more interesting and important, he insisted on the whole of his household following his example. He was reputedly a single man, which made matters easier, for it is womenfolk who keep houses alight till two o'clock in the morning.

The two men left the car and made their way down the mews until they came to the little green door in the wall which led through a narrow passage to the butler's offices. Tony pushed the door gently and it yielded. He went in, closing the door behind him, stopping to examine the lock and to make sure of his exit being unimpeded.

Kato had done his work remarkably well. Every door opened with a push, and they found themselves in the big entrance hall of the house, with no other sound to disturb them than the solemn ticking of a clock on the stairs.

Tony was wearing thick felt slippers and carried in one hand a length of rope

and in the other his torch. There was little need, however, to use this, for a faint light came through the big stained glass window at the head of the stairs. They went up noiselessly and reached the first floor, but here there was no sign of the promised Japanese lantern. They mounted another flight, and here, as promised, the guiding light was burning.

Tony waited only long enough to blow out the little candle which burnt inside. His heart was thumping painfully—burglary was distinctly unamusing.

The two men passed in, closing the door softly behind them. It was difficult to see at first, but after a while, when their eyes became accustomed to the darkness, and aided by the light which came in narrow bands through the slats of the Venetian blinds, they distinguished the various objects which constituted the furniture of the room. They saw the bed. Its head rested against the centre of the wall to the left of the door.

Tony stole forward. The carpet, he thought, must have been designed by somebody who had an idea of helping midnight intruders in their nefarious plans. It was so soft that it was impossible that any sound could reach the ears of the sleeper. Nevertheless, he moved forward with the utmost caution, whilst his companion stood in the shadow of a big wardrobe, waiting events.

Tony saw dimly the outline of a man upon the bed. He made no sound or sign of movement; he reached the safe and felt gingerly for the tiny wires which he knew connected the door with the alarm. Kato had described the safe exactly. There was a soft snick as the wires were cut, and deftly Tony manipulated the moving dial of the combination. Here he had to use his lamp, but only in brief flashes and the light was so guarded that it was impossible that a ray could reach the sleeper.

The door swung open and he put in his hand, groping for the big morocco leather case which Kato had told him contained the emerald. His fingers closed round the big leather case. He did not trouble to open it, for he knew by the weight and the shape, that Poltue's emerald was in his hands. He slipped the case in his pocket, but in doing so lost his grip on the lamp, which fell with a clatter on the table by the bed.

He held his breath, but Poltue did not move. There was something so ominous about this man's quietness that Tony stooped, and, picking up his lamp, flashed it for a moment upon the bed. Bill heard his gasp and came forward.

'What is it?' he whispered.

'Look!' said Tony, and turned the light full upon the man.

There was no need to make further enquiries. Poltue, the millionaire, was dead. The haft of a knife was sticking out of his side and the bed was smothered with blood.

'This looks like a trap,' said Tony, quickly. 'Get downstairs as fast as you can.'

Silently they fled down the wide staircase and reached the first door, where Bill gripped the other by the arm.

'There's somebody talking,' he said. 'Listen!'

'On the telephone,' said Tony, between his teeth.

They heard the faint tinkle of a bell and crept along the passage until they came to a door, behind which was the murmur of a voice.

Tony turned the handle softly. The room was illuminated, and they saw the back of Kato crouching over a table, the telephone in his hand, the receiver to his ear.

'Is that the police station?' he was saying. 'Come quickly to Mr Poltue's house in Grosvenor Square. There has been a murder... '

So far he got when Tony was on him with a leap. The telephone fell with a crash as the two men went to the floor struggling, Tony's hand over the Jap's mouth, his knee on his chest. It took them the greater part of five minutes before they bound and gagged him and time was precious.

'Carry him upstairs into the bedroom,' said Tony fiercely and together they laboured up the stairs, the struggling body of the man between them.

'Now unfasten the rope,' breathed Tony Newton, and his companion wonderingly obeyed.

Tony walked to the wall and switched on the light.

'You've got a nerve,' he said grimly to the gagged man. 'You've blood on your hands, and you're calling for the police! You thought you'd trap us—Carry out your private vendetta and put the blame upon us?'

For answer the man sprang at him like some wild animal. Tony stepped back a foot, brought his hand up and down again, and the man fell in a heap at the foot of the bed where his victim lay.

'Remove the gag,' said Tony. 'Step lively, and take off the ropes.'

'What did you hit him with—the sjambok?'

Tony nodded, and slipped a short length of rhinoceros hide into his pocket. It was the only weapon he ever carried and it was usually effective.

They reached the ground floor and passed through into the mews. Tony taking the key from the inside of the back door, locking it and dropping the key down a handy grating. They gained the car and moved off just as a car full of policemen came swinging round the corner of the street.

'Well missed!' said Tony. He was very white.

'But he'll tell,' said the troubled Bill. 'He's bound to tell.'

'Tell nothing,' said Tony, tersely.

'Where's the emerald?' asked the other. 'Did you get it?'

'I got it all right but I left it.'

'You left it!' gasped Bill. 'Where?'

'In Mr Kato's pocket,' said Tony. 'With a Japanese knife in Poltue's side and Poltue's emerald in Kato's pocket, there should be only one end to this adventure.'

And he spoke prophetically; for six weeks later Kato was convicted of murder on circumstantial evidence.

12. THE GRAFT

Tony Newton was an opportunist. And like most opportunists, his equipment included the faculty for grasping situations and acting upon his understanding with extraordinary rapidity. The well-thought-out plan of battle, the laborious strategy and patient attack which characterise the progress of other successful men, were not for Tony. To him, life was full of opportunities, most of which he instantly rejected: some because they offered too little hope of reward, some because, whilst the reward was sufficiently tempting, the means by which the goal was to be reached seemed a little dubious.

It was only to be expected that the phenomenon of a young man with no visible means of support, living well, dressing well, and having plenty of money to spend should excite the curiosity of other opportunists whose ways were not Tony's ways. From time to time there swept into his orbit the

aristocracy and gentry of an unknown world. At least, they were unknown to Anthony. Smartly dressed men, and women, too, also without visible means of support drifted in upon him, sounded him skilfully, tempted him with even greater ingenuity, and passed on. For Anthony neither played cards nor visited gambling hells, nor fell to the suggestion of easy money.

Nevertheless, they were intensely interesting to him, these denizens of London's netherworld. They did not pretend to be ladies or gentlemen; they were just 'good fellows'. And one, to whom Anthony offered the tribute of a free dinner, gave a very simple explanation. This was Jay Gaddit, expert cardsharper and man-about-town.

'All these stories about gentlemanly crooks are rubbish,' he said, smoking a meditative cigar after dinner. 'If you, whom I will describe as a mug—'

Thank you,' said Anthony.

'There are only two kinds of people in the world—thieves and mugs,' said the other calmly, 'so no offence is meant. You, being a mug, meet one of the boys and have dinner with him; and after dinner somebody suggests a game of cards—probably some girl in the gang who drifts in. Now, suppose the crook was a gentleman, and all through the dinner you've been talking art and science and hunting and all that sort of thing; and then he suddenly puts up the wheeze about cards? The first thing you'd say to yourself is: "That fellow must be a crook," because a gentleman wouldn't discuss cards with a stranger. But suppose instead of being a gentleman, he was a fellow like me—a bluff lad of the village, full of fun and jollity, and the question of cards cropped up. You wouldn't think twice about it. You'd look at me and say: "That fellow's well dressed; I suppose he's got plenty of money. He's a farmer, maybe, or a shopkeeper," and you'd trust me. Looking expensive is part of my graft—and my graft is better than others. Now look at that chap over there,' he pointed to a good-looking, quietly and well dressed man. That's Sadbury—at least, that's what he calls himself. Never touches a card. A perfect gentleman if ever there was one—as far as his talk goes.'

Anthony looked at the accomplished Mr Sadbury with interest.

'What is his graft?' he asked, and the cardsharper chuckled softly to himself.

'Bigamy,' was his startling reply, and Anthony gasped. 'He's been married about six times, mostly to wealthy and middle-aged widows,' he went on, and there was a note of reluctant admiration in his voice. 'He picks them up on ships. Takes a voyage to Australia; he's married within three or four days after getting to Sydney. He's been married in Cape Town, Buenos Aires, Ottawa, New York, Colombo, Vancouver and San Francisco. He's never been caught

because nobody's squealed on him. A woman who's been robbed and fooled naturally doesn't make a squeal, especially if she knows nothing about the others. I'm talking to you as brother to brother.'

Anthony accepted the doubtful compliment with equanimity.

'Has he ever been in prison?'

'Three or four times,' said the other carelessly, 'but not for bigamy. I can't say that it's a graft I like,' he said. 'Plain thieving and quick moving is my motto. Besides which, my graft is less dangerous. One of these days somebody's going to get onto Sadbury, and he'll be shot up, as sure as I'm sitting here.'

Jim looked at the bigamist wonderingly. A black-haired man in the late twenties, he was talking to his companion, a slovenly, down-at-heels man, whose furtive eyes and trembling hand were discernible even from that distance.

'That is hardly a prospective victim?' said Anthony.

Jay Gaddit shook his head.

'He's a poor dope—a fellow who takes sleep-stuff. What Sadbury is doing with him, I can't guess.'

In the course of his wanderings about London, Tony came into touch with almost every branch of those nefarious trades which prey upon the unwary, the simple-minded and the super-clever. He had no friends, few hobbies, but his evenings, so far from being the dullest part of the day, were often the most instructive.

To Anthony there was only one girl in all the world, and he never let his mind rest upon her. For, although he was inclined toward romanticism, it never occurred to him that Jane Mansar, a millionaire's daughter, whose beauty was ever with him, and by whom he compared all other women, was for such an adventurer as he. He was no longer a penniless adventurer—thanks to a number of enterprises which had proved more profitable than he in his wildest dreams had ever imagined—but an adventurer.

He had met Jane at the commencement of his career. A car accident, faked in order to bring him into close communion with Mr Gerald Mansar, her hard-faced progenitor, had ended painfully for him. The possibility of the acquaintance being renewed did not seem likely. He did not even speculate upon such an impossible happening. So Anthony Newton wandered alone through the queer byways of London; learnt to know by sight and name men who had a trick of disappearing for months at a time; heard the gossip and

scandal of the underworld and numbered amongst its citizens at least two delightful acquaintances, who, when the first misunderstandings had blown away and when they had discovered that he was neither mug nor copper, were ready to exchange confidences.

For some time after Anthony had dined with his criminal acquaintance, Gaddit, the cardsharp, disappeared. He had 'gone to the country', his friends told him politely. But three months later, Tony learnt that he had gone to 'The Awful Place', and 'The Awful Place' is Dartmoor. Three or four days later came a letter, written on blue paper, and headed 'HM Prison, Princetown'. Anthony did not trouble to think how the man had obtained his address. The knowledge of these things was part of his stock-in-trade. The letter began:

'DEAR MR NEWTON,

'I hope you will pardon me addressing you, but I've been put away for three years on false evidence. Anyway it wasn't all true. Unfortunately, when I was taken I had very little money, and I left my wife totally unprovided for I wonder if it is too much to ask you to see if you can do anything for her?'

It was a curious request, the like of which had never come to Anthony before, but he never hesitated. Writing down the address which the convict had given, he called a taxi, and in a few minutes was deposited at the door of a block of flats in Bloomsbury. The door of No. 69 was opened to his knock by a tall, slender girl of 327, undeniably pretty. She glanced suspiciously at Tony, but in a few words he explained his errand.

'Come in Mr Newton,' she said, and ushered him into a small, pretty drawing-room.

Tony had no idea how the wives of criminals behaved in circumstances like these; but if he expected to find her mournful, or showing signs of grief, he was to be disillusioned.

'It only shows you the awful effect of drink. If he'd been sober he wouldn't have been caught,' she said. 'And after all the help I'd given him, it was a little disgusting for him to go away and leave me only a hundred and fifty.'

Tony was staggered. With her quick perception the woman saw the impression she had created and laughed.

'You didn't expect to find me crying, did you, Mr Newton? After all, this isn't the first time Jay's gone to the country, though he's never had a lagging before. As to money, I really don't want any,' she said, after a few moments' thought. 'I'm working with a friend of mine and I've just enough—if Sadbury hadn't

played me such a low trick, I should be well off.'

The name was familiar to him,

'Oh, you mean the bigamist?'

'Bob told you all about him, didn't he? That man is certainly no gentleman. After I'd put five days' honest work into him, he went away without saying thank you, or anything.'

One thing Tony had learnt of these curious people, and that was never to ask questions. He had to guess what was the 'honest work' Mrs Gaddit had 'put into' Sadbury—and he was a bad guesser.

He went back to his own hotel with a sense of relief. A knowledge of the crooked fraternity had its embarrassing moments. He was busy himself for about that time he was engaged in one of innumerable enterprises. It was three months before he again saw Mrs Gaddit, and then she was in the park. She was driving in a beautiful car, with a chauffeur and footman in attendance, and Tony smiled sympathetically at this proof of her opulence.

It was the day after he had seen the woman driving in state, that something happened which brought the heart into his throat and the hue of the sunset to his face. He was walking down Regent Street on his way to call upon his impecunious and novel-writing lawyer friend, when somebody called him by name and he turned.

At first that vision of radiant loveliness took his breath away and he did not recognise her, thinking she had made a mistake, but she came toward him, laughter in her eyes, her hand outstretched.

'How are you, Mr Newton?'

For a second he was speechless, and could only shake Jane Mansar's hand and gape at her.

'It is nearly a year since we saw you. You haven't called on us.'

There was mischief in the lip trembling with suppressed laughter and Tony surveyed her reproachfully.

'No, I haven't,' he said. His voice was a little husky, his manner horribly gauche. 'The fact is I've been busy—er—'

'Have they made you a Director of the Bank of England?' she asked, innocently, and then: 'You can put your hat on. Apart from the fact that you're drawing a great deal of attention to yourself, you're liable to catch cold.'

Anthony with a muttered apology, put on his hat. He had not been aware that he was bareheaded.

'We've often spoken about you,' she said, as they walked slowly up the crowded street. 'Father and I, I mean. He thought you were the cleverest of all of them.'

Anthony swallowed something, for he knew by 'all of them' Miss Jane Mansar was referring to the unscrupulous young men who had tried, by devious methods to obtain an introduction to her wealthy parent.

'In fact, he wanted to see you,' she went on, and Anthony who had recovered something of his self-possession, smiled.

'Does he want to send me to Brussels?' he asked, dryly.

'No, I don't think he does,' she said this time more seriously. 'Your name cropped up when we were making out the list of invitations to my wedding.'

Anthony stood stock-still.

'Your wedding?' he said, incredulously.

She nodded.

'I'm marrying my cousin; I thought you knew; it was in the papers.'

'Oh, yes,' said Anthony, trying to gain control of his voice. 'Though why the news of her marriage should affect him so he was at a loss to understand. 'I didn't know you had a cousin,' he said, rather feebly, and she laughed.

'You don't know anything about me at all,' she answered, with the old humour in her eyes, 'so don't pretend to, Mr Newton! Though I have so few relatives that might have known Philip. And, talking of-of angels, here is my beloved!'

There was nothing in her tone to suggest that Philip Lassinger was particularly beloved by her. There was, indeed, almost a savage vehemence in the word and Anthony turned to meet a man whom he was prepared to hate.

Philip Lassinger was tall, fair, and his clean-shaven face was more than ordinarily good-looking. Thereupon, Tony realised that he hated all fair-headed men.

'This is Mr Newton,' introduced the girl, and they shook hands.

'Surely not Mr Anthony Newton?' said Lassinger jovially. 'Oh, boy, I've heard all about you!'

The girl sensed Tony's embarrassment.

'Will you come to lunch with us, Mr Newton?' she said, lowering her voice a little. 'I will brave father's annoyance, though I don't think he'll be at all angry.'

Tony's first instinct was to refuse. He wanted to stalk majestically away and commune with his broken heart, but he also wanted lunch; and, more, he wanted the companionship of this fairy-like dream that had so tragically materialised.

Mr Gerald Mansar was waiting in the palm court of the Carlton when they came in, and at the sight of Anthony, his white eyebrows went up.

'This is an unexpected pleasure,' he said, as he gripped Anthony's hand ferociously. 'I think you owe me nine hundred pounds.'

'You owe me an apology, which is worth much more than nine hundred pounds to me,' said Tony coolly.

'I was stung, I admit it,' said Mansar apparently enjoying the recollection. 'You know my nephew, Lassinger?'

He slapped Philip Lassinger on the back and it was easy for Tony to see that the old man's admiration for the youth was sincere. Before lunch ended, he realised that the marriage was less agreeable to the girl than it was to her father. She seldom spoke to her fiance and when she did it was only to make a rejoinder to something he had said.

'What do you think of our prospective bridegroom, Newton?' said the old man, pulling at his cigar after coffee was served. 'He's a world wanderer, my dear fellow... You turned out much better than we ever expected, Phil.'

'I was a pretty bad egg as a boy wasn't I?' smiled Lassinger. 'I think wandering has put me straight, and the days I spent alone on the ranch gave me a whole lot of time to think.'

It was not a pleasant meal for Tony, and long before they parted he wished he had never come. When he got back to his hotel that afternoon, it was to brood savagely upon the freak of fate that had made this good-looking youth (Tony could not honestly deny his good looks) an acceptable suitor to the one girl in the world whom Anthony, in his secret heart, worshipped.

He saw them together, driving down Piccadilly one day, and Philip Lassinger was his own smiling self, but the girl seemed paler, less vivid than when Tony had met her only a few days before. He tried to forget her, but ever his mind wandered back; and to tantalise him, the illustrated papers published full-page

photographs of the girl. Tony cut them all out and had them pinned to the wall of his little bedroom.

The evening before the wedding he met her. It was a wet gusty summer day, and in tune with the elements he was striding savagely through Hyde Park, when he saw a figure ahead of him. He would have passed without looking into the face of the girl, only he heard her gasp of astonishment.

'This is fate,' she said, sombrely. 'Come and sit down. There's a seat under those trees. The misguided park-keeper will probably think we're courting, but if you can sustain that horrible suspicion—'

'I can sustain anything in the world today—for you,' said Anthony.

She sat down and looked at him, and anything less like a bride-to-be Tony could not imagine. Her hat was wet through; she had a bedraggled wisp of hair like a smear on her cheek; and her eyes were bright and hard.

'I escaped from the preparations,' she said, 'and I nearly came to your hotel only I wasn't quite sure which it was. What do you think of it, Anthony Newton?'

'It's not a bad hotel,' began Tony.

'Please don't be humorous, or I shall scream!' she said. 'What do you think of my wedding?'

'I don't want to think about it,' said Tony, and a new light came into her eyes.

'Do you really mean that?'

He nodded.

'I hate it,' she said in a low voice. 'But father has set his heart on it. It was a short but tempestuous wooing—not of me, I mean, but of father. And Philip is nice, and gallant and never embarrasses me, and... but I don't want to marry him. I feel like somebody in a condemned cell, and I'm counting every minute, and oh! they pass so quickly, Tony!' There was a pause. 'Why I called you Tony, I don't know,' she said.

'Possibly because it is my name, but if there is any other reason, I'll excuse you,' said Tony. 'Why do you get married, Jane?'

'Why?... Well, father wants it... Of course, daughters do not marry to please their fathers except in books and yet honestly that is what I am doing. I can't hurt father.'

'You're going to hurt somebody more than your father,' said Tony quietly. 'You're going to hurt me.'

She looked at him straightly.

'Do you mean that—too?'

He nodded, not trusting himself to speak. She was going to say something, but suddenly she jerked herself to her feet.

'I can't stay any longer, or else I shall make a fool of myself and, what will be more awful, I shall make you make a fool of yourself! I'm going home to be a modern bride and total up the wedding presents.'

She walked in silence to Prince's Gate, but the silence was hers, for Tony pleaded, cajoled, even threatened.

'It's no good. Tony,' she said. 'Of course, I'm not in love with you. It would be ridiculous to say I was. But I'm certainly not in love with Philip. Perhaps you're the lesser of the two evils. I'm sorry if that hurt you.' She squeezed his arm affectionately and was gone before he realized that she had any intention of leaving him so suddenly.

It was a sleepless night for Tony Newton. He was determined not to go near the house or the church, but something stronger than resolution took him, and he found himself one of a small group of interested spectators outside the church at eleven o'clock. As he stood watching with an aching heart the arrival of the guests, a big car swept up to the awning and a man stepped out, raising his hat to an acquaintance. It was Philip Lassinger. He heard a 'tut' of impatience by his side, turned, and to his amazement saw Mrs Gaddit, the cardsharpener's wife.

'Hullo, Mr Newton!' she said. 'What do you think of that grafter? For two bits I'd go over and blow the gaff. But you don't know Sadbury.'

Tony's jaw dropped.

'Sadbury!' he gasped. 'You mean Lassinger?'

She nodded. 'That's his graft. It's a real cruel shame not to go after him, though he'll leave her on the honeymoon.'

'But Sadbury's dark!' said Anthony hoarsely.

'I dyed his hair golden. It took five days, and he gave me not a cent. I introduced him to that dope Lassinger—the real Lassinger. He's supposed to have come back from South America, but the real Lassinger's been in England

for years. Didn't Jay point him out to you?'

Then in a flash Tony remembered the seedy individual he had seen dining with Sadbury.

'That's his graft, and he's some mover. He'll be careful with this girl, otherwise he'll be getting a lifer—'

But Tony did not wait to hear any more. He saw the bridal car turn into the broad road and in two seconds he was standing under the awning. Mr Mansar handed out his daughter, a beautiful figure in her wedding gown; and standing, while her train was being adjusted, her eyes fell on Anthony. Mr Mansar saw him, too, and frowned as Tony approached them.

'I want to speak to you, Mr Mansar.'

'I can't talk to you now, Newton,' said the other impatiently.

'This is a matter of life and death,' said Tony. 'The man you call Lassinger is a crook named Sadbury.'

'You're mad!'

'Will you delay the wedding while the matter is investigated, and I'll produce proof?'

'Certainly not,' said Mansar, going crimson with anger. 'Come my love.'

But 'my love' did not move. 'Father, hadn't you better make sure?'

'I will do nothing of the sort!' stormed Mansar, growing furious as he found himself the centre of curious interest.

Reluctantly, the girl put out her arm to take her father's, but Tony stepped in between them.

'Jane,' he said, and he spoke as one with authority, 'you go home!'

For a second she hesitated, looking from her father to this incongruous figure who had suddenly obtruded into the festivities and then, without a word, she turned on her heel, and, to the astonishment of the waiting footmen, stepped into the car.

'Home!' she said, and Mr Mansar stood, paralysed with rage and chagrin, as the car drove off.

'You scoundrel!' he hissed, shaking his fist in Tony's face. 'I'll have—'

'Produce your son-in-law,' said Tony, 'and I'll do all the threatening that's necessary.'

The sound of the altercation brought the bridegroom to the door of the church at that moment, and Tony beckoned to him.

'What the devil is the meaning of this?' he demanded.

'Sadbury, I want you,' said Anthony, and gripped the man's arm professionally. And Mr Sadbury made the one mistake of an otherwise blameless career.

'It's a cop,' he said. 'No rough stuff and I'll go quietly.'

It was two months to the day when Tony Newton came to the Branksome Tower Hotel at Bournemouth and walked into the private suite of Mr Gerald Mansar with the air of the proprietor. Mr Mansar had not returned from London. Tony hoped he would not.

'Here's the full story,' he said. 'Sadbury made a confession. He'd met Lassinger in London—Lassinger being a ne'er—do—well who had been lost sight of for years. When he heard of his relationship to your father, Sadbury got himself made up and appeared in the role of a very successful nephew.'

'He came into father's office one day, and daddy brought him home,' said Jane; 'and, of course, he knew everything about us, because the real Lassinger had told him. And I don't want to know any more, Tony. Did you ask father?'

Tony nodded.

'Was he very angry?'

'A little,' said Anthony Newton cautiously. 'He raved a bit, and cursed a bit—yes, he did, but in the end he said "yes".'

She drew a long breath.

'I think you're wonderfully brave to beard the lion in his den,' she said, and Anthony coughed and said nothing.

It was her father who told her that Anthony had asked for her hand by telephone. For once Tony Newton's nerve had failed.

THE END

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