The Cat Burglar and Other Stories

By Edgar Wallace

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1. THE CAT BURGLAR

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

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

"You can't expect millionaires to marry—especially if they've been married before. This Poynting's got money and a family. Families are always a just

cause an' impediment. If he wants to make you happy by givin' me a directorship—let him."

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

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

"You'd better insure that," said Elsah's wise father. "It's worth three thousand if it is worth a cent."

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

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

"Perhaps," said her cynical parent.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She waved him to comparative quiet.

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

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

"As far as Portland Place, if you go on with this absurd marriage. Or perhaps

I'll go out into the world and do something romantic, such as work for my living."

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

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

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

She said this to John Venner: he was rather charitable. Nothing quite exasperates a woman so much as misapplied charity. And it is invariably misapplied when employed in the defense of another woman.

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

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

With difficulty Dorothy remembered that she was a lady.

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

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

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

"Your dear daddy," cooed Elsah.

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

Elsah swallowed something.

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

"Hang out the flags?" suggested Dorothy.

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

All that sort of stuff.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What a woman!" he said.

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

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

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

He sighed again.

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

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

Mr. Morgan uttered impatient sounds.

"I'd have thought " he began.

Tom did not want to know what he thought.

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

Slip hastened to supply the information.

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

Slip smiled.

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

"I got her," said Slip simply.

Tom removed his cigar again.

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

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

Tom's nose wrinkled.

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

But Slip was not offended.

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

"Except what?"

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

Tom looked at him suspiciously.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Slip argued with great earnestness, and in the end Tom was half convinced.

There was an admitted difficulty as regards the approach, but Slip, a man of tact and resource, was confident that all obstacles would be overcome.

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

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

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

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

"Yes?" asked Mary Smith imperiously.

The maid entered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

She waited.

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

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

Such a response was naturally disconcerting. Happily he could cover his momentary confusion. He groped wildly in an inside pocket, brought out a red

morocco case, and flicked it open. Between visiting-cards, of which he carried a variety, was a newspaper cutting. This he drew out and flourished at her.

"Read that," he commanded.

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

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

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

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

She handed the cutting back.

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

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

She first hesitated, then nodded.

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

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

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

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

Very few women could rattle Slip Morgan. She did.

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

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

Well?"

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

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

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

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

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

"0h!"

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

"0f course, masks! How amusing!" She looked at Slip with a new interest. "Your friend is on the hook, you said? Does that mean he's hanged or he's going to be hanged! Or do I understand that your friend is not exactly honest?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

You just stroll up to the winder—"

""Window," she murmured.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"My friends!"

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

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

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

"This replica—"

"Why not have the original, daddy?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dorothy stared at him.

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

Colonel Poynting smiled.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. THE PICK-UP

It was the day before Mr. Vernon Strate went back to town, where his multifarious activities demanded attention, that he proposed in his quiet way—so quietly, so unemotionally, that at first Margaret Brand did not realize what he was saying.

"I am, of course, your senior by ten or twelve years, and I realize that in many ways I am not the kind of husband you would have chosen."

She listened, at first dismayed, and then in a state of confusion. She was twenty-four, and the kind of man she would have chosen had not appeared. And the future, to this daughter of an Infantry Colonel who had left her the thousand pounds she so jealously hoarded, was growing a little bleak. She held a position that brought her £200 a year and no prospects.

"I really can't think what to say, Mr. Strate—I hardly know you."

Which was true: they had met in the train to Brightsea—his courtesy and

attention had been charming, and she was quite sure that he had exchanged the luxury of the Marine Hotel for the bare comforts of Acacia House in order to be near her.

He had admitted as much. "I am a fairly rich man," he went on, "and I have no ties and no relations..."

He spoke of travel, of Italy and the Riviera and the beauties of his Canadian ranch.

"I am going to town tomorrow. I would like you to give this matter your earnest consideration. On the day we marry, I will settle ten thousand pounds upon you."

He was, despite his denial, an attractive man of forty, tall, and in a way fascinating. His queer trick of dropping his "h's" occasionally used to amuse her at first, but when he told her of his early struggles against poverty, his selfeducation, and his lack of opportunities for acquiring polish, the amusement became sympathy.

Most of the day he spent indoors with his work: his eyes were not strong, and the sun gave him a headache. Sometimes they would stroll together at nights, but that was before he proposed.

In his absence she found herself considering the offer seriously. And yet... it was an ugly thought: Mr. Strate was a "pick-up"—a man who had come into her life without introduction.

Of "pick-ups" Margaret Brand had heard. You found them on the promenade, on the pier, sometimes in trains. They asked you whether you would like the window up or down, would you prefer this shady chair to the one in which you sat; they spoke about the weather or the calmness of the sea, or the oddness of other people. And gradually you came to know them and went char-a-banc rides to ruined castles, or the pictures—soon you found yourself discussing quite intimate things like relations and appendicitis.

Margaret had been two weeks at Brightsea when the real "pick-up" loomed on her horizon. He was not an inmate of Acacia House, that spotlessly clean and economically furnished boarding-house where middle- aged ladies who knitted jumpers in London came to knit jumpers in Brightsea; he did not drop carelessly into a chair by her side on the front, nor stroll past her several times trying to catch her eye.

The meeting was unusual.

She was sitting on one of the hard bench seats, a slim figure in beige, the red

of her open sunshade giving a deeper tinge to her tanned and pretty face, when he came swinging along the deserted pier—it was eight o'clock in the morning, and only energetic fishers were up and about.

A rather tall, brown-faced man in flannels and a dark blue blazer, on the breast-pocket of which was a white dove.

He passed her without a glance, and she looked up from her book and watched him idly till he disappeared round the side of the Pavilion at the far end of the pier. She was reading when he came back, so engrossed in the story that she would not have noticed him had he not tripped and fallen, sprawling at her feet.

"Damn!" he said calmly, as he picked himself up. "Shoelace... terrible sorry!"

He put one foot on the bench and jerked savagely at the long lace that had tripped him. She said nothing—turned her eyes to the book again, though she was not reading.

"If I were trying to scrape acquaintance with you I should attempt something less painful." He was dabbing a scratched hand with a handkerchief.

"But I'm not. And I won't tell you that we've met before, because we haven't. It's a glorious morning, isn't it?"

"Is it?" She barely raised her eyes from the printed page.

"You know jolly well it is." Without invitation he sat down. "You're Margaret Brand. My sister went to school with you. My name is Denman —Ian or John, according to taste. She pointed you out yesterday and tried to attract your attention."

In the old days at St. Mary's, when Margaret Brand was senior prefect and Helen Denman was head girl, there arose the legend of The Awful Brother. He was Helen's, and his awfulness lay in his undiscipline, his rowdiness, his propensity for breaking precious vase. and windows, and his disinclination for morning baths.

Finally, in the last year he did something that was so awful that Helen (something of a prig, Margaret remembered) would not even tell her dearest friend. All that she could recall was that it was disgraceful.

The Denmans were rich and County. Pa Denman had acquired a baronetcy: Mrs. Denman was a lady who was very particular about the people she knew. And the awful brother had been guilty of an act of supreme awfulness. Did he marry a barmaid or run away with the wife of a butcher?... Margaret couldn't

remember—perhaps she had never been told.

"You're not the—awful brother?" she blurted.

He nodded unsmilingly.

"That's me," he said calmly. "Now will you behave?"

She laughed in spite of her momentary fright.

"Yes, I'm the awful brother—I'm in a devil of a tangle. The poor old governor died last year, and I've been trying to hide up my past... You see, I'm a baronet of the United Kingdom, and that doesn't go with certain things. If the newspapers got hold of the story they'd splash it! I'm turning over a new leaf next week, though... chucking everything. I'd like one last fling, though—gosh! how I'd like one big thundering punch before I cleared out!"

He spoke rapidly, jerkily—to her, incoherently. She hadn't the slightest idea of what he was talking about. As suddenly as he had sat down he rose again. "I'll toddle along," he said; "awfully glad to have met you: don't give me away!"

She saw him again in the afternoon, and he carried her off to tea —insisted upon taking her to the theatre that night, and met her early in the morning to instruct her in the art of sea-fishing.

She thought it expedient at the end of the third day to tell him.

"Engaged?" His rather good-looking face was suddenly blank. "Really... I didn't know."

"Well, not exactly engaged," she explained quickly, and told him as much as she thought necessary, changing the subject as quickly as she could.

"Have you had your big punch?" she asked him; "and what is your big punch?"

He shook his head. "No—I don't suppose I shall. Brightsea isn't the sort of place you'd expect to get it."

This puzzled her. What was the dreadful thing he did when he disgraced his family? Was he a jewel thief or... somehow she knew that the barmaid theory was wrong.

That afternoon Mr. Strate returned from London, and she plucked up courage to make her decision.

"Can you come out—I want to speak to you?"

He hesitated. "The sun is rather strong for my eyes," he began.

"Wear your smoked glasses," she suggested. "You did one day, and you didn't get a headache."

He agreed to this, and ten minutes later they were walking slowly along the pier.

"Let us sit here." She sat down, and he at her side.

"Mr. Strate, I want to tell you something. I don't think I can marry you. I am very appreciative of the honor you do me, but I am not anxious to marry—"

"But, my dear," he began, "I've set my 'eart on this—"

And then there appeared in the distance the lank figure of the awful brother.

He saw them, and waved his hand.

"This is a friend of mine," she said—"Ian Denman. I knew his sister—"

To her amazement, the man by her side leapt to his feet with an oath.

"I don't want to meet anybody!" He almost shouted the words. "Tell him I'm not well." But it was too late. Ian Denman had come up.

"This is Mr. Strate," she said haltingly, "a—a friend about whom I spoke to you."

The awful brother was glaring down at them.

"Good Lord!" he groaned. "Here's my chance and I can't take it —beat it, Smith!"

To her horror and amazement the placid Mr. Strate rose and ran at top speed toward the entrance of the pier, the awful brother running after him.

"You've spoilt it, my dear!" he said, as he fell into the vacant seat. "I wanted to go out of the force in a blaze of glory And now I can't!"

"Who—who are you?" she gasped.

He chuckled.

"Didn't you know I disgraced the family by joining the police. I'm Detective-Sergeant Denman of Bow Street, and I've been looking for Smith —alias Bocosco, alias Strate—for months. He's a professional bigamist, and wanders round looking for lonely young ladies who have a few hundred pounds in their

bank.

"Come and have a lemon squash, and I'll tell you where we'll spend our honeymoon."

3. DISCOVERING REX

In the office of the Public Prosecutor was a young lawyer named Keddler, for whom the prospects were of the brightest until he grew impatient with the type of evidence which was supplied him by the painstaking but unimaginative constabulary, and went out single-handed to better their efforts. And he succeeded so remarkably well that a reluctant Commissioner of Police admitted his superiority as a detective and offered him a post at New Scotland Yard.

This offer was enthusiastically accepted, but since the regulations do not admit of amateur police work and he found himself relegated to the legal department, where his work consisted of preparing statements of evidence for his successor at the P.P. office to examine, he resigned at the end of six months. To return to his former position was, at the time, impossible, and against the advice of his friends and in face of solemn warnings from his old chief, he opened an office in the city of London, describing himself as an "Investigating Agent."

Despite the gloomy predictions of his associates, John Keddler grew both opulent and famous. The opulence was welcome, but the fame was embarrassing, not that John was unduly modest, but because it led on three occasions to his identification at a moment when it was vitally necessary that he should be unknown to the persons who detected him.

Starting on a small job for the Midland and County Bank, a matter of a forged acceptance, in which the real police had failed to satisfy the bank, he enlarged his clientele until he found himself working amicably with Scotland Yard in the matter of Rex Jowder, alias Tom the Toy, alias Lambert Sollon.

Rex was wanted urgently by several police departments for insurance fraud, impersonation, theft, forgery, and general larceny, but only the insurance fraud was really important because it involved a well-known Chicago house in a loss of 700,000 dollars, which they were anxious to recover before Rex, who was notoriously careless when he handled other people's money, dissipated his fortune in riotous living. John Keddler was commissioned by the London

agents of the company to bring about this desirable result, but unfortunately the lean, shrewd thief had learnt from an indiscreet newspaper that John was his principal danger, and had spent two days waiting in the country lane in which the detective's modest little house was situated, and one dark night when John descended from his car to open the gates of his demesne, six pounds weight of sand had fallen upon his shoulder. The sand was enclosed in a sausage-shaped bag, and it was intended for his neck.

Taken at this disadvantage Keddler was almost helpless and would have ceased to worry Mr. Jowder until the inevitable give and take of the Day of Judgment, only the assailant had placed himself in an unfavorable position to follow up his attack, though it was helpful to him that the red rear light of the car reflected on the polished steel of the gun John pulled mechanically.

He dived to the cover of a hedge and ran, and John Keddler had been so respectably brought up that he hesitated to scandalize the neighborhood by discharging firearms to the public danger. In some respects John Keddler was a slave of convention. But this mild adventure served to concentrate his mind and attention still more closely upon the case of Rex Jowder, and so well did he work that at the end of a week there was a police raid upon a certain safe deposit in the city, and there was discovered the bulk of the stolen money which the misguided Jowder had cached (as he believed) beyond the fear of discovery.

Why this raid was carried out is a story made up of John's instinct, a drunken man, a frightened woman (Rex was strong for ladies' society), and an indiscreet reference, repeated by his terrorized lady friend, to a mysterious key which hung about his neck. He would have been captured also, only the police were a little over-elaborate in their preparations.

With his money gone, the fruit of two years' clever and dangerous work, Rex Jowder became something more than annoyed. Before him was a life sentence, and standing at the focal point of his misfortune was one John Keddler. From the point of view of the insurance company whose gratitude he had earned, John was not a "good life."

"What about Jowder?" asked his confidential clerk.

"Jowder can wait," said John. "As a matter of fact I am not very much interested in the man any longer."

But the man was very much interested in John, and he was content to wait too, though his waiting had to be done in a mean Lambeth lodging.

As for John Keddler, he accepted in a joyous holiday spirit the commission

which followed the loss of Lady Bresswell's jewelry, for Lady Bresswell lived on the Lake of Como, and John was partial to the Italian lakes. Incidentally this visit was to introduce him to the Marchessa Della Garda—that unhappy lady.

From the first the wisdom of Mona Harringay's marriage bristled with notes of interrogation—those little sickles that trim the smothering overgrowth of truth.

There was no doubt that the Della Garda family hated the Marchessa with a hatred born of an enormous disappointment. They referred to Mona as "The Señora Pelugnera" (they affected Spanish by virtue of their descent from the Borgias), and "Mrs. Hairdresser" was adopted to keep fresh the ghastly fact that Mona's father was the very rich proprietor of Harringay's Elixir for the Hair.

The marriage was in every way an amazing one, for Giocomi was no impoverished third cousin of the real nobility. Head of the Della Garda clan and immensely wealthy, the ordinary excuses and explanations of a marriage between an Italian marquis and the daughter of a rich American were wanting. They had met in Harringay's Long Island home where Giocomi was a guest. He was making his first long absence from the Continent of Europe. Therefore he was home-sick and miserable when he met Mona, and their marriage was the natural reaction. She, for her part, was fascinated by his good looks and a little overwhelmed by the impetuosity of his wooing. The wedding was the social event of a brilliant season.

Not until the liner was clear of Sandy Hook did Giocomi Della Garda emerge from his delirium, and face the certainty of his relatives' wrath. For all his good looks and his perfect manners, he was not a nice young man. He had, in particular, a weakness for approval, one of the most fatal to which the human soul is liable, and the nearer to Genoa the vessel came, the more and more he resented the existence of a wife who had already surrendered her mystery, that lure which had led Giocomi into so many adventures, but which had never before yielded him a wife.

Mona, Marchessa Della Garda, realized the bleak failure of her life long before she came home to the cold, oppressive atmosphere of the gloomy palace which had housed sixteen generations of the family. Neither the cold majesty of the Pallacco Della Garda, nor the exotic splendors of the Villa Mendoza, set amidst the loveliness of Lake Como, brought compensation to a disillusioned heart-sick girl. But her one and only visit to the Como home was not without its consequences. Lady Bresswell, a grateful and somewhat voluble lady (her lost jewels recovered without the scandal which would have attended the investigations of the police), was showing John Keddler the

glories of the lake. They had brought her ladyship's expensive motor-boat to a rest near Cadenabbia, and the servants were spreading lunch when round a tiny headland came a boat, the sole occupant of which was a girl.

She pulled with long, steady strokes and seemed oblivious to their presence, although she only passed them a dozen yards away.

John Keddler, a man to whom all women were very much alike, gazed at her fascinated. The sun in her russet gold hair, the appealing sadness of her delicate face, the sweep of her perfect figure, took his breath away. It was as though he had seen a vision of some other world.

He watched her until she brought the boat to a white landing-stage, and stepping out and tying the boat, had disappeared behind a great fuchsia bush.

Then he heaved a long sigh, and like a man waking from a dream turned to meet the laughing eyes of his hostess.

"Who was that?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

"I've told you twice, Mr. Keddler," smiled Lady Bresswell, "but you were so absorbed that you didn't hear me. She is lovely, isn't she?"

"Who is she?"

"The Marchessa Della Garda, an American girl who married Giocomi—poor dear. Giocomi is rather a beast."

"Oh," said John, and that was all he said.

Sixteen generations on her father's side of hairdressers, general workers, coal-miners, and peasants had supplied Mona Della Garda with the capacity for endurance and patience, but on her mother's side, she went back to some quick-drawing folks who had made the lives of successive western sheriffs exasperatingly lively, and when, some six months after John Keddler had seen her, Giocomi followed a flagrant breach of his marriage vows by boxing her ears, she took a pistol from the drawer of her dressing-table.

There was excellent reason for this act, for Giocomi was weeping with rage at her mild reproach and had flung off to his room in search of a hunting-crop. Following him went Pietro Roma, his valet, also in tears, for this man worshipped the young Marchessa and would have died for her. It nearly happened that he did, for in frenzy at his interference, Giocomi clubbed him into insensibility with the heavy end of the stock. He never used the whip.

The major-domo of his establishment, attending the cracked head of the valet,

heard a shot and mistook it for the crack of a whip, until the Marchessa came downstairs wearing a heavy carriage coat over her evening dress and carrying her jewel-case in her hand. Even then, he did no more than wonder why the illustrious lady should go abroad on a night of storm.

Later came doctors, examining magistrates, and, one by one, white- faced Della Gardas to take counsel together. More than a week passed and Giocomi Della Garda was laid away in the dingy family vaults of SS. Theresa and Joseph, before the name of John Keddler was mentioned.

It came about that news reached Rome of Pietro Roma, who disappeared with a broken head the day after his master's death and had been seen in London.

"If she is in London too," said Philip Della Garda thoughtfully, "you may be sure that she will never be discovered. The English and Americans work hand in hand, and they will do everything that is humanly possible to cover up her tracks. I am all for employing the man Keddler. He recovered Lady Bresswell's jewelry last summer, and even at the British Embassy they speak of him with respect."

Prince Paolo Crecivicca, his kinsman, stroked his white beard.

"I shall never be happy until this woman is brought to trial," he said, "and I agree that this infernal rascal, Pietro, is probably in communication with her, for, according to Dellimono, he was the man who betrayed to 'The Hairdresser' poor Giocomi's little affair with the Scala girl, and these vulgarians would be on terms of friendship. Employ Mr. Keddler by all means. Wire to him at once."

John Keddler arrived in Rome thirty-six hours later—no miracle this, with the London-Paris, Paris-Milan, Milan-Rome air services in full operation. Though he answered the summons in such a hurry that Philip Della Garda not unnaturally believed he was eager for the job, he displayed no remarkable enthusiasm for the undertaking. Particularly was this apathy noticeable after all that Prince Crecivicca described as the "unfortunate facts" were revealed.

"In England, of course, she would be acquitted," he said, a little stiffly, "and even in Italy—do you think it is wise to bring this matter before your courts? The publicity... the scandal...?"

Philip Della Garda showed his small teeth in a smile.

"We are superior to public opinion," he said smugly. "Had this happened two hundred years ago we would have dealt with the Hairdresser without invoking the assistance of the courts. As it is—"

As it was explained by the Della Gardas in chorus, this woman must be subjected to the humiliations of a trial, whatever be the jurors' verdict.

"Of course," said John politely. "Have you a photograph of the lady?"

Not until then did he realize that he had been sent to track the woman of his dreams—the woman who had no name to him but "The Girl in the Boat." They saw him frown and a queer expression come to his face.

"I will do my best," he said.

When he had gone, leaving his employers with a sense of dissatisfaction, Philip Della Garda, accounted by his friends as something of a sportsman, had an inspiration.

"Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" he demanded pedantically. "I will go to London myself."

Passing through Paris, Keddler was seen by a journalist who happened to be on the aviation ground, and it was his speculative note on the occurrence which Mona Della Garda read in her Battersea lodging:

"Among the famous people who now use the air express for their continental travels is Mr. John Keddler, the well-known private detective. Mr. Keddler, in an interview, says he finds the air-way an invaluable boon. He had been called to Rome in connection with the Della Garda murder, and was able to make the return journey in a little over twenty- four hours—a journey which ordinarily would have taken four to five days. He left immediately for London, and hopes to bring about the arrest of the Marchessa in a very short time."

Of course, John Keddler said nothing about the Della Garda murder, or his hopes. He had grunted a "good afternoon" at the enterprising press agent of the Aviation Company, and there began and ended the interview—but Mona Della Garda, reading this paragraph, fell into a blind panic.

For now, the sustaining heat of righteous anger had departed from her, and the strain of the sixteen barber generations—they had been law-abiding and for the most part timorous barbers, with exalted views on the sanctity of human life—was asserting its pull. Murder in any degree was to them merely a phenomenon of the Sunday newspapers, as remote from reality as the moons of Saturn.

"I wonder, miss, if you ever read them agony columns in the newspapers!" asked Mrs. Flemmish one morning.

Mrs. Flemmish was her landlady and a woman from the Wessex borders of

Devon, a woman of rolled sleeves and prodigious energy, whose stoves were brighter than the panels of limousines.

Mona had found her room by accident and was perfectly served, for Mrs. Flemmish had unbounded faith in the spoken word of her sex, and never doubted that "Miss Smith" was a young lady who wrote for the press. Mona had to excuse her feverish interest in the daily newspapers.

"Yes—yes," said Mona, going white. She lost her color readily in these days, and her frequent pallors gave her delicate face a fragility which Mrs. Flemmish in secret accepted as a symptom of lung trouble.

"I'd like to know who this 'Dad' is who keeps on advertising to 'M.', telling her to communicant—communicate, I mean, with him. Where's Long Island, miss?"

"In—in America," said the girl hurriedly, "near New York."

"I suppose she's run away from home," ruminated Mrs. Flemmish. "Girls be girls all over the world—but she ought to let her father know, don't ye think so, Miss Smith?"

Mona nodded. How could she let him know, other than by letter, and a letter was on its way. Mr. Harringay would pass that epistle in mid-ocean, for he had caught the first east-bound liner, a greatly distracted man.

If she could only get into touch with the devoted Pietro. The poor fellow was in London, searching for her—a mad search, since he would be followed, and he could not find her without also betraying her.

A thought came to her on the third evening after the return of John Keddler. There had been some reference to Pietro in the newspapers. A reporter had found him amongst the outcast and homeless on the Thames Embankment one night, and had secured a "good story" from him. Perhaps he slept there every night? She would search for him. A man's help might save her—even the help of this poor devoted servant.

"I am going out tonight, Mrs. Flemmish," she said.

Mrs. Flemmish made a little grimace.

"It's not a good night for ye, mum," she shook her head. "There's one of them Lunnon fogs workin' up. Did ye read the paper tonight about the Eye-talian lady, miss?"

Mona's heart almost stopped beating.

"N—no," she said; "is there any fresh—which Italian lady?" she asked.

Mrs. Flemmish had settled herself down in the chintz-covered arm- chair and was stirring the fire economically.

"They a' set a detective on her, poor creature," she said. "Do you think 'twas her father that put the advertisement in the paper?"

Mona had a grip of herself now.

"Perhaps," she answered steadily, and Mrs. Flemmish, staring in the orange depths of the fire, nodded.

"If I were her, her bein' a rich young woman, I know what I'd do, ees fay!"

Mona frowned. She had never looked to this sturdy country woman for a solution to her agonizing problems.

"What would you do?" she asked slowly.

"I'd marry a young Englishman," nodded Mrs. Flemmish. "My man were in a lawyer's office an' clever he was, as all the Welsh people are, an' often he's told me that you can't arrest an Englishwoman in England for a crime in foreign parts."

The girl could only stare. That solution had not occurred to her, and if it had, she would have rejected it, for even the enthusiastic scientist is not prone to repeat the experiment which cost him everything short of life by its failure.

"Her has money, by all accounts," said the woman, feeling furtively between the bars of the fire to dislodge a glowing piece of slate. "Her could buy a husband and divorce him, and even when she was divorced her'd be safe."

Mona stood for a long time pinching her red lips in thought, and Mrs. Flemmish turned her head to see if she was still there, a movement that startled the girl into activity.

"I'll go now, Mrs. Flemmish," she said hastily. "I have the key...."

A light yellow mist lay upon the streets, which were crowded even at this late hour, for it was Christmas week, as the cheery contents of the shop windows showed. Great blobs of golden light looming through the fog marked the blazing windows of the stores, and she passed through a road lined with stalls that showed vivid coloring under the flaring, pungent naphtha lamps.

She checked a sob that rose in her throat at the memory of other Christmas weeks, and hurried her pace, glad, at last, to reach the bleakness of the bridge

that crossed a gray void where the river had been.

A taxi-cab carried her to the West End, and this she dismissed in the darkest corner of Trafalgar Square, making her way on foot toward Northumberland Avenue. She had to pass under the brilliant portico lights of the Grand Hotel, and had disappeared into the gloom beyond, before the young man who was standing on the step waiting for his car, realized it was she.

She heard his startled exclamation, and looking back in affright, recognizing Philip Della Garda, ran. Swiftly, blindly through the thickening fog she flew, crossing the wide thoroughfare and turning backward into Graven Street.

Philip Della Garda!

He hated London in the best of seasons. There could be only one incentive to his presence in the raw of December, and she was terrified. They would arrest her and take her back to Italy and a lifelong imprisonment. She had heard stories, horrifying stories, of the Italian prisons, where the convicted murderers were buried in an underground cell away from light and human companionship in the very silence of death. None spoke to them, neither guardian nor priest. They lived speechless until the thick darkness drove them mad.

She could have shrieked; the terror thus magnified by the uncanny mirk in which she now moved had assumed a new and more hideous significance.

Marriage could save her! It was this mad panic thought that sent her hurrying along the Strand, peering into the faces of men who loomed from the nothingness of the fog and passed, none dreaming of her quest. There were men who leered at her, men who stared resentfully at the eager scrutiny she gave them in the fractional space of a second that the light allowed.

And then the inspiration came, and she hurried down a steep slippery street to the Thames Embankment. The benches were already filled with huddled figures, so wrapped in their thread-bare coats that it was almost impossible to tell that they were human.

"May I speak to you?"

Her heart was beating a stifling tattoo as she sat down in the one unoccupied space which Providence had left by the side of the man whose face she had glimpsed in the light thrown by a passing tramway car.

Instantly she had made her decision. There was a certain refinement revealed in the lean face, a sense of purpose which seemed out of tune with his situation. He did not answer her, but drew more closely to the wreck that

slumbered noisily at his side.

"I—I don't know how to begin," she said breathlessly, "but I'm in great trouble. I—I must tell you the truth; the police are searching for me for something I did in Italy—"

She stopped, physically unable to go on.

"The police are searching for you, are they?" There was an undercurrent of amusement in the man's words. "Well, I sympathize with you—I'm being sought for at this particular moment."

She shrank back almost imperceptibly, but he noticed the movement and laughed. She recovered herself. She must go on now to the bitter end.

"Are you British?" she asked, and after a second's hesitation he nodded. "Are you married?" He shook his head. "If I gave you money—a lot of money, would you—would you marry me—at once?"

He half turned and stared at her.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because if—if I became British by marriage they would not arrest me. I only want your name—I will pay you—anything, anything!"

Her voice was husky, and the underlying fear in it was not to be mistaken.

"I see," he said; "you want to be naturalized by marriage. That's the idea?"

She nodded.

"Could it be done—quickly?"

The man rubbed his chin.

"I think it could be done," he said. "Tomorrow is Thursday. If I gave notice we could marry Saturday—where do you live?"

She told him and he rubbed his chin again.

"It might be done," he said. "I've got a sort of claim to Battersea. If I—anyway you can meet me at the registrar's on Saturday at twelve. What is your name?"

She told him that and gave him the other particulars he asked. He seemed to be thinking the matter over, for he did not speak for a long time. A policeman strolled past, flashing his lantern in their direction, and he dropped his head.

"There is one thing I want to say," said Mona desperately. It took all her courage to tell him this. "I only want your name. When—when it is all over I shall divorce you... you understand?"

"H'm," said the man, and got up.

"Let's walk along," he said. "I'll take you as far as Westminster Bridge, and you don't mind if I cross the road occasionally; it might be very awkward if I met a certain person, if I was with you."

The man kept close to the parapet, Mona nodded, and they were abreast of Cleopatra's Needle when he caught her arm and drew her to the recess. The fog had lifted and he had seen a tall saunterer walking near the kerb and scrutinizing the sleepers on the bench.

The searcher did not see them, and the man at Mona's side looked after him.

"If you weren't here," he said softly, "I'd have settled an old score with that gentleman."

He left her at the end of the Embankment and Mona went home, not daring to think. The next day was a day of torture. She was placing her life in the hands of a man who, by his own confession, was a fugitive from justice. And yet... she must do it, she must, she must, she told herself vehemently.

That morning the newspapers had given greater prominence to the Della Garda murder. There was an interview with Philip Della Garda, who had seen her and had told of his recognition in half a column of closely set type. From this newspaper, too, she had a clue as to the identity of her future husband. She found it in a note dealing with the activities of John Keddler.

"Mr. Keddler, who has been commissioned by the Della Garda family to assist the police in their search, is also on the track of Rex Jowder, an international swindler, supposed to be of British origin, who is wanted for frauds both in London and New York."

In a flash it came to her. That saunterer was Keddler—the man who was tracking her down, and her chosen husband was an international swindler! She wrung her hands in despair, and for a second wavered in her resolution.

Nevertheless, a sleepless night spent in a painful weighing of this advantage against that peril, brought her to the registrar's office.

She carried with her a large portion of the money she had brought from Italy—happily, in view of a flight from the tyrannies of Giocomi Della Garda, she had kept a considerable sum in the house. She realized with consternation that

she had fixed no sum; would he be satisfied with the four thousand pounds she brought to him? But what did that matter? Once she was married, she would be free to communicate with her father, and he would satisfy the most extravagant demands of her husband.

There was only one fear in her heart as she walked through the pelting rain to the dingy little office. Would the man repent of his bargain—or worse, would he be unable to keep the appointment? Both aspects of her doubt were cleared as soon as she set foot in the outer lobby of the office. He was waiting, looking more presentable than she had expected. His raincoat was buttoned to the chin and she thought him good looking in the daylight.

"I had the certificate made out in your maiden name," he said in a low voice. "It makes no difference to the legality of the marriage."

She nodded, and opening a door, they stepped into a chilly-looking office, and to the presence of an elderly man who sat writing slowly and laboriously at a big desk.

He glanced up over his spectacles.

"Oh yes—Mr.—er—" He looked helplessly at the certificate he was filling. "Yes—yes, I won't keep you young people longer than a few moments."

They sat down and Mona utilized the respite.

"Here is the money," she whispered, and pushed a roll of notes into his outstretched hand.

He took the notes without any great display of interest and coolly slipped them into the pocket of his raincoat without troubling to count them.

Presently the old man rose and beckoned them.

As in a dream Mona Della Garda heard his monotonous voice, and then a ring was pressed upon her cold finger.

"That's that," said her husband cheerfully. "Now come along and have some food—you look half dead."

She stared from him to the golden circlet on her hand.

"But—but I don't want to go with you," she stammered in her agitation. "It was understood... I leave you now... but you must tell me where I can find you."

"Young lady," the man's voice was not unkind, "I have taken a few risks for

you and you must do something for me. There is a gentleman waiting in the rain for me; he has been trailing me all the morning, and my only chance of escaping a disagreeable occurrence is in your companionship."

"But I don't want..." she began, and seeing his face, "very well, I will go with you to a restaurant."

He nodded and they went out in the rain together. Three paces they had taken when there was a sound like the sharp crack of a whip. Something like an angry bee in terrific flight snapped past Mona's face, and her husband leapt at a man who was standing half a dozen paces away. Again came the explosion, but this time the bullet went high, and in a second she was the terrified spectator of two men at grips.

The struggle did not last long. Three policemen came from nowhere and one of the men was seized. The other came back to her wiping the mud from his coat.

"I didn't think he was such a blackguard," he said.

She could only look at him in wide-eyed fear.

"Who was he?" she gasped.

"A fellow named Rex Jowder," said her husband; "he's been looking for me for a month."

"Then you...?"

"I'm John Keddler," he smiled, "and I think I've lost a good client. Come along and lunch and I'll tell you how you can get your divorce—I'm a bit of a lawyer, you know. Besides which I'd like to return all that money you gave me."

Whether or not, in the complicated terms of the Extradition Treaty between Italy and Britain, Mona Keddler could have been tried in London for a crime committed in Rome, no jurist would commit himself to say. John Keddler in his wisdom did not challenge a decision. He had an interview with his furious employer, who threatened and stormed—and went home. Mona he sent to a place of safety until the storm blew over; but the storm was the mildest of breezes.

The winter turned to spring and the spring to summer. The Italian Government notified all persons concerned that the Della Garda "affair" would be regarded as a lamentable family tragedy, for which nobody could be held liable; and the summer came to autumn again before Mona Keddler sailed for New York.

The question of divorce, in spite of many meetings at luncheon, dinner, and tea-tables, had never been properly discussed by either. It was not until the evening before she sailed for New York that Mona Keddler asked the question that had puzzled her so through the six months of her curiously pleasant married life.

"I cannot quite understand, Jack, why you did it," she said.

"Did what?"

She hesitated.

"Married me," she said. "It has practically ruined your career, for I don't see just how we can divorce one another without... well, without unpleasantness. The divorce laws are so horribly strict in England. And you are married—without a wife. It was selfish, miserably selfish of me to let you do it—but why did you?"

He was unusually grave.

"For the last reason in the world you would suspect," he said.

"But what?" she asked.

Here he was adamantine.

"I'll keep my mystery," he said, "but I'll write my reason in a letter, if you swear you will not break the seal of the envelope until your ship is on the high seas."

She promised, and he watched the Olympic drift from the pier at Southampton with a little ache at his heart that nothing could assuage—watched until the trim figure on the promenade deck and the handkerchief she waved were indistinguishable from other figures and other wildly waving handkerchiefs.

Then he went back to town, heavy hearted, feeling that life was almost done with.

At that moment Mona Keddler was reading for the fortieth time the scrawled words in pencil:

"Because I loved you from the day I saw you rowing on the Lake of Como."

Her trunks were piled on the deck and she was watching the low-lying shores of France with a light in her eyes which no man had ever seen.

John Keddler had forgotten that the ship called at Cherbourg on the outward

voyage.

4. THE MAN IN THE GOLF HUT

He walked down the stairs from the great man's study, and at every two steps he came to a halt as some new aspect of the situation appeared to him. He had an absurd desire to sit down on the heavily carpeted treads and take his time over his musings, and once or twice he did lean on the sloping and massive handrail to allow himself a physical ease that his mind might work with greater smoothness.

Of course, the whole thing was madness—stark lunacy, and the greatest, least reasonable, most extravagant of all the lunacies was John Jenner's sublime egotism. His name must be protected; his honor must be avenged; he must face the world without blush or reproach.

Bobby Mackenzie chuckled hysterically but internally.

There were seven more stairs to descend before he came to the broad landing from whence one reached the drawing-room and Leslie Jenner.

"Phew!" said Bobby, drew a handkerchief from his sleeve, and wiped his brow.

He went down two steps and lingered... down three more and halted, drumming the handrail with nervous fingers... then boldly took the last two together, strode across the landing, laid a resolute hand upon the doorknob, and found his knees shaking.

And yet he was a sturdy young man, good and healthy looking, practised in the ways of social intercourse and one who was not unused to meeting difficult situations. Once, in a shattered trench fronting the Hindenburg line, he had pushed nerve-shattered men into action with a ribald jest which had become an army classic. At this moment he did not feel humorous.

He turned the knob with an effort of will which would have nerved a condemned man to put the rope about his own neck.

A girl was standing against the fireplace, her back to him. She did not look round even when he banged the door. He saw her shoulders shake, and looked back at the door.

"Miss Jenner," he said huskily, "don't... don't...!"

She turned, and he gasped.

"You were... laughing?" he asked incredulously.

"Of course I was laughing," she scoffed. "Isn't it laughable—father's absurd scheme?"

He nodded very slowly. He was very fond of Leslie Jenner. Every man was fond of her—a wisp of a girl, light-treading, lissome, quick- thinking.

"I told you some of the story before you went up to father," she said. "I suppose he told you the rest?"

"I suppose he did," he admitted carefully.

"He told you that I had spent the night with an unknown man in the golf hut?" she said.

He nodded again.

"I'll tell you the rest." She settled herself on a fender-seat and pointed to the big arm-chair opposite to her. Bobby seated himself meekly.

"I'd been to the Winslows," she said; "they're great pals of father's. Old Winslow is one of the two gods of finance whom father worships; father is the other. They had a birthday party—one of their numberless children has reached twenty-one without mishap, and naturally they wanted everybody to rejoice and be exceeding glad. Daddy was going, but something colossal happened at the last minute—steel rose an eighth or lard fell a twenty-fourth or something—and naturally the world stopped revolving. I went alone—Winslows' place is about twelve miles out of town, and you have to cross a piece of waste land that is called Smoke Park. It is a desolation and an abomination—"

"Must you be scriptural?" pleaded Bobby. "I only ask because your parent has been—"

"The Book of Job?" interrupted the girl quickly—"'He hath made me a byword to the people, and I am become an open abhorring'—I thought he might. Well, to continue this strange story. Nothing happened at the dance except that I saw you flirting outrageously with Sybil Thorbern—"

"Flirting!" groaned Bobby. "Oh lord!—well, go on."

"Anyway, you were talking most earnestly to her—Jack Marsh pointed out

that fact."

"He would," said Bobby. "I'm hardly likely to flirt with the wife of my best pal—but go on."

"Coming back at a little after midnight," she continued, "my car stopped. There was oil where gas should have been or gas where oil was due, I can't tell you. Anyway, Anderson, that's the chauffeur, disappeared into the interior of the bonnet and remained, uttering strangled moans from time to time, and emerging at intervals to apologize for the weather. You see, being a warm night I went in an open car, without hood or anything, and it began to rain like... like...."

"Hell," suggested the sympathetic man in the chair.

"Yes—thank you. I was getting wet through, and I remembered that there was a shelter—a small respectable hut which had been erected for golfers—we were on the course when we finally went dead. Without saying a word to Anderson, I tripped daintily along a path and found the hut. By this time it was raining—um—well, as you said. The door of the hut was closed, but it opened readily enough and I stepped inside. I was within hailing distance of the car, but the chauffeur had not seen me go, you understand?"

The other nodded.

"No sooner was I inside when I had a horrible feeling that there was somebody else there. I went spiney and shivery and made for the door. Before I could reach it somebody caught me by the arm. He was very gentle but very firm.

"'If you shout,' he said, in a disguised voice—I knew the voice was disguised—'I'll knock your infernal head off!'"

"I see," said Bobby; "he was a gentleman."

"He wasn't bad," said the girl; "after that he was quite nice. He said that he hated doing this, but it was all for my good, and he hoped that I'd have the sense to see that he wouldn't have taken the step but for circumstances over which he had no control. In fact, it struck me that he was nervous himself."

"You couldn't see him?"

"No—it was absolutely dark. Then I heard the chauffeur's voice shout 'Are you there?' I was going to answer, but the man put his hand over my mouth. Then I heard the car drone down the road. Anderson thought I must have walked on, and went along to pick me up. I don't know what I said to the gentleman in the hut—I think I was offensive. He didn't seem to mind.

"'You will stay here till one-thirty,' he said, 'and then you can go home.'"

"The brute! You were terribly frightened I suppose?" said Bobby.

"No—the queer thing is that I wasn't," replied the girl. "I just recognized that this was an unusual person. I even made up stories about him."

"Like what?" asked the interested Bobby.

"Well, perhaps he had committed a murder, an old feud, you know, and that sort of thing, and was making his escape when I came in upon him. I was puzzled about the one-thirty. Why did he want me to stay so long? Presently, however, I got a clue. There was a sound of a car coming along the road, and I saw its head-lamps appear over the rise. It was from the same direction as I had come, and stopped at identically the same spot where my car had stopped. I heard somebody get down, then I heard a whistle. And this is where the queerest part of the adventure began. My jailer literally pushed me into a corner of the hut.

"'Don't make a sound,' he said quite fiercely, and then he walked to the door, opened it, and stepped out. I heard somebody say, 'Is that you?' and then my man replied in a horrid, gruff, growling voice: 'Nothing doing!' The other person made no reply, but I heard his feet scuttling back to the car, and presently the car moved on, working up to a terrific pace before it disappeared."

"What did your man do?" asked Bobby.

"He came back," said the girl, "and he was laughing as though at the greatest joke in the world. But it was no joking matter for him, for just as I started in to ask with all the dignity that I could command that he should escort me at once to my home, along came papa's car from the opposite direction and pulled up near the golf hut. I heard father's loud voice cursing Anderson.

"'Of course she's in the golf hut, you fool,' he said. 'Do you think a daughter of mine wouldn't have sufficient sense to come in out of the rain? Give me one of those head-lamps.'

"He took the lamp in his hand, and then my jailer began to get agitated.

"'Is he coming here?' he whispered. 'Who is it?'

"'My father,' I said very coldly.

"'Your father!'"

"There was a kind of horror in his voice that went straight to my heart," said

Leslie. "He turned to me and asked: 'What is your name?' I told him, and I think he nearly dropped."

"He didn't realize how important a prisoner he had, I suppose?" suggested Bobby.

"Don't be sarcastic—at any rate, father was no sooner on the path leading up to the hut, when my ruffian threw open the door and bolted like a hare. I saw father's lamp turn in his direction, but daddy could only have caught a glimpse of his back. And then, Bobby," said the girl solemnly, "the fat was in the fire! Of course, if I'd had a glimmer of intelligence, I should have told father the truth and stuck to my story."

"Though it was an extremely improbable one," said Bobby gravely, and the girl nodded.

"It was improbable, but it was true. The improbability of the yarn, however, struck me first. My imagination was too keen. I pictured just how father would stand with his hands on his hips and his legs apart, glaring down at me, and I just didn't feel like explaining.

"'Who was that man?' demanded father, and his voice was so deceptively mild and reasonable that I thought I had an easy escape—and I just gave the name that came into my head!"

"Which happened to be mine," said Bobby sadly.

"Which happened to be yours," she agreed.

"Did it strike you," asked Bobby, "that you would have the devil of a job explaining me away—especially as I bolted? That you were spoiling my young career, blackening my fair name, and jeopardizing my prospects?"

"Not until afterwards," she confessed ruefully. "When I got home I went to daddy and told him the whole truth, and he said I was shielding you, that by heavens I should make amends, by heavens he had half a mind to shoot you, and by heavens such a large blot had never been splashed upon the family escutcheon—of course, I knew I was wrong. I know I am wrong now. I want you to forgive me, Bobby. It is pretty hard on me you know—I've still to tell Jack Marsh."

"Oh, Jack Marsh!" said the young man softly. "Is he an interested party in this business?"

She hesitated.

"In a way," she said; "you see, there's a sort of understanding—I'll tell you frankly, Bobby. I'm rather fond of Jack, and I'm rather afraid of him. I'm fond of you too, but I'm not afraid of you. You see?"

"I see," said Bobby, "and that is rather a good thing."

There was a certain significance in his words, and she looked at him sharply.

"Oh, by the way, you haven't told me what happened upstairs. Did father ask you to marry me?"

He nodded.

"He not only asked, he demanded."

"Poor boy," she smiled; "you had an awful difficulty in getting out of it, didn't you?"

"Not at all," said Bobby, brushing invisible crumbs from his knees, "not at all. In fact, I didn't get out of it."

"You didn't—get out of it?" she asked breathlessly, staring at him.

"No," said Bobby, "I didn't. I just said 'All right!'"

There was a long silence.

"What does that mean? Do you mean to say—that you accepted me?" she asked faintly.

Bobby nodded.

"There was nothing else to do," he answered, with a dismal smile. "He insisted upon the affair taking place at once, and was frightfully keen on a quiet wedding."

She had nothing to say, being literally speechless.

"It is extremely tough on me," said Bobby bitterly. "I have always looked forward to a wedding with bridesmaids and crossed swords in the porch, and 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing!' and all that sort of stuff. I was never so disappointed in my life as when he talked about a 'quiet wedding.'"

"But—but Bobby," she wailed, "you haven't really—"

He nodded.

"I had to do it for the sake of your dear old family escutcheon," he said. "I

don't know very much about your escutcheon, but if it's anything like mine it wants electro-plating. Our family has been making mesalliances since the days of Robert Bruce."

Suddenly she realized the horrible fact that, quite unknown to her, she was engaged.

"You mustn't do it," she cried vehemently. "Bobby, you must go straight to father and tell him—tell him you weren't the man. The engagement must be broken off! I insist upon this! It is—it is awful!"

Bobby sniffed.

"Suppose you go to father and you tell him I'm not the man," he said; "after all, you're better authority than I am."

"But this is tragic," she said, pacing the room; "it is monstrous!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Bobby, sitting back in his chair and putting the tips of his fingers together; "I'm not so sure that it is so bad. Mind you, you're not the kind of girl I should have chosen."

"Bobby, you're insulting!"

"No, I'm not," he said; "honest to goodness, I'm not. I have a terrifically high opinion of you, and I should never have dared in my position to have offered marriage. Your father, however, insists upon the marriage taking place immediately, insists upon giving me £100,000 worth of shares in his shipping company—"

"He is going to pay you!" she gasped. "For marrying me! Bobby!" She swallowed something, then walked quickly to the door. "I'm to see father, and I'll tell him the whole hideous truth. I love him dearly and I would do anything to save him unhappiness, but I am not going to have my life wrecked—I'll tell him that."

"You might tell him something about my life being wrecked too," called Bobby from the chair.

Probably she did not hear him, for she was out of the room and half- way up the stairs before he had finished. She came to the door of the study and no farther. Three minutes later she made a solemn re-entry to the drawing-room, closing the door behind her.

"Bobby," she said soberly, "I dare not do it. Poor daddy! I just opened the door, and he was—" she choked.

"Yes?" said Bobby interestedly.

"He was sobbing as if his heart would break," gulped the girl.

"I shouldn't have thought £100,000 would have affected him like that," said Bobby thoughtfully.

"You brute!" she flamed. "Of course, it wasn't the money. It was me—me." She sat down, covering her face with her hands.

"It may have been me too," said the insistent Bobby; "after all, a nice man like your father would be awfully cut up at the thought that a life such as mine promises to be, and a career—"

"Your life and your career!" she interrupted angrily. "Oh, what a fool I've been, what a fool!"

Bobby did not interrupt, to agree or deny, and presently she grew calmer.

"I'll go through with it," she said wearily. "I could laugh if it were not so terrible."

"I couldn't even laugh," said Bobby; then: "I wonder if I could persuade him—I'd have had a try if you hadn't told me about Jack Marsh."

She swung round at him.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Just what I say," said Bobby coolly. "It was the mention of Jack Marsh which has sealed your young fate."

"Bobby!"

Bobby was standing up, his back to the fire, and his lips were tight pressed.

"We'll go through with this marriage," he said. "Maybe it is going to be pretty rotten for both of us, but I have an idea that it'd be worse for you if I didn't go through."

Another long silence, then:

"When shall it be?" she asked, averting her gaze.

Bobby scratched his chin.

"What are you doing next Thursday?" he demanded.

Three weeks later they sat on opposite sides of a breakfast-table in a private

sitting-room of the Hotel Maurice reading their several correspondence. Through the open window came the clatter and whirr of the traffic on the Rivoli and the indefinable fragrance of a spring-time which further advertised its presence in the masses of mimosa, the golden clusters of daffodils, and in the shallow bowls of violets occupying every table in the room.

The girl threw a letter across the table to her husband.

"You'd better read this," she said; "it is from Jack Marsh."

He took up the letter and read it from beginning to end, so slowly that she grew impatient.

"Oh, do hurry," she complained; "there's nothing in it. I think Jack is being very nice about the whole business."

"Very!" he handed the letter back. "If you take my advice, you'll write to him, and having thanked him like a little lady, tell him that under the circumstances it is inadvisable that you should meet again."

She could only stare at him.

"What on earth do you mean?" she demanded.

"You can add," he went on, "that your husband objects to the continuation of the acquaintanceship."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," said the girl, the color coming to her face, her eyes shining dangerously.

"It is my wish," said the lofty Bobby. "Forgive me if I pull out the autocratic stop, but I have asked precious little of you since we have been married, and it is not my intention to make any other demands upon you. This, however, I insist upon. After we have been married a few years I will allow you to divorce me, and you can take as your portion those beautiful shipping shares which your dear father bestowed upon me as a wedding gift. But, in the meantime, you will do as I wish. Jack Marsh is an undesirable acquaintance."

"From your point of view," she scoffed.

"From your point of view too, only you haven't the—only you don't know it," he said.

She checked an inclination to throw a fish-knife at his head, and sat back, her hands folded on her lap.

"I shall take not the slightest notice of anything you say," she said; "my friends

are my friends, and they will continue to be such. Perhaps you would like to see my other letters? I had half a dozen from feminine relatives, congratulating me upon my marriage and envying me my happiness. Do you mind if I laugh?"

"Why not?" said the imperturbable Bobby. "I can show you letters that I've had from maiden aunts, infinitely more comic. I could show you, I've got it here somewhere," he searched among the pile of letters at his elbow, "an epistle from Uncle Angus, reminding me that the first-born of the Mackenzies is invariably called—"

She rose from the table.

"If you're going to be horrid, I will not stay," she said; "that sort of humor doesn't amuse me."

They came back to London a week later to all appearances a happily married couple, and London relieved them both of a particular strain, for here each had friends and peculiar interests which neither shared with the other. The marriage was the most unreal experience which had come either to Bobby or to the girl.

Bobby described the ceremony as being rather like a joint application for a dog license, and said that it left him with the same emotions that would have been aroused by an appearance before an Income Tax commissioner. The "honeymoon" had bored them both, save for the odd intervals when they found a common pleasure amongst the treasures of the Louvre.

London and its gaiety spelt relief.

A few nights after their return, Mrs. Vandersluis-Carter gave a dinner and dance. Neither Leslie nor Bobby were invited to the dinner, but both went on to the ball. About midnight Bobby, wandering about in search of his wife, found her sitting in an alcove head to head with Jack Marsh. Marsh was doing the talking, and by his doleful appearance Bobby gathered that he was telling the girl the sad story of his life.

She looked up and saw something in Bobby's face which she didn't like, and took a hasty farewell of her former fiancé.

"Will you go along, Leslie?" said Bobby. "I'll join you in a few minutes. I want to speak to Marsh for a while."

"Let us go together," she said nervously.

"If you please," said Bobby, and his voice was firm, "will you go and wait for

me?"

Marsh was on his feet too, sensing trouble. Leslie still hesitated, and the matter might have passed off quietly only Marsh felt it incumbent upon him to say a few words.

"Leslie was just telling me," he said, with all the geniality at his command, "that—"

"My wife's name is Mrs. Mackenzie," said Bobby. "You can forget that she was ever called Leslie by you."

"Bobby, Bobby!" whispered his wife in terror of a scene.

"And I would add this," said Bobby, taking no notice of her, "that the next time I catch you speaking with her I will take you by the scruff of the neck and I will kick you into Kingdom Come. Does that appeal to you?"

Marsh was white with rage.

"You're a pretty good talker, Mackenzie," he said; "you ought to be in Parliament."

Bobby's answer was appallingly unexpected. Without drawing back, his fist shot out and Mr. Marsh went to the floor.

"I'm not going to explain anything to you," said Bobby to his agonized wife that night. "I'm only telling you that you must not meet Marsh or there will be trouble. In a few years' time, I promise you, you can divorce me—just as soon as it is decent. In the meantime, if you want to avoid this kind of unpleasantness, you must also avoid J. Marsh." It was unfortunate that Bobby's assault had been witnessed by the one person beside Marsh who hated him.

Sybil Thorbern had reason enough by her own code. Into the sympathetic ears of her husband she poured the story of Bobby's infamy. He, poor, good man, listened uncomfortably because he was Bobby's oldest friend.

"The man is a savage," she said, "absolutely undisciplined."

"Bobby isn't bad," protested her husband feebly. He was a ruddy man, twenty years his wife's senior, an out-of-doors man with a detestation of any crisis which involved mental effort. "Bobby is a little wild, Sybil, but if he hit Marsh, you can be sure that Marsh deserved it."

Whereupon, stung to indiscretion, Mrs. Thorbern blurted venom. She was a pretty woman and had many admirers. Her husband took almost a pride in the

fact, but the kind of admiration which Bobby Mackenzie had expressed to his wife (as she told the story) left a cloud on his brow.

"When did this happen?" he asked.

"The night of the Winslows' ball, a few days before this fellow married Leslie Jenner."

"I can hardly believe it," he said, in a troubled voice, "and yet—" he remembered certain circumstances, a packed valise lying in the hall, the discovery of his wife in traveling clothes ready to go out after midnight, and the lame excuse she made.

"I was mad," she excused herself; "every woman has that spasm of madness, however much she loves her husband, and for a moment he carried me off my feet. And then I realized how sweet you were and how good and ... Douglas, I hadn't the heart...!"

She was weeping now passionately, but her hysteria was due more to fright than to contrition. For she had said too much, made her accusations too direct, and even in the exalted moment of her vengeance was panic- stricken at the possible consequences of her "confession."

"Douglas, you won't say any more about it, will you?" she pleaded. "I oughtn't to have told you."

"I'm glad you did," he said. "I remember—" he said slowly, "some bruises on your arm that night—did he do that?"

She nodded.

"Yes, yes, but you won't go any farther with this matter, will you, Douglas? Please, please, dear, for my sake!"

"I'll think about it," said Douglas Thorbern unsteadily, and went up to his room.

The next morning there was a meeting between two distressed women. Bobby was out when Mrs. Thorbern called at the hotel where the young people were staying, and Leslie, who knew her well enough and disliked her instinctively, received the wife of Bobby's best friend.

"Leslie, I want you to help me," she blurted. "I'm in an awful fix. I was very annoyed with Bobby, and I told my husband something about him and I'm afraid, I'm afraid...!"

"What did you tell your husband about Bobby?" demanded Leslie coldly.

The fact that she had parted from Bobby that morning in a spirit of the bitterest hostility did not lessen her feeling of antagonism toward Mrs. Thorbern. The woman hesitated.

"I—I told him that Bobby wanted to run away with me."

Leslie sat down suddenly.

"Bobby wanted to run away with you?" she repeated incredulously.

The other nodded.

"When did this happen?"

"On the night of the Winslows' ball, you remember?"

"Oh, I remember," said Leslie grimly; "I have a very good reason for remembering. So Bobby wanted to run away with you, did he?"

Again Mrs. Thorbern hesitated.

"I told my husband so, but—"

"Did you tell him the truth," asked Leslie, "or were you just lying?"

"I—well, there was some trouble with Bobby and me...."

"Were you speaking the truth or a lie?" asked Leslie again, and her voice was steady. "Personally, I know you were lying, because Bobby would not do so mean a thing."

"Naturally you would defend your husband," bridled Mrs. Thorbern.

"Naturally," said the girl calmly.

"He's a beast!" Mrs. Thorbern burst forth tearfully. "He has ruined my life!"

Her sincerity was unmistakable, and Leslie felt a little pang at her heart, but there was in her composition some of her father's shrewdness, his dogged insistence.

"Did Bobby ask you to run away with him?" She returned to the question and knew that her own future happiness was at stake, for she had dreamed of a future which did not exclude from her life the man who met her at meals and talked solemn nonsense about matrimony.

"Yes!" cried Mrs. Thorbern at last, and Leslie smiled.

"That, my dear girl, is a naughty, wicked lie!" she said. "Bobby never wanted

you to run away with him—in fact, I'm going to ask him to tell me the story, because I am sure you are concealing something."

"All I want you to do is to warn Bobby to keep out of my husband's way." Mrs. Thorbern's voice held a menace. "You're horribly unsympathetic, Leslie; I did hope I should find a friend in you."

"What do you want me to do?" asked the girl; "agree with you that Bobby is a blackguard? I rather think that I know him better than you."

"I'm glad you have that illusion," said Mrs. Thorbern icily. "Your understanding of him was violently sudden; there was something rather mysterious about your marriage."

"Mysterious?" drawled the girl; "but aren't all marriages a little mysterious?"

Mrs. Thorbern shrugged her shoulders and was on her way to the door when Leslie stopped her with a cry. The older woman looked round and saw a light burning in the girl's eyes.

"Wait, wait," said Leslie excitedly, "this story about Bobby—this story you told your husband—when did you arrange to run away with him?" and then, as the other hesitated, she corrected, "when did you tell your husband that Bobby wanted to run away with you?"

"On the night of the Winslows' ball."

"And did your husband—have any idea that you were going to run away—with anybody?"

"He knew nothing," said Mrs. Thorbern, "he—oh, what is the good of telling you?"

"Oh please, please tell me," begged Leslie. "I am really anxious to know."

"Douglas found me dressed ready to go," said Mrs. Thorbern slowly, "and he—he—discovered my dressing-bag in the hall. I didn't expect him back that night. He had gone to Edinburgh on some business."

"And you were meeting—Bobby—somewhere near the Winslows?"

Again the hesitation.

"Yes, I was meeting him—him—"

"At any time?" asked the girl breathlessly, and Mrs. Thorbern looked at her with suspicion.

"I told my husband," she was careful to say, "that I was meeting Bobby between twelve and half-past one."

"I know," Leslie almost whispered the words; "you were meeting him at the golf hut in Smoke Park!"

It was Mrs. Thorbern's turn to show astonishment and uneasiness.

"You were meeting him at the golf hut before half-past one—and it wasn't Bobby you were meeting at all!"

"How do you know?" asked the woman harshly.

"It was Marsh—Jack Marsh—and Bobby knew you were going to run away, and he stopped you—that's what you mean when you say he wrecked your life!"

Mrs. Thorbern's breath was labored.

"Bobby is a sneak," she cried. "He listened, he listened! I'd have gone with Jack then, but he caught me by the arm—your charming Bobby—I had the bruise marks for days!"

"And he was waiting in the hut for you," said the girl slowly.

"Jack?"

Mrs. Thorbern looked at her open-mouthed, but the girl shook her head.

"No, Bobby," she said softly, "the splendid darling! It was he who was in the hut all the time waiting for you to keep your appointment and determined to save your husband's name. And that's why he wouldn't tell me—because it meant giving you away."

"How do you know he was there?" asked the woman.

"Because I was there too," said Leslie proudly.

Bobby came down to dinner that night, glum of face, and found his wife waiting for him in the hall.

"I'm in all sorts of trouble," he said. "I've had a perfectly rotten letter from an old pal of mine."

"He'll write you an apology in the morning," said the girl cheerfully.

He stared at her.

"How do you know? Are you going in for clairvoyance or something?"

"He'll write you an apology, because I told his wife she had to tell him the truth."

Bobby stopped dead.

"Look here, young person," he said, "what is the mystery?"

She smiled up in his face.

"Don't make a scene in public, Bobby," she said, "and do take that gloomy look off your face. I want to start off on my second honeymoon without a sad thought."

He stood gaping down at her.

"When do we start?" he asked hollowly.

"We'll go by the boat train that leaves Victoria at nine o'clock in the morning," she said.

He looked at his watch.

"What about the train that goes to Bournemouth tonight?" said he.

5. THE CLUE OF MONDAY'S SETTLING

It did not seem possible to May Antrim that such things could happen in an ordered world. She paced the terrace of the big house overlooking the most beautiful vale in Somerset, her hands clasped behind her, her pretty head bent, a frown of perplexity upon her pretty face.

Everything must go... Sommercourt... the home farms... the house in Curzon Street... her horses... she checked a sob and was angry with herself that it needed the check.

And why?

Because John Antrim had signed a paper—she thought such things only happened in romances. Her father's stability she had never questioned. She knew, as all the county knew, that he was a wealthy man beyond fear of disaster. And out of the blue had come this shattering bolt. It was incredible.

Then she caught a glimpse of him. He was sitting in his favorite seat at the far end of the terrace, and at the sight of that dejected figure, she quickened her pace.

He looked up with a faint smile as she came up to him, dropping her hand on his shoulder.

"Well, May? Thinking things out, too!"

"I'm trying to," she said, "but I find it difficult to make a start. You see, dear, I don't understand business..."

"Sit down."

He made a place for her by his side.

"I'm going to tell you a story. Sounds formidable, eh? It begins on the 18th of March when the steamship Phoenician Prince left New York for Southampton. She is a vessel of 18,000 tons, one of two, the property of the Balte Brothers, Septimus Balte and Francis Balte being the partners who control the stock."

"Our Francis?" asked the girl in surprise.

"Our Francis," repeated John Antrim grimly.

He went on:

"On board were five million in British, French, and Italian notes, which had been redeemed from the American money market, and were being consigned to the Anglo-American Bank of London. These were packed in six tin cases, soldered air and water tight, and enclosed in stout wooden boxes. They were deposited in the strong-room, which is on the port side of G Deck. Its door opens into a cabin which is occupied in extraordinary circumstances by a quartermaster.

"On this occasion one of the owners was on board, Mr. Francis Balte, and because of the importance of the consignment he had the quartermaster 's cabin fitted up for his own use. During the day, and when Mr. Balte was absent from the cabin, it was occupied by his personal steward, Deverly.

"Francis kept the key of the strong-room in his possession. It never left him day or night. On the night of the 26th, the purser went to Francis with certain documents relating to the money. Francis opened the doors of the strongroom and the purser checked the packages; the door was closed and locked. There was no bathroom attached to the cabin, and Balte used an ordinary sponge bath which was brought in by the steward, together with a dozen small towels.

These were used to lay on the floor, with the idea of saving the carpet, which had been newly laid—in fact, especially for Mr. Balte's comfort. The steward went in later, took away the bath and six towels, the other six being unused."

May frowned again. What had the towels to do with the narrative?

He must have interpreted her thoughts.

"I have interviewed the steward," he said, "and the loss of the towels seemed to him to be the queerest part of the whole proceedings. The next morning, as the ship approached the Needles, the purser came down, accompanied by half a dozen seamen. Balte was asleep, but he got up and handed the key of the strong- room to the purser, who opened the doors, to find—nothing."

He groaned.

"I should never have underwritten such a vast amount."

"You underwrite!" she gasped. "Is that why... you are responsible for the money?"

He nodded.

"It was stark madness," he said bitterly. "Ordinarily I should only have been saddled with a small proportion of the loss. But in a moment of insanity I accepted the whole risk. That is the story.

"The ship was searched from end to end—every inch of it. The steward was on duty in the alleyway outside—he sat with his back to the door, dozing he admits. It was impossible for anybody to get through the porthole, supposing, as was the first theory of the police, that a man let himself down over the side and scrambled through the port. The steward was full of the mystery of the towels—six towels and six boxes of notes! But in one respect he was very informative. He distinctly heard in the middle of the night a sound like that of a watch or clock being wound up. 'Creak, creak, creak'—he gave me a wonderful imitation."

"What on earth was it?"

"He heard it six times faintly but distinctly. He says so now, but he also says that he thought it might have been the creaking of gear—one hears strange noises on board ship. And we come again to the fact that six towels were missing. To my mind that is significant. The boxes were very heavy, by the way, many of the notes were of small denomination and had been subjected to hydraulic pressure in the packing to get them into as small a compass as possible. Roughly each box weighed 140 pounds with its iron clamps and

bands."

May was interested.

"I never realized that paper money had weight," she said. "How many five pound notes could an ordinary man carry?"

"A strong man could carry £100,000 worth," replied Antrim," but he would not care to carry that amount very far. So there it is, my dear. Somewhere in the world is a clever thief in the possession of nearly a third of a ton of negotiable paper. And I am responsible."

They sat in silence until

"Daddy... why don't you see Bennett Audain?"

"Bennett?" he was startled, and then a smile played at the corner of his lips. "Bennett came to me just before I left town. He had heard from somebody that I was involved and, like the good fellow that he is, offered to help with... with money. I had an idea that I would see Francis."

She pursed her lips thoughtfully. Francis Balte she knew and did not dislike. She had met him at the house in town—a vague, cheery man, full of commonplace phrases.

"You mean that I should let Bennett take the case in hand!" asked John Antrim, with a little grimace. "I mistrust amateur detectives, and although I admit your cousin is clever—he is also the veriest amateur. Curiously enough the loss of the towels interested him more than the loss of the money."

Her mind was made up.

"You are to telephone Bennett that we are dining with him tonight," she said determinedly.

"My dear—"

"Daddy, you must do it—I feel that Bennett is the one man who can help."

The real seven ages of man's conscious existence may be divided into the periods when he wishes to drive a locomotive, when he wants to be a detective, an Adonis, a soldier (or sailor), a millionaire, a prime minister, and a boy.

Bennett Audain never got beyond the second period, but he realized some of the others, for he had been a soldier, he was undoubtedly good-looking, and as unquestionably rich.

The right kind of obsession is an invaluable asset for a young man of great possessions, and to current crime he devoted the passionate interest of the enthusiast. He was both student and worker; he had as great a knowledge of the science which is loosely described as "criminology" as men who had gained fame in its exposition; he certainly understood the psychology of the criminal mind better than any police officer that ever came from Scotland Yard —an institution which has produced a thousand capable men, but never a genius. Indefatigable, patient, scientific in the sense that science is the fanaticism for veracity," which is the scientist's basic quality.

"It is queer that a fellow like you should take up psycho-analysis. I should have thought it was just a little off your beat." John Antrim looked critically through his glass of port.

"There are queerer things," said Bennett, with an amused glance at the girl. "It is queer, for example, that having taken a hundred-mile journey to consult me about the strong-room robbery, you haven't yet mentioned it."

The girl smiled, but the frown on her father's face deepened.

"Don't sneer at psycho-analysis, Daddy," she warned him. "Bennett will give us a demonstration—won't you, Bennett?"

They were dining together at Bennett Audain's house in Park Lane. The big room was dark save for the shaded lamps on the table and the soft glow that flushed the Persian rug before a dying fire.

Bennett had a nervous smile, charming in its diffidence.

"That is a popular label for a queer new system of mind-probing," he said. "I am not accepting or rejecting the Freudian philosophy, and I'm not enough of a doctor to understand his theory of neuroses. I merely say that those responsible for the detection and prevention of crime might, with profit, employ the theory of idea-association."

A gust of wind blew a pattering of rain against the curtained window.

"Humph!" said John Antrim, and looked at his watch.

Bennett laughed softly.

"I knew you would look at your watch when you heard the rain," he said, and the other stared. "Why?"

"Association of ideas," said the other calmly. "You told me when you came that you thought of leaving May in London and driving back alone to

Sommercourt. Uncle John," he leant across, coming from the dusk of shadow into the yellow light, "if I could get the right man to question I would save you exactly a million!"

Antrim frowned horribly.

"I doubt it," he said, in his gruffest tone. "I have been caught. But I was a fool to underwrite the whole consignment—a mad fool. You can do nothing; the best and cleverest police officers are working on the case. "What could you do —by psycho-analysis?"

He leant back with a sigh.

"Who is the right man?" asked May eagerly.

Bennett, his eyes fixed on vacancy, did not answer at once.

"Where is Francis?"

The girl started, as well she might, for the question was shot at him with unexpected violence.

"I'm sorry—-only I had an idea"—Bennett Audain was apologetic to a point of panic. "I—I get a little explosive at times, which is terribly unscientific "

"But is human," smiled the other.

John Antrim got up.

"I wonder if he is at the Elysium Club?"

"There is a 'phone over there." Bennett pointed to the shadows. "It is rather late, but perhaps he'll come round."

Antrim hesitated. Before he could make up his mind what to do, May was 'phoning.

Apparently Balte was at the club.

"He's on his way," she smiled; "poor soul, he was most embarrassed to hear my voice."

May returned to the table.

"Heavens, what a night! You can't return to Sommercourt, Daddy."

The rain was swishing savagely at the windows, the ceaseless broom-like sweep of it across the panes, the faint tick of the enamel clock on the high

mantelpiece, and the wheezy breathing of Bennett's old terrier, stretched before the fire, were the only sounds in the room until Balte came with a clatter.

He was a stout man of thirty-five, fair and ruddy of face, and he brought into the shadowy room something of his own inexhaustible vitality.

"Glad to come, Miss Antrim." He stopped dead at the sight of John Antrim. "Pretty wild night, eh—I'm blessed if it has stopped blowing since I arrived. Old Sep writes that he was in Torquay yesterday, and the sea was absolutely breaking over the front—tramcars drenched and wrecked. Funny, being wrecked in a tramcar."

He put his red hands to the blaze and rattled on.

"Dreadful thing, eh, Miss Antrim! "What's the use of the police—eh? What's the use of 'em? Want men like Audain, full of up-to-date ideas. Wish it had been anybody but you, Antrim." He shook his head mournfully.

"Ever heard of Freud?" asked Bennett, his chin on his clasped hands, his absent gaze on the fire.

"Freud—no. German, isn't he? Nothing to do with the Germans, old boy, after that beastly war. They sunk three of our ships, by gad! Who is he, anyway?"

"A professor," said Bennett lazily, "and an authority on the mind. Why don't you sit down, Balte?"

"Prefer standing, old boy. Stand and grow better—eh, Miss Antrim? What about this Hun?"

"He interprets dreams "

"Ought to be in the Police, that's where he ought to be—interpreting some of those pipe-dreams they have," he chuckled.

"I will tell you what I am getting at," said Bennett and explained.

May held her breath, sensing the deadliness of the play.

Mr. Balte was amused.

"You say one word and I'll tell you a word it suggests?" he said. "That's a kid's game—used to play it when I was so high. You say 'sugar,' I say 'sweet'; next fellow says 'orange,' and so forth."

"You see, Mr. Balte," interrupted May, "Bennett thinks he can get at your sub-

conscious mind. He believes that he can even tell what happened when you were asleep."

Mr. Balte pulled at his nose and looked down. He was thinking. He wondered if Bennett Audain could get at his mind about May Antrim, and could put into words all that he had dreamed yet had not dared to say, all that he had schemed for. The thought caught his breath. He loved her so, this girl whose beautiful face had never left his vision; he had dared so much for her and she never knew. To her he was one of the thousands who served as a background of life.

"Try, old boy," he said huskily; "I don't believe in it, but if you can get hold of any information that will help Mr. Antrim—you don't know how I feel about that—go ahead."

"Sit down."

Mr. Balte obeyed. His china-blue eyes were fixed on his interrogator.

"Ground," said Bennett unexpectedly.

"Eh—er—er—-earth," responded the other.

"Dig."

"Garden."

"Hole."

"Er—I nearly said 'devil,' " chuckled Mr. Balte. "This is funny—like a game"

But it was an earnest game with Bennett Audain. Presently:

"Shares," he said.

"Slump," it came promptly, one word suggested by the other. Balte added: "Everything is slumping just now, you know..."

They went on quickly. Bennett recited the days of the week.

"Monday?"

A grimace—the faintest—from Balte.

"Er-unpleasant—starting the week, y'know."

Bennett shot out the days.

"Friday!"

"Calendar—thinking of a calendar, y'know."

"Key?"

"In door."

He got up.

"A silly game, Audain." He shook his head reproachfully. "Admit it. I can't play games—too worried. Poor old Sep is half off his head, too."

"Where is Septimus?" asked Bennett.

"At Slapton—pike-fishing. Hmm, how people can sit in a punt all day... fishing. Well, what are you going to do, Audain? Can you help us? The police—pshaw!"

"Will you tell me this?" asked Bennett. "Are you a heavy sleeper?"

The stout man shook his head.

"Do you sleep late in the mornings?"

"No; up at six, bright and jolly." He paused. "Now I come to think of it, I was very sleepy that morning. Drugs, eh... do you think I was drugged—chloroform and that sort of thing?"

"No," said Bennett, and let him go.

"Well?" asked the girl when the door had closed upon the visitor.

"Stay in town for a day or two," said Bennett Audain.

At seven o'clock the next morning he called a justly annoyed police inspector from his bed. Fortunately Bennett knew him very well.

"Yes, Mr. Audain; his trunks were searched. Mr. Balte insisted."

"How many trunks had he in the cabin?"

The inspector, cursing such matutinal inquisitiveness, answered:

"Four."

"Four? Big ones?"

"Yes, sir; pretty big and half empty."

"Did you smell anything peculiar about them?"

The inspector wagged his head impatiently. His legs were getting cold and the bed he had left was entrancingly warm.

"No, sir, I did not smell them."

"Good," said Bennett's cheerful voice.

"The worst of these amateur detectives is that they jump all ways at once," said the inspector as he shuddered back to bed.

"M'm," said his wife, on the border-line of wakefulness.

Bennett, at his end of the wire, looked out of the window into the gray moist morning on to the stark, uneasy branches of park trees.

The hour was 7.5. Essential people had not yet turned in their beds; even the serving-maids and men-servants had scarcely blinked at the toilsome day. Bennett Audain went back to the remains of his breakfast and wished, when he had had Francis Balte under examination, he had said, "Paint." Mr. Balte would surely have responded "See."

Mr. Balte had a large house at Wimbledon. He was a bachelor, as was his brother. He was a simple man, as also was his brother. They had inherited considerable property at a time—the last year of the war—when property had a fictitious value. The cream of their father's estate had been swallowed by the Treasury in the shape of death duties. Their skimmed milk was very thin and blue in the days of the great slump. Stockholders in Balte Brothers Incorporated Shippers—and they were many—watched the shrinking of profits indignantly. The last general meeting of the Company had been a noisy one. There was one fellow in particular, a bald man with spectacles, Francis had noted miserably from his place on the platform—a violent, intemperate man, who had talked of a change of directors, and he had received more "hear-hears" than had Francis when he had expressed the pious hope that trade would improve and shipping return to its old prosperity.

It was Sunday morning, and Francis sat in his library. It was a room containing many shelves of books which he had never read, but the bindings of which were in the best taste. His elbows were on the table, his fingers in his untidy hair, and he was reading. Not the Sunday newspapers, his usual Sunday's occupation.

These were stacked, unopened, on the little table by the easy-chair. It was a book, commonly and commercially bound, and the more he read the more bewildered he grew. A little shocked also, for this volume was embarrassingly intimate.

Thus his brother found him. Septimus, lank and bent and short-sighted, glared through his powerful glasses at the studious figure and sniffed.

"Got it?" he asked.

Francis closed the book with a bang.

"It is all medical stuff," he said. "Audain is a bit cranky. Going?"

The question was unnecessary. Septimus was muffled to the chin, his fur gloves were under his arm, and his big racing car was visible from the library window.

"If there is anything in this Audain stuff, let me know. I've read something about psychoanalysis—I thought it was for shell-shocked people. So long."

"When will you be back?"

"Tuesday night. I've written the letter."

"Oh."

Francis stirred the fire thoughtfully.

"Create a bit of a stir your resigning from the Board," he said; "wish..."

"Yes?"

"No, I don't. I was going to say that I wished it was me. Better you. Everybody knows you're in bad health.... Warm enough?"

"Ay," said his brother, and went out pulling on his gloves.

Francis did not go to the window to see him off. He bent over the fire uncomfortably, jabbing it unreasonably.

It occurred to him after a long time that his brother had not gone. He put down the poker and shuffled across to the window—he was wearing slippers. There were two cars in the road, bonnet to bonnet, and a man was standing by the seated Septimus. They were talking.

"Audain," said Francis, and meditated, biting his lip. Presently Septimus went off and Bennett Audain came briskly up the path. Francis admitted him.

"Energetic fellow!" he cried. His voice was an octave higher than it had been when he spoke to his brother, his manner more virile and masterful. He was good cheer and complacency personified. "Come in, come in. You saw old Sep? Poor old chap!"

"He tells me that he is resigning from the shipping business." Bennett was warming his hands.

"Yes; he's going to the south of France, old Sep. Going to buy property. Queer bird, Sep. But he was always a land man—farms, houses... anything to do with land... very shrewd."

Bennett glanced at the table, and the other anticipated.

"Interpretation of Dreams—eh?" he chuckled. "You've got me going on Freud.

Don't understand it. Of course I understand what he says about dreaming and all that... but that game of yours... eh?"

Bennett changed the subject, Francis wondering.

"Yes, it is not a bad house," he agreed amiably. "A bit bourgeoise, but we're that kind. Quaintly constructed—would you like to see over it?"

A home and its attractions can be a man's weakness. In a woman, its appointments are the dominating values , architecture means no more than convenience. And Bradderly Manor was a source of satisfaction to Francis. They reached the wind- swept grounds in time, because there was a workshop in which old Sep labored. It was to him what laboratory, studio, music-room, model dairy, and incubatory are to other men. It was a workshop, its walls lined with tool cabinets. There was a bench, an electric lathe, vices, drills... an oak panel with its unfinished cupids and foliage testified to the artistry and workmanship of Septimus Balte.

"Always was a wonderful workman, old Sep," said Francis in admiration. "Do you know, he was the inventor of a new depth charge that would have made his name if the war hadn't finished "

"That's it, is it?"

Francis looked round.

Bennett had taken from a shelf a large paint can. It had not been opened. The manufacturer's red label pasted on the top of the sunken lid was unbroken.

"That's what?"

Bennett held the can for a second and replaced it.

"Luminous paint," he said. "Lefvre's—he's the best maker, isn't he?"

Francis Balte said nothing. All the way back to the house he said nothing.

Bennett followed him into the library and watched him as he filled a pipe from a jar which he took from the mantelpiece.

"Well?" he said miserably. Bennett saw tears in his eyes.

"The two things I am not sure about are," Bennett ticked them off on his fingers: "One, was John Steele the cause? Two, why the towels?"

The stout man puffed furiously and all the time his eyes went blink, blink, blink.

"Friday—Calendar; that's how you knew. You wouldn't think I'd fall so easily. But you must have known all about it or why should you know I meant the Racing Calendar?"

"I guessed. I did not know that you and your brother had a stud of horses and raced them in the name of John Steele. That was easy to discover. When I decided that it was the Racing Calendar you meant, the official journal of the Jockey Club, I went to the publishers and got the register of assumed names."

The pipe puffed agitatedly. No... we lost money on racing, but that wasn't it; bad business... over-valuation of assets. I wonder what she will think about me..."

He sank down in a chair, the pipe dropped from his mouth, and he wept into his big red hands.

"I have no interest in punishment," said Bennett Audain, and May Antrim, watching the pain in his delicate face, nodded. She was beginning to understand Bennett Audain.

"In solutions of curious human puzzles, yes," said Bennett, as he sipped his tea and noted joyously the first splashes of green that had come to the park trees in one night, "but not in punishment. If you like to put it that way, I am unmoral. Your father received his money?"

"Of course he did, Bennett—the six boxes arrived at his office yesterday morning."

Bennett laughed very softly. "It is good to be alive when the buds are breaking, May. I feel a very happy man. Suppose you wanted a clockwork contrivance made, where would you go to get the work done? Look up the Classified Directory. No mention of clockwork- makers or makers of mechanical toys. Yet there are ten people in London who do nothing else. There is a man named Collett in Highbury who made a sort of time- bomb during the war. I went to him after I had learnt that Septimus Balte was

working on war inventions. I found that by patient inquiry. It is queer how soon people have forgotten all things pertaining to the war."

"But why did you inquire about clockwork at all?" asked the girl.

"Creak!" mocked Bennett. "Did your father tell you how the steward had heard a noise, six noises, as of a watch being wound? Well, I found Mr. Collett a secretive, furtive man, but reasonable. He had made a simple water-tight machine. It operated a large spool which was held in position by a catch and released three hours after it had been set. Is that clear?"

May nodded.

"Why water-tight?" asked Bennett. "The spool itself was outside, and presumably was designed to work in the water. Attached to the steel box containing the mechanism were two iron bolts, one at the top above the spool, one at the bottom. Now what was attached to the spool? Nothing but ten fathoms of stout light, cord, a double length of it. Now do you see?"

"No," admitted the puzzled girl.

"Then I will explain further. At the end of the cord was a small cork buoy, probably covered with canvas and certainly treated with luminous paint. The towels—" he laughed,

"I ought to have thought of the use to which they would be put, but I had not seen the cabin. And the strange thing is that when I put myself in the place of Francis, it never occurred to me that if boxes weighing 140 pounds and clamped with iron were pushed through a porthole, the brass casings of the port would be scratched—unless the boxes were wrapped in cloth of some kind."

"Then he threw the boxes into the sea!" gasped May, sitting back.

Bennett nodded.

"First he took the buoys and attachments from his trunks, then he wound up the mechanism, threw that and the buoy out of the porthole—the buoy being attached by a short length of chain to the under-bolt of the clock-work case — then he heaved up the money-box and pushed that after. They sank immediately. No belated passenger leaning over the rail would see a luminous buoy floating back. Nobody saw those buoys but Septimus, waiting in his motor- boat twelve miles south of Slapton Sands. And he did not see them until the three hours passed and, the spools releasing the buoys, they came to the surface. Then he fastened a stouter rope to one of the double cords and rove it through the bolt.... He salvaged all six boxes in an hour, which isn't bad

for a sick man."

She shook her head helplessly.

"How... why... did you guess?"

"Guess?" Bennett's eyebrows rose. "It wasn't a guess. Who else would have stolen the boxes? In fiction the thief is the last man you suspect. In fact, the thief is the last man you'd acquit. The police always suspect the man who was last seen near the scene of the crime, and the police are generally right. I knew half the Balte secret when the word 'key' suggested 'wind' and 'Monday'—the day racing men settle their bets—suggested 'unpleasant'."

He looked at his watch.

"Francis and 'poor old Sep' should at this moment be boarding the Rotterdam at Plymouth," he said.

"But why... he had heavy losses, but he would not have been ruined. Did he want the money so badly "

"There is a woman in the case," said Bennett gravely. "Somebody he dreamt about and planned for."

"Poor man!" said May softly. There were tears in her eyes, he noticed, and remembered Francis Balte's words: "I wonder what she will think about me?"

6. ESTABLISHING CHARLES BULLIVANT

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

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

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

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

For Tillingworth had been an eccentric man who had no practice. Tillingworth, with his long, untidy beard and his long, untidy hair, had occupied the dilapidated Willough Lodge, a stuccoed edifice at the

unfashionable end of the High Street, for fourteen years, during which period he may have seen a few casual patients of the lower or agricultural orders, but certainly he had never been called in by the aristocracy and the no less exclusive bourgeoisie of Saxmonleigh.

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

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

Tillingworth had a sister and a brother, the latter a sober but unscrupulous man who offered "an old-established practice which needs working up" at a sacrificial price.

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

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

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

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

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

It never left off being answered.

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

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

"It is absolutely hopeless—hopeless!"

His hands were thrust into his trousers pockets, his feet were stuck stiffly in the direction of Gould Mortimer's flower-filled fireplace.

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

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

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

Dr. Charles Bullivant shook his head.

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

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

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

The door opened and a girl burst in.

She was, to Charles Bullivant's prejudiced eyes, the one girl in the world by whom Nature might set its standard for all time. Tall, slender, with a perfect

figure and the loveliest face that ever captivated a none too susceptible ship's doctor.

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

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

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

"0h, nonsense!" said the girl indignantly. ""Why, everybody knows you're splendid! You cured my headache in a minute—in the Red Sea, too."

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

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

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

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

"Got—?" began her puzzled brother.

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

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

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

Charles Bullivant read:

Are you ill?

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

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

by

CHARLES BULLIVANT,

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

Don't take a chance! Take Charles!

Watch Yourself Grow Better!

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

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

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

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

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

She looked from one to the other, disappointed.

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

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

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

"He—he tickled me," lied her brother.

It was a lame excuse as the slamming door testified.

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

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

instead of tips, I might have a chance."

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

"Don't rot," pleaded the other.

But Gould Mortimer was really serious.

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

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

"Which youngster?"

"What's his name—the doctor?"

Green-Sanders shrugged his shoulders.

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

Sir James grunted.

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

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

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

A look of understanding came to Sir James' face.

"American!" he said significantly. "0f course, if he's one of those Anglo-American people, he'll never do."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Sure," said Mortimer again.

The doctor smiled tolerantly.

"Well, you know, Mr. Mortimer," he said, "our friend is up against it—that is the expression, isnt it?"

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

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

Gould Mortimer smiled largely and amusedly.

"Why should he!" he asked.

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

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

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

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

Dr. Green-Sanders drew himself up.

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

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

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

"Spain?"

Mortimer nodded.

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

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

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

"But why—"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Have you read that—"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Doctor in?" he demanded explosively.

"No," replied Big Mort.

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

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

well.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Maisie flew down the stairs to greet him.

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

Dr. Charles Bullivant looked at her in amazement.

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

"He's out—"

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

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

The young doctor was blundering through his correspondence as well as a man could whose one arm was occupied by a girl. "A11 these blight—all these good people want me to call. Here's an invitation from Sir James himself!"

He stared up at the calm figure in bewilderment.

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

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

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

the drawing-room more leisurely.

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

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

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

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

"Robbed?" cried the shocked pair together.

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

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

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

Gould Mortimer removed his cigar.

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

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

£50 REWARD

LOST OR STOLEN

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

Willough Lodge, Saxmonleigh.

1. The medallion and ribbon of the Order of Isabella la Catholica: engraved "From Alfonso to Charles Bullivant, in Memory of a Pleasant Association."

2. A signed photograph of the Crown Prince of Mid-Europe, signed "Wilhelm Kron-Prinz."

3. The Order of St. Stephanie in brilliants, and framed portrait of the Grand Duke Basil, inscribed "Mille remerciments, Basil."

4. Photographic group (signed) in gold frame of Dr. Bullivant, the Prince of the Asturias, the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Crown Prince of Mid-Europe, and the Grand Duchess Maria.

5. The freehold deeds of Willough Lodge.

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

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

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

"But—but I don't understand," said the doctor. "0f course, those things were mine, and I'm jolly glad to get them—but the deeds of this house; I only rent this place."

Big Mort smiled at his sister.

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

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

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

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

7. SENTIMENTAL SIMPSON

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

Another point:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I see," said the real detective.

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

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

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

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

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

But Simpson did not run.

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

Simpson accepted the reproach with amazement.

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

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

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

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

"None whatever, Simpson."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

unauthorized opening of Epstein's Jewelry Emporium, even Lew eventually dropped him after a disastrous partnership.

"It would have been a success and we'd have got away with the finest parcel of stones that ever was taken in one haul," he said, relative to a certain Hatton Garden job which he had worked with Simpson; "but what happened? He got the safe open and I was downstairs, watching the street for the copper, expecting him to come down with the stuff. I waited for ten minutes and then went up, and what did I see? This blank, blank Simpson sitting on the blank, blank floor, and crying his blank, blank eyes out over some old love-letters that Van Voss kept in his safe! Letters from a blank, blank typist that Van Voss had been in love with. He said they touched him to the core. He wanted to go and kill Van Voss, and by the time I'd got him quiet the street was full of bulls... we got away over the roof... no more Simpson for me, thank you!"

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

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

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

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

Mr. Simpson looked uncomfortable.

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Valentino puffed thoughtfully at his cigar.

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

Simpson nodded.

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

Simpson shook his head unhappily.

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

"What will you have, Simpson?"

"'Gin," said the wretched Simpson.

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

"Beer," corrected Simpson despondently.

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

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

"Willie was always on the spot, and if he did a job, there was the stuff all

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

He sighed.

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

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

Mr. Simpson.

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

Mr. Simpson was silent.

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

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

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

Mr. Simpson scratched his chin.

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

"Let bygones be bygones," said Mr. Valentino. "I know all about that Purley

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The second bedroom was less ornate, and like the other, untenanted. Here he drew blank. It was evidently a room reserved for visitors; the dressing- table was empty as also was the wardrobe. Then he remembered and went back to the room he had searched and flashed his lamp under the bed. There was no

sign of a safe. It may be in the third room, thought Mr. Simpson, and turned the handle of the door softly. He knew, the moment he stepped inside, that the big four- poster bed he could dimly see was occupied. He could hear the regular breathing of the sleeper and for a second hesitated, then stepping forward carefully, he moved to the side of the bed, listening again.

Yes, the breathing was regular. He dare not put his lamp upon the sleeper. This must be the child's room, he guessed, and contented himself with stooping and showing a beam of light beneath the bed. He gasped. There was the "safe". A squat, steel box. He put out the light and laid the torch gently upon the floor, then groping beneath the bed, he gripped the box and slid it toward him. It was very heavy, but not too heavy to carry.

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

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

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

Simpson swallowed something.

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

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

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

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

The dazed burglar obeyed.

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

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

She shook her head reproachfully.

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

"No, miss," said the miserable Simpson.

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

"My poor old mother!" he sobbed.

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

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

"No, miss," sobbed Simpson.

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

"Are you a burglar because you are hungry?"

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

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

Mr. Simpson nodded again.

"Poor burglar!"

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

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

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

All Mr. Simpson's ill-spent life passed before his anguished eyes as he waited. He would reform, he swore. He would Live an honest life. The influence of this sweet, innocent child should bear its fruit. Dear little soul, he thought, as he mopped his tear-stained face, she was down there in that dark, cold kitchen, getting him food. How brave she was! It was a long time before she came back bearing a tray that was all too heavy for her frail figure to support. He took it from her hands reverently and laid it on the table.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The girl nodded.

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

"Who is Valentino?"

"He's a fence, miss; you wouldn't know what a fence is. He keeps the * Bottle

and Glass' public-house down Atherby Road, Kennington."

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

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

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

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

Mr. Simpson said nothing for a moment, then:

"I have been visiting a friend."

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

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

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

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

Mr. Simpson sat up and took notice.

Valentino!

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

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

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

That their crime was associated was proved when they stepped into the dock together, with policemen between them, the constabulary having been inserted for the sake of peace and quietness. Yet, despite his position, Mr. Simpson was by no means depressed. His heart sang a song of joy at his reformation. Perhaps he would see the girl, that angel child, again; that was all he hoped.

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

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

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

A lawyer rose in the body of the court.

"Your name is Marie Wilson?" he said.

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

"You are professionally known as "Baby Bellingham?"

"Yes, sir," said the child.

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

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

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

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

The magistrate was looking at a paper on his desk.

"I see there is a report of this occurrence in this morning's newspaper," he said,

and read the headline:

"CHILD ACTRESS REDUCES HARDENED BURGLAR

TO TEARS BY HER ARTISTRY"

Miss Wilson nodded gravely.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bluebells always made Mr. Simpson cry.

8. WHITE STOCKING

I

John Trevor was not a jealous man. He told himself this a dozen times; he told Marjorie Banning only once.

"Jealous!" she flamed, and then gaining control of her anger; "I don't quite understand you. What do you mean by jealous?"

Jack felt and looked uncomfortable.

"Jealous, of course, is a silly word to use, but," he blundered, "what I mean is suspi—"

He checked himself again.

They were sitting in the Park under an expansive elm, and though not far from the madding crowd, the crowd was sufficiently removed from its madding qualities to be minimized to a negligible quantity. There were within sight exactly three courting couples, a nurse with a perambulator, a policeman, and a few playing children.

""What I mean to say is," said Jack desperately, "I trust you, dear, and—well, I don't want to know your secrets, but—"

But?" she repeated coldly.

"Well, I merely remark that I have seen you three times driving in a swagger motorcar—"

"A client's car," she said quietly.

"But surely the dressing of people's hair does not occupy all the afternoon and evening," he persisted. "Really, I'm awfully sorry if I'm bothering you, but it is a fact that whenever I've seen you it has been on the days when you have told me you could not come to me in the evening."

She did not answer immediately.

He was making it very hard for her, and she resented, bitterly resented, not only his doubt and the knowledge that in his eyes her movements were suspicious, but that she could offer no explanation. She resented most of all the justification which her silence gave to him.

""Who has been putting these ideas in your head?" she asked. "Lennox Mayne?"

"Lennox!" he snorted. "How ridiculous you are, Marjorie! Lennox would not dream of saying anything against you, to me or anybody else. Lennox is very fond of you—why, Lennox introduced me to you."

She bit her lips thoughtfully. She had excellent reasons for knowing that Lennox was very fond of her, fond in the way that Lennox had been of so many chance-met shop-girls, and that she also was a shop-girl brought that young man's admiration into a too familiar category.

She was employed at a great West-End hairdresser's, and hated the work; indeed, hated the work more than the necessity for working. Her father, a small provincial doctor, had died a few years before, leaving her and her mother penniless. A friend of the family had known the proprietor of Fennett's, and old Fennett was in need of a secretary. She had come to what Lennox Mayne crudely described as the "woman's barbers" in that capacity. From secretary she had passed to a more practical side of the business, for the old man, a master of his craft, had initiated her into the mysteries of "color culture"—an artless euphonism.

"I'm awfully sorry that I've annoyed you," she said primly as she got up, "but we shop-girls have our duties, Jack."

"For Heaven's sake don't call yourself a shop-girl," he snapped. "Of course, dear, I quite accept your explanation, only why make a mystery of it?"

Suddenly she slipped her arm in his.

"Because I am paid to make a mystery of it," she said, with a smile. "Now take me to Fragiana's, for I'm starving."

Over the meal they returned to the subject of Lennox.

"I know you don't like him," said Jack. "He really is a good fellow, and what is more, he is very useful to me, and I cannot afford to lose useful friends. We were at Ruby together, but, of course, he was always a smarter chap than I. He has made a fortune, while I am struggling to get together the necessary thousand that will enable me to introduce you to the dinkiest little suburban home—"

She put her hand under the table and squeezed his.

"You're a darling," she said, "but I hope you will never make your money as Lennox has made his."

He protested indignantly, but she went on, with a shake of her head:

"We hear queer stories, we dyers of ladies' faded locks," she said, * * and Lennox is awfully well known in London as a man who lives by his wits."

"But his uncle " he began.

"His uncle is very rich, but hates Lennox. Everybody says so."

"That is where you're wrong," said Jack triumphantly. "They have been bad friends, but now they are reconciled. I was dining with Lennox last night, when you were gadding around in your expensive motor-car—I didn't mean that unpleasantly, dear—anyway I was dining with him, and he told me that the old man was most friendly now. And what is more," he lowered his voice confidentially, "he is putting me in the way of making a fortune."

"Lennox?" said the girl incredulously and shook her head. "I can imagine Lennox making a fortune for himself, or even dazzling unsophisticated maidens with golden prospects, but I cannot imagine him making a fortune for you."

He laughed.

"Has he ever tried to dazzle you with golden prospects?" he bantered, but she avoided the question.

She and Lennox Mayne had met at the house of a mutual friend, and then they had met again in the Park, as she and Jack were meeting, and Lennox had discovered a future for her which had certain material advantages and definite spiritual drawbacks. And then one Sunday, when he had taken her on the river, they had met Jack Trevor, and she had found it increasingly easy to hold at bay the philanthropist.

They strolled back to the Park as the dusk was falling, and entering the Marble Arch gate they passed an untidy, horsey little man, who touched his hat to Jack and grinned broadly.

"That is Willie Jeans," said Jack, with a smile. "His father was our groom in the old Royston days. I wonder what he is doing in London?"

"What is he?" she asked curiously.

"He is a tout."

"A tout?"

"Yes; a tout is a man who watches racehorses. Willie is a very clever watcher. He works for one of the sporting papers, and I believe makes quite a lot of money."

"How queer!" she said and laughed.

"What amuses you?" he asked in surprise, but she did not tell him.

II

The man who sprawled motionless along the top of the wall had certain strange, chameleon like characteristics. His mottled green coat and his dingy yellow breeches and gaiters so completely harmonized with the ancient wall and its overhanging trees, that nine passers-by out of ten would have failed to notice him. Happily for his peace of mind, there were no passers-by, the hour being seven o'clock on a sunny May morning. His elbows were propped on a patch of crumbling mortar, a pair of prismatic glasses were glued to his eyes, and on his face was a painful grimace of concentrated attention.

For twenty minutes he had waited in this attitude, and the stout man who sat in the car drawn up some distance along the road sighed patiently. He turned his head as he heard the descent of the watcher.

"Finished?" he asked.

"Huh," replied the other.

The stout man sighed again and set the rattling machine running toward the village.

Not until they were on the outskirts of Baldock did the dingy watcher regain his speech.

"Yamen's lame," he said.

The stout man, in his agitation, nearly drove the car on to the sidewalk.

"Lame?" he repeated incredulously.

Willie nodded.

"He went lame when the gallop was half-way through," he said. "He'll win no Derby."

The fat man breathed heavily.

They were brothers, Willie the younger, and Paul the elder, though there was no greater family resemblance between the pair than there is between a rat and a comfortable hen.

The car jerked to a stop before the Baldock Post Office, and Willie got out

thoughtfully. He stood for some time meditating upon the broad pavement, scratching his chin and exhibiting unexpected signs of indecision. Presently he climbed back into the car.

"Let's go down to the garage and get some juice on board," he said.

"Why?" asked the astounded brother. "I thought you were going to wire—"

"Never mind what you thought," said the other impatiently; "go and load up with petrol. You can take me to London. The post office won't be open for half an hour."

His stout relation uttered gurgling noises intended to convey his astonishment and annoyance.

As the rattling car came back to the Stevenage Road, Willie condescended to explain.

"If I send a wire from here, it will be all over the town in a few minutes," he said libellously. "You know what these little places are, and Mr. Mayne would never forgive me."

Lennox Mayne was the principal source of the tout's income. Though he had a few other clients, Willie Jeans depended chiefly upon the honorarium which he received from his opulent patron.

Mr. Jeans' profession was a curious one. He was what is described in the sporting press as a "man of observation," and he had his headquarters at Newmarket. But there are great racing establishments outside of the headquarters of the turf, and when his chief patron required information which could not be otherwise secured, Mr. Jeans traveled afar to the Wiltshire Downs, to Epsom, and elsewhere, in order to gain at first-hand knowledge of certain horses' well-being.

"It was a bit of luck," he mused as he went along. "I don't suppose there is another man in England who could have touted old Greyman's horses. He usually has half a dozen men patrolling along the road to see that nobody sneaks over the wall."

Stuart Greyman owned a large estate on the Royston Road, which was peculiarly adapted for so furtive and secretive a man, for a high wall surrounded the big park wherein his horses were trained, and his staff was loyalty itself.

From other stables it is possible to secure valuable information through the judicious acquaintance of a stable-lad, but Greyman either paid his staff too

well to allow of that kind of leakage, or he showed a remarkable discrimination in employing his servants. And in consequence the old man was something of a terror to the ring. He produced unexpected winners, and so well kept was his secret that until the race was over, and the money began to roll back from the starting-price offices, there was not the slightest hint that the victor was "expected." In consequence, he enjoyed the luxury of long prices, and every attempt that had been made to tout his horses had hitherto been unsuccessful.

Willie's gratification was, therefore, natural and his success a little short of miraculous.

The dust-stained car came to a stop in a decorous London square, and an outraged butler who answered the door hesitated for some considerable time before he announced the visitors.

Lennox Mayne was at breakfast, a sleek-looking young man, who was less disconcerted than his butler at the spectacle of the untidy Mr. Jeans.

"Sit down," he said curtly, and when the visitors obeyed and the butler had closed the door—"Well?"

Willie poured forth his story, and Lennox Mayne listened with a thoughtful frown.

"The old devil!" he said softly, and not without admiration; ^ * the wicked old devil!"

Willie agreed on principle that Stuart Grey-man was all and more than his loving nephew had described him, but was puzzled to know why Mr. Greyman was more particularly devilish that morning than any other.

Lennox sat for a moment deep in thought, and then

"Now, Jeans, you understand that this is a secret. Not a whisper of Yamen's lameness must leak out. I might tell you that ten minutes ago my uncle rang me up from Baldock to say that he had galloped Yamen and he had pulled up fit."

"What!" said the indignant "Willie. "Why, that horse is as lame—"

"I don't doubt it," interrupted his employer, "but Mr. Greyman has a good reason for putting it about that Yamen is sound. He has heavily backed the horse to win the Derby, and he wants time to save his money. What other horses were in the gallop!"

"I don't know his horses very well," explained Willie, "but the colt that made all the running was a smasher, if ever there was one. He simply carried the rest of the horses off their feet. I couldn't put the clock on him, but I know they were going a racing gallop."

"You're sure it was Yamen that pulled up lame?"

"Sure, sir," said the other emphatically. "I saw him run at Ascot and at Newmarket last year, and there is no mistaking his white legs. You don't often see a brown horse with four white stockings."

The other meditated.

"What kind of a horse was it that won the gallop?"

"He was brown all over, not a speck of white on him."

"H'm," mused Mr. Mayne; "that must be Fairyland. I must remember him. Thank you for coming," he said, as he dismissed his visitors with a nod, "and remember—"

"Mum's the word," said Willie as he folded up the two banknotes which his employer had pushed across the table.

Left alone, Mr. Lennox Mayne did some quick, intensive thinking. He had in his mind no thought of blaming his uncle. Lennox Mayne could not afford to condemn trickery or treachery in others, for he had not amassed a comfortable fortune by paying too strict an attention to the niceties of any known code of conduct. He was a gambler, and a successful gambler. He gambled on stocks, on horses, but in the main his success was due to backing and laying against human beings. In this latter respect he had made two faux pas. He had gambled not only upon the tolerance but upon the inferior intelligence of his maternal uncle, Stuart Grey-man.- He had used information given to him in secret by that reticent man, and to his consternation had been detected, and there had been an estrangement which had lasted five years, and had apparently ended when old Greyman met him one day at lunch at the Carlton Grill and had gruffly notified his forgiveness.

"The old devil!" he murmured admiringly; "he nearly sold me."

For old Greyman had told him, again in confidence to back Yamen for the Derby.

Lennox Mayne trusted no man, least of all the uncle whom he suspected of harboring a grudge against him. Therefore had he sent his tout to confirm the exalted story of the lame Yamen's amazing speed. Yamen had only run twice

as a two-year-old. He had been carefully nursed for his classic engagements, and at least the story which the old man had told him was plausible.

So the old man was trying to catch him! Luckily, Lennox had not wagered a penny on the information which his uncle had brought him.

If Greyman had been one of his failures, no less had Marjorie Banning. There were times when Lennox Mayne irritably admitted that she had been the greatest failure of all. She had seemed so easy. She was just so circumstanced that the way seemed simple.

It was a coincidence that, as his mind dwelt upon her, the telephone bell rang shrilly and the voice of John Trevor greeted him.

He heard the name and made a wry face, but his voice was pleasant enough.

"Hullo, Jack! Certainly come round. Aren't you working today? Good."

He hung up the receiver and returned to his table. Jack Trevor! His eyes narrowed. He had not forgiven this innocent friend of his, and for ten minutes his mind was very busy.

Jack had a fairly good post in a city office, and just at that time the rubber trade was one of England's decaying industries, and his time was very much his own.

Lennox received him in his study, and pushed a silver box of cigarettes toward his visitor.

"What brings you west at this hour?" he asked. "You'll stay to lunch?"

Jack shook his head.

"The fact is," he blurted, "I'm a bit worried, Lennox. It is about Marjorie."

Lennox raised his eyebrows.

"What has Marjorie been doing?" he asked. "Does she want to turn your hair a flaming gold?"

Jack smiled.

"Not so bad as that," he said; "but I know you are very fond of Marjorie. Lennox, you're a man of the world, whose advice is worth having, and—the fact is, I am worried like the devil about her." He was silent for a long time, and Lennox watched him curiously. "Either she has a mysterious friend or she has a mysterious job," said Jack at last. "Four times she has passed me in the

street, in a most swagger car."

"Alone?"

Jack nodded.

"Perhaps she was going to see a client," suggested the other carelessly. "You know, even women who own luxurious motor-cars need the service of a trained perruquier."

"Even females who own luxurious motor-cars do not require the services of a perruquier from three in the afternoon until eleven at night," said Jack grimly; "and that is the time Marjorie has returned to her diggings. I know it was hateful to spy on her, but that is just what I've done. She is getting a lot of money. I had a chat with her landlady. I called in on the pretense that I had called in to see Marjorie, and got her to talk about her, and she told me that she changed a hundred-pound check for her."

"H'm," said Lennox. He was as puzzled as his friend. His agile brain was busy, and presently he said:

"There is certain to be a simple explanation, my dear chap, so don't worry. Marjorie is not flighty, whatever else she is. When are you going to get married?"

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"Heaven knows," he said. "It is all very well for you to talk about marriage, because you're a rich man, but for me it means another twelve months of saving."

"Have you fixed the sum on which you can get married?" asked Lennox, with a smile.

"A thousand pounds," replied Jack, "and I've got about six hundred towards it."

"Then, my dear chap, I'll put you in the way of getting not a thousand, but ten thousand."

Jack stared at him.

"What the dickens are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about the dark Yamen," said Lennox, "my uncle's horse. I told you the other day that I would make your fortune—I am going to do it."

He got up, went to a table, and took up the morning paper, turning its pages.

"Here is the betting," he said. "One hundred to six Yamen—and Yamen is as certain to win the Derby as you are to marry your nice little girl. I can get you ten thousand to six hundred today—tomorrow the price may be shorter."

"Good lord! I couldn't lose six hundred pounds," gasped Jack, and the other laughed.

"If you knew how small a risk it was you wouldn't yammer like a sheep. I tell you this is money for nothing."

"Suppose I had sixty pounds on it—"

"Sixty pounds?" sneered the other. "My dear chap, what is the use of making money in pennies? Here is the chance of your lifetime, and, unless you are a lunatic, you will not miss it. Tomorrow the horse will be nearer six to one than sixteen, and you can lay out your money and stand to win a fortune at practically no risk to yourself."

He spoke for half an hour on horses—of Yamen, its speed, its breeding—and Jack listened fascinated.

"I'll ring up a bookmaker and put it on for you."

"Wait, wait," said Jack hoarsely as the other reached for the telephone; "it is a fearful lot of money to risk, Lennox."

"And a fearful lot of money to win," said the tempter. If he had had more time, he would have arranged the bet so that the six hundred pounds fell into his pocket, but that was impossible. Jack Trevor must be caught immediately or not at all—must be given no time to reflect or to seek advice, and certainly no time to discover that Yamen was a cripple. The secret might leak out at any moment; a disgruntled stable-boy, a chance spy, a too-talkative veterinary surgeon—any of these might talk and the stable's secret would be revealed. The loss of six hundred might not prevent a contemptuous little hairdressing girl from marrying—it would certainly postpone the event.

"I'll do it," said Jack, with a gasp, and listened as in a dream to his placid companion's voice.

"Put it to the account of Mr. John Trevor, Castlemaine Gardens... Yes, I'll be responsible. Thank you."

He hung up the receiver, and looked round at the other with a queer smile.

"I congratulate you," he said softly, and Jack went back to the city, his head in

a whirl, even the mystery of his fiancee's movements obscured by the tremendous realization of his own recklessness.

Marjorie Banning heard the news and dropped into a twopenny park chair. Happily, the chair was there.

"You've put all the money on a horse?" she said hollowly. "Oh, Jack!"

"But, my dear," said Jack stoutly, "the money is as good as mine, and all that Lennox said is true. The horse was sixteen to one yesterday and it is only eight to one today."

"Oh, Jack!" was all she could say.

He had to find conviction for himself. He was miserably conscious of his own folly, and had cursed himself that he had ever listened to the voice of temptation.

"It is all right, Marjorie," he said, with poorly simulated cheerfulness; "the horse belongs to Lennox Mayne's uncle. He told Lennox that it is certain to win. Think what ten thousand pounds means, Marjorie dear..."

She listened, unconvinced. She who knew with what labor and sacrifice his little nest-egg had been gathered, who understood even more clearly than he what its loss would entail, could only sit with a blank sense of despair at her heart.

At that moment Mr. Lennox Mayne was experiencing something of her dismay, though the cause was a little different. Summoned by telegram, he who had been described as the "Prince of Touts"—though a more untidy, unshaven, and uncomfortable prince had never borne such a title—had come post-haste to Manchester Square, and whilst the grimy Ford, with its stout, hen-like driver, stood at the door, Mr. Willie Jeans fidgeted uneasily and endured -with such patience as he could command the flow of his employer's abuse.

"You're a blundering jackass, and I was a fool to hire you," stormed Lennox Mayne. "What is the use of touting a horse if you're seen touting? I told you that you were not to let anybody know that you were connected with me, you drivelling fool, and you've been talking."

"No, I ain't," said the other indignantly. "I never talk. Do you think I should be able to earn a living if I—"

"You've been talking. Listen to this." Lennox snatched up a letter from the table.

"This is from my uncle. Listen to this, you damned fool:

"You are not satisfied with my information, it seems, but employ your tout to spy on my training. You can tell Mr. Willie Jeans from me that if ever he is again seen in or near my estate, he will get the biggest flogging he has ever had in his life..."

The following paragraph, which gave Stuart Greyman's opinion of his nephew, Lennox did not read.

"I never knew anybody saw me; there was nobody about when I was on the wall," grumbled Mr. Jeans. "I've earned my fifty, if ever a man has earned it."

"You'll get no fifty from me," said Lennox. "I've given you as much money as you're entitled to, and don't come near me again."

When Mr. Willie Jeans joined his brother, he was in no amiable frame of mind.

"Where are we going now?" asked that placid man.

Willie suggested a place which has the easiest and most varied of routes, and his brother, who was not unused to these temperamental outbursts, held on his way, for their original destination had been Epsom. A policeman at Hyde Park raised a warning hand at the sight of the ramshackle machine, but Mr. Willie Jeans' flivver was a "private car" within the meaning of the Act, and they joined the resplendent procession of machines that were moving slowly through the Park.

It was Fate that made the oil lubrication choke within a dozen paces of where two disconsolate lovers were sitting.

"What a queer car!" said the girl; "and isn't that the man you saw the other day —the tout, did you call him?"

"Yes," said Jack gloomily; "that's the tout," and then suddenly, "I wonder if he knows?"

He rose and walked across to the man, and Willie touched his cap.

"Good evening, Mr. Trevor."

"Where are you going!" asked Jack.

"I'm going to Epsom, to watch the Derby gallops. Most of the horses are there now, but," he grinned unpleasantly, "not Yamen."

"Why isn't he there?" asked Jack, with a sickening of heart, for he instinctively

recognized the hostility which the little man displayed toward the horse on whose well-being so much depended.

"Because he'll never see a racecourse—that's why," said the other savagely.

"He'll never see a racecourse? What do you mean?" asked Jack slowly.

"He is lame," said the little man. "I hope you haven't backed him?" he asked suddenly.

Jack nodded.

"Come over here," he said. "This is pretty bad news I've heard, Marjorie," he said. "Jeans says that Yamen is lame."

"That's right," nodded the tout, "as lame as old Junket. That is another one of Mr. Greyman's. You remember him, sir; he always looked as if he was winning in a canter and then went lame in the last hundred yards."

"I don't know much about horses," said Jack. "I want you to tell me about Yamen. How long has it been lame?"

"Three days," said the little man. "I have been touting it for a week. It broke down in the winding-up gallop."

"But does Mr. Greyman know!"

"Mr. Greyman!" said the little man scornfully; "why, of course he knows. He didn't let on to Lennox Mayne, but I told Lennox Mayne, and a fat lot of thanks I got for it."

"When did you tell him?" asked Jack, going white.

"The day before yesterday."

"Then Lennox Mayne knew!"

Jack was bewildered, shocked beyond expression.

"It can't be true," he said. "Lennox would never—"

"Lennox Mayne would give away his own aunt," said Willie Jeans contemptuously.

"Was it Lennox Mayne who persuaded you to back this horse?" asked the girl.

Jack nodded.

"You are sure Yamen is lame!"

"I swear to it. I know Yamen as I know the back of my hand," said the little man emphatically. "The only horse with four white stockings in the Baldock stables—"

"Baldock!" The girl was on her feet, staring. "Baldock, did you say?"

"That's right, miss."

"Who lives there?" she asked quickly. "What is his name?"

"Greyman."

"What sort of a man is he?"

"He is an old man about sixty, gray-haired, and as hard as a nail. A cunning old devil he is, too; I'll bet he's too cunning for Lennox Mayne."

She was silent a long time after the little man had gone on his shaky way, and then most unexpectedly, most surprisingly, she asked:

"Will you take me to see the Derby, Jack?"

"Good Lord! I didn't expect you'd be interested," he said, "and it will be an awful crush."

"Will you take me? You can hire a car for the day, and we could see the race from the roof. Will you take me?"

He nodded, too dumbfounded to speak. She had never before evinced the slightest interest in a horse race.

Some rumor of the dark Yamen's infirmity must have crept out, for on the morning of the race the horse was quoted amongst the twenty-five to one brigade, and hints of a mishap appeared in the morning Press.

"We hear," said the Sporting Post, "that all is not well with Mr. Greyman's dark candidate, Yamen. Perhaps it is wrong to describe him as 'dark,' since he has already run twice in public, but until his name appeared prominently in the betting-list, very few had the slightest idea that the colt by Mandarin-Ettabell had any pretensions to classic events. We hope, for the sake of that good sportsman, Mr. Stuart Greyman, that rumor was exaggerated."

Marjorie had never been to a race-meeting before, and possibly even the more sedate meetings would have astonished her, but Epsom was a revelation. It was not so much a race-meeting as a great festival and fair. The people frightened her. She tried, as she stood on the roof of the car, to calculate their number. They blackened the hills, they formed a deep phalanx from one end of

the course to the other, they packed the stands and crowded the rings, and between races filled the course. The thunderous noise of them, their ceaseless movement, the kaleidoscopic color, the booths and placards even more than the horses held her interest.

"There are all sorts of rumors about," said Jack, returning from his tour of discovery. "They say that Yamen doesn't run. The papers prepared us for that. I am horribly afraid, dear, I've been a fool."

She bent down over the edge of the roof and took his hand, and to his amazement he discovered she had left a paper in it.

"What's this—a banknote? Are you going to have a bet?"

She nodded.

"I want you to make a bet for me," she said.

"What are you backing!"

"Yamen," she replied.

"Yamen!" he repeated incredulously, and then looked at the note. It was for a hundred pounds. He could only stare helplessly at her.

"But you mustn't do this, you really mustn't."

"Please," she insisted firmly.

He made his way to Tattersalls' ring, and after the race preliminary to the Derby had been run, he approached a bookmaker whose name he knew. The numbers were going up when he got back to her.

"I got two thousand to a hundred for you," he said—"and I nearly didn't."

"I should have been very angry with you if you hadn't," said Marjorie.

"But why " he began, and then broke off as the frame of the number board went up. "Yamen is running," he said.

Nobody knew better than the girl that Yamen was running. She watched the powder-blue jacket in the preliminary parade, and caught a glimpse of the famous white stockings of Mandarin's son as he cantered down to the post. Her arm was aching with the labor of holding the glasses, but she never took them off the powder-blue jacket until the white tape flew upward and the roar of two hundred thousand voices cried in unison:

"They're off!"

The blue jacket was third as the horses climbed the hill, fourth on the level by the railway turn, third again as the huge field ran round Tattenham Corner into the straight, and then a strident voice from a near-by bookmaker shouted:

"Yamen wins for a pony!" as the dark Yamen took the lead and won hard- held by three lengths.

"I don't know how to begin the story," she said that night. They were dining together, but Marjorie was hostess.

"It really began about a month ago, when an old gentleman came into the shop and saw Mr. Fennett, the proprietor. They were together about ten minutes, and then I was sent for to the private office. Mr. Fennett told me that the gentleman had a special commission, and he wanted an expert to undertake some dyeing work. I thought at first it was for himself, and I was rather sorry that a nice-looking old gentleman should want to interfere with his beautiful white hair. I didn't actually really know for what purpose I was required until the next week, when his car came for me and I was driven to Baldock. And then he told me. He asked me if I had brought the bleaching and dyeing material with me, and when I told him that I had, he let me into the secret. He said he was very fussy about the color of horses, and he had a wonderful horse with white legs, and that he objected to white legs. He wanted me to dye the legs a beautiful brown. Of course I laughed at first, it was so amusing, but he was very serious, and then I was introduced to this beautiful horse—who was the most docile client I have ever treated," she smiled.

"And you dyed his legs brown?"

She nodded.

"But that was not all. There was another horse whose legs had to be bleached. Poor dear, they will be bleached permanently, unless he dyes them again. I know now, but I didn't know then, that it was a horse called Junket. Every few days I had to go to Baldock and renew the dye and the bleach. Mr. Greyman made it a condition with Mr. Fennett that my commission should be kept a secret even from the firm, and of course I never spoke about it, not even to you."

"Then when I saw you in the car—"

"I was on my way to Baldock to dye and bleach my two beautiful clients," she laughed. "I know nothing about racehorses, and I hadn't the slightest idea that the horse I had dyed was Yamen. In fact, until Willie Jeans mentioned the word 'Baldock' I had not connected the stable with the Derby.

"The morning after I left you I had an engagement to go to Baldock to remove the dye—Mr. Greyman had told me that he had changed his mind, and that he wanted the horse to have white legs again. And then I determined to speak to him and tell him just how you were situated. He told me the truth, and he swore me to secrecy. He was reconciled to Lennox and told him all about Yamen. And then he discovered that Lennox did not believe him and was having the horses watched. He was so angry that, in order to deceive his nephew's watcher, he had the horse's legs dyed, and gave the—the tout a chance of seeing poor Junket with his bleached legs break down—as he knew he would. He told me he had backed Yamen to win him a great fortune."

"So you, of all people, on Epsom Downs knew that Yamen would win."

"Didn't I back him?" asked the dyer of legs.

THE END