THE PRISON BREAKERS AND OTHER STORIES

BY

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Freeditorial

The Prison Breakers And Other Stories

1. THE PRISON-BREAKERS

It was the sort of thing one might expect would happen in the Intelligence Service, and may be briefly related.

Alexander Barnes, who enjoyed a mild fame as a man about town, a regular first nighter at all the new plays, a familiar figure at private views, was arrested on a charge of wilfully shooting Cristoforo P. Supello. With him was also charged an American who gave the name of "Jones."

The facts elicited at the trial were briefly as follows:

Barnes and Jones had been dining at the "Atheneum Imperial" and had strolled out into Pall Mall. A few minutes later the officer on point duty at the end of Waterloo Place heard three shots fired in rapid succession. The shots came from the direction of the Duke of York's statue, and the constable ran towards the sound and was joined by two other policemen who arrived from the other end of the thoroughfare. The man, Supello, was lying on the ground dead. Barnes and Jones were caught at the top of the Duke of York's steps leading down into St. James's Park, and were secured without difficulty.

The fact that they attempted to escape did not support the story which Barnes told, namely, that he had been attacked by Supello and had fired in self-defense. Undoubtedly a revolver was found in the dead man's hand with one chamber discharged. In Barnes's possession was an automatic pistol from which two shots had been fired (the shells were discovered on they following morning), but no weapons of any kind were found on Jones. Both Jones and Barnes swore they were attacked first, and the fact that three shots were fired and that two of them had been found in Supello's heart proved that the first had been fired by him, since medical evidence demonstrated that he could not have used a revolver subsequent to receiving the wounds which killed him.

With such evidence it seemed humanly impossible that the charge could be persisted in, yet Barnes was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to ten years' penal servitude, whilst Jones was discharged.

The conviction was secured on the evidence of a homeless man who said he was dozing on the steps of a house when he heard an altercation and saw Barnes draw and flourish his pistol in the face of Supello, and by the further evidence of the butler of Mr. Stieglemann, the international financier, who

alleged that he, too, was a witness of the affair, and said that he heard angry words between the parties, and corroborated the statement of the night-waif in so far as the flourishing of weapons was concerned.

The occurrence created something of a sensation, for Barnes was a fairly well-known man who lived a blameless and—save that he had a trick of disappearing from London at odd intervals, nobody knowing whither —an unsuspicionable life.

Alexander Barnes accepted his sentence philosophically, although he had a young wife to whom he was passionately devoted. He possessed that serene faith in his department which makes up nine-tenths of the moral equipment of the Intelligence Man.

He did not tell the judge that he and "Jones" of the Washington Secret Service had intercepted Supello on his way to a certain Embassy with the full text of the Salem-Ponsonby Treaty in his pocket, or that they had followed Supello, a most notorious trafficker in government secrets, from the hotel; or that they had sat watching him at dinner until the lady from the Embassy had passed Supello's table and had dropped a white rose as a sign that his Excellency had agreed to pay the stiff price which the Mexican had asked.

They shot him and had ripped the treaty from his inside pocket, and Jones had dropped the document into the nearest street sewer, but, honestly, Supello had fired first. Barnes could not tell this interesting and romantic story, partly because he would not have been believed, and partly because it is the rule of the Higher Intelligence Circle never to bleat. If you are caught you must take your medicine with a smiling face and send no S.O.S. messages to your unknown chiefs for succour.

"Mr. Jones" was informed that his presence in England was no longer an absolute necessity, and he departed for New York and was accompanied to his cabin by police officers.

When the big liner was fifty miles from Mersey mouth, he was visited by a quiet man who talked with him for a long time. This man was Bland, Chief of the Intelligence Service, who left the boat at Queenstown and made his way back to London.

He sought an interview with the Minister of the Interior, and the result was not especially successful.

At the end of a very hopeless quarter of an hour, he shrugged his shoulders. "I quite understand, sir," he said as gently as he could, "my suggestion is

very irregular, but then the situation is a little extraordinary. We are on the verge of war—"

"That is a matter of opinion, sah," said the other gruffly.

He always said "sah," and as "Sah" he was known throughout the services.

He was a thin man with a towsy mop of pure white hair, his face was thin, his mouth was thin, and he looked out onto the world through the narrowest slits of eyes that Bland had ever seen in a man.

Sir George Mergin had been Minister off and on over a period of twenty years in one administration or the other. He was known as narrow, but safe.

He ran his department on rigid regulation lines, wrote with a quill pen, and drank a glass of sherry at eleven in the forenoon.

Small wonder then that he regarded the Chief of the Intelligence Bureau and his preposterous schemes with resentment.

"You see, Mr.—er—Bland, you have no—er —official status. You are in no vote and come under the—er —administration of no department."

"In fact, we're nobody's darlings, sir," smiled Bland, "and have no Chief to whom we can appeal. The Interior loathes us, the P.V. police are jealous of us, the Foreign Office, whom we serve, pretend that they do not know that there is such an organization as the Secret Service—"

There came a gentle tap at the door and a secretary entered. He crossed to his Chief and said something in a low voice.

"Ah yes, ah yes," said Sir George, "tell the Commissioner to come in."

Bland concealed a smile. It was no coincidence that Assistant-Commissioner Goldring should make his appearance at that moment. Goldring had control of the Political Department and ran a secret service of his own. It was little more than a glorified detective force, which was employed in tracing dangerous aliens and keeping an unfriendly eye upon the comings and goings of known anarchists. It was a department which boasted of its linguistic gifts and was known at the Yard as the "P.V. Division "—"P.V." standing for "parlez-vous."

And here it may be said that the regular police force entertained a most profound contempt for the P.V.'s, their prescience and their capacity, and invariably favored Bland's department when a decision had to be made for one or the other.

Goldring came in, bowed graciously to the Chief, and favored Bland with a little nod.

"Ah, Commissioner, I am glad you have come, sah! Now I will put it to you, Mr. Goldringor perhaps, Mr. Bland, sah, you would like to explain your—er—curious project."

Bland knew as well as any that Goldring was well aware of the business and that he had already been consulted.

"I suggest that Alexander Barnes should be set at liberty," he said. "Mr. Goldring knows all that Barnes was doing. He was out to find the man who had bribed a Foreign Office clerk to supply him with a copy of the Salem-Ponsonby Treaty."

"And shoot him?" suggested Goldring, shaking his head with an assumption of gravity. "Surely there is a law in the land to deal with such crimes as you suggest Supello committed; surely he could have been arrested?"

Bland looked at him with a pitying smile which made the other hot and angry.

"No, sah!" said the Minister shortly; "I can do nothing, sah—nothing. It is absurd to ask such a thing. Bring me a request from my excellent friend, the Foreign Minister, or let the Under-Secretary substantiate your statement, and in the public interest I might bring Clause 475 of the Act of Defense into operation, but otherwise—no!"

Again Bland smiled.

"You know very well, sir, I cannot do that," he said.

"Personally," interrupted Goldring, "I doubt the whole story. I am not exactly without information, Mr. Bland; you don't suggest that you know any more of what is happening in England than I?" he asked archly.

Bland nodded.

"I know that our friend Stieglemann gives. excellent dinners," he drawled. "I know that after dinner his guests play roulette, and that if Stieglemann wishes he can always win—it is useful."

"What do you mean?" demanded Goldring, very red.

"By 'useful'? I'll tell you. Suppose a police official lost five hundred pounds at a sitting, and Stieglemann tore up that police officer's I.O.U. for that

amount, would not this officer be under some obligation to his admirable host? You ask me what I know more than you—I'll tell you. Stieglemann's roulette board is faked. You didn't know that, did you?"

Goldring met Bland's challenging eyes and dropped his own before them.

"I am going now," Bland went on, picking up his hat, "but before I go I will say this. The two witnesses against Alexander Barnes were planted. Stieglemann's butler is an alien agent; the tramp who saw everything is another. But they don't count, because Alexander would have killed Supello anyway sooner than allow the Salem-Ponsonby Treaty to go to its purchaser. You refuse me help to release Barnes—I will release him myself and take him through England under the nose of your police."

Sir George rose in a trembling fury. "You threaten me, sah!" he quavered.

Bland nodded.

"I will break you, sah! I will arrest you, sah! Mr. Goldring, take him into custody!"

Goldring hesitated, then stepped forward, and Bland laughed. He laughed as he accompanied his captor down the stairs, and was chuckling in the locked room at Scotland Yard when they came to him (after an hour's stay) and told him that he was free.

For there had come to Sir George Mergin a High Government Personage who had said at the end of an aimless and innocent conversation:

"Oh, by the way, release Bland."

"Release him—release him, sah!!" spluttered Sir George. "Why, sah?"

"Oh, I don't know," said his visitor vaguely, "only I think... I should release him if I were you. By the way, all the evening newspapers have a story about your resigning—it's in the stop-press. You aren't thinking of taking that step, are you?"

"Certainly not!" gasped the Minister. "Who dare put such a thing in the papers?"

"Goodness knows—you know what newspapers are," said the Personage carelessly, and strolled to the door.

He stood for a moment irresolutely playing with the handle of the door. Sir George saw him frown and purse his lips.

"I think I should release Bland," said the visitor thoughtfully, and went out, closing the door behind him.

Sir George wrote the order for release.

"But Barnes shall serve his time," he said viciously, as he flourished his signature to the document.

Bland went back to his office, where he had a little work to do. He recognized that he had put Goldring and his department upon their mettle and that the Parlez-Vous Brigade would be watching him like a hawk. Two of them had followed him to the office and were now—ostentatiously innocent—examining the windows of a fruit store on the opposite side of the street.

They followed him to his flat—Goldring had put a car at their disposal—and Bland watched them from his window with great enjoyment for some time. Then he sent for them, and they came sheepishly enough and stood in front of the big desk in his study.

"I don't want you boys to get cold feet watching me," he said kindly; "you can sit up here if you promise not to make a noise. You'll get a much closer view and be able to docket my varying emotions."

"Mr. Bland," protested one, "you're quite in error"

"I am never in error," interrupted Bland. "Just sit where you are. I'm expecting a visitor, and you'll be able to report the whole wicked plot."

The visitor was Shaun Macallum, a bright young man wise in the ways of the Intelligence Service.

"Sit down, Shaun. I phoned you to come—oh, by the way, these are two of Goldring's men, Sergeant Jackman and Sergeant Villars. I have no secrets from them."

The two men grinned uncomfortably.

"Alec Barnes is in Clewes Gaol," Bland went on; "I want you to go down and arrange to get him out. When he is released I want you to bring him to London and take him to Liverpool by train. Put him on a boat that is leaving for the United States—our friends on the other side will arrange for him to join his wife, who leaves for the U.S.A. next week."

"How are we to get him out of prison?" asked Shaun. Bland leant back in his chair and gazed thoughtfully at the ceiling.

"That is fairly simple," he said slowly.

The two men seated uncomfortably on the edge of their chairs leant forward a little.

"That is fairly simple," repeated Bland; "on a certain day we will cut all telephone and telegraph wires leading to the prison. Within half an hour our friend will be free. If he is not, then he will be within twenty-four hours."

"Oh," said Shaun blankly.

Bland rose.

"That's as much as I can tell you," he said; "and now, Shaun, you can take these two active and intelligent members of the P.V. Division and lose them."

That evening Commissioner Goldring sought the Minister of the Interior at his house in Portland Place.

"It is absurd, sah," said Sir George irritably. "The whole thing is absurd and wholly irregular. Confound the fellow! If I had my way—by Jove! The thing is a bluff, sah."

Goldring shook his head. He was a badly scared man, for if Bland's intelligence men knew of private transactions as between himself and Mr. Stieglemann, what else might they know?

"If he says he will do it, he will," he said.

"Let him try," answered Sir George grimly.

This was on the Wednesday evening. On the Thursday morning the Governor of Clewes Gaol received very detailed instructions regarding the care of his prisoner.

On Friday morning, Goldring was in attendance on Sir George when officials brought word that the telephone wire between the office of the Minister of the Interior and Clewes Gaol had been cut in three places.

"Rush an XX message through to Clewes town," said Sir George. "Tell the Governor to hold Barnes in readiness for transfer to Stanmoor—anything may happen in these little country gaols, sah."

Bland lunched with Shaun Macallum that day.

"Exactly what is the idea—cutting the wires and all that sort of thing?" asked Shaun.

Bland glanced swiftly round and lowered his voice.

"We can do nothing in these little country prisons," he said; "our only chance is to scare Sah into transferring Barnes to Stanmoor."

This was, as I say, on the Friday morning.

On Saturday those idle folk who lingered about Stanmoor's tiny railway station after the arrival of the 3.7 from London would have witnessed the coming of a tall, good-looking convict.

He was unshaven but cheerful, for he had faith in his Chief and in the hundreds of gallant men who, as he knew, were working for his salvation. His wrists were enclosed in handcuffs and he was accompanied by the inevitable assistant warder, carrying the inevitable blue envelope containing transfer papers. This was no unusual sight for the townsmen of Stanmoor. No day passed which did not witness the coming or going of sinister figures in yellow livery. Sometimes they appeared singly, but more often they arrived or were dispatched in gangs of twenty, fastened together by a long steel chain which passed between each couple.

The warder beckoned a cab, and into this he bundled his prisoner, following and seating himself opposite. There was no need to give the driver instructions. He whipped up his horse, passed through the little market-place and Stanmoor's one street, and breasted the long hill which leads to the dreary moorland, in the very center of which is situated Stanmoor Convict Establishment.

It is the boast of successive governors that never once in its long and mournful history has Stanmoor Prison lost a convict save by death, discharge, or transfer. Escapes there had been, but no man had ever succeeded in getting away from the moor.

This is not to be wondered at. Physically, Stanmoor is bleak and bare save for three definite wood groups named, ominously enough, Hiding Wood, M'Greery Wood, and Trap Wood. M'Greery, who gave his name to the second of these, was a sometime fugitive from the granite prison and met his end in its bosky glades. Hiding Wood is so called because it was the clump for which the majority of escaped prisoners made; and Trap Wood has only two outlets, one to the moor and the other to the village of Boley-on- the-Moor and presents no difficulties of search.

The roads are few, the farms scattered and difficult to come by, the edges of the moor are patrolled by guards, and when to these difficulties is added the fact that the Governor had recently secured the right to requisition a

military aeroplane patrol in case of need, it is not necessary to urge the strenuous character of the problem which Stanmoor offered to the unfortunate wretch who sought freedom over its bare and treacherous waste.

Barnes and his custodian passed under the arch of sorrow, through the black gates, and were taken to the office of the Chief Warder.

That official was evidently well advised as to the responsibility which his new charge represented.

"You're the prison-breaker, are you?" he said pleasantly. "Well, we shall have to give you extra attention, my friend."

It was an extraordinary speech for a Chief Warder to make (so thought the Assistant Warder, in charge of the prisoner), for men holding that position are sparing of speech, laconical, and stony. They do not address a prisoner as "my friend," nor do they volunteer information as to the necessity for keeping him under observation.

"Do you speak any foreign languages?" asked the Chief Warder.

"Yes, sir, several."

"German?"

"Yes, sir." The Chief Warder nodded. "I can find you work here," he said; "there are a number of German prisoners—let me hear how much German you know."

And then he spoke rapidly in a language wholly incomprehensible to the attendant warder, and the prisoner replied, speaking as quickly.

All these facts came out at the subsequent inquiry (details of which will be found in the Blue book "Prison Commissioners' Report, No. 764 A") into the part the Chief Warder played.

What he said in German, and what Barnes replied, is a matter of conjecture. The Chief Warder's version was that he merely asked a few questions in the language to test the prisoner's knowledge. The Ministry of the Interior alleged that he was a "member of a certain organization," the character of which did not transpire.

Three days after the admission of Alexander Barnes to Stanmoor, Goldring came by special train to Stanmoor town, bringing with him twenty of the smartest men of his special corps, for Alexander Barnes had escaped.

Sir George Mergin had a brief interview with his Commissioner before he left London, and to say that Sir George was angry is putting the matter with studied moderation.

"The prisoner is on the moor, he escaped an hour ago, and there is a cordon round the district."

"But how—how, sir?" demanded the bewildered Goldring.

"He went out with a party of German prisoners to work in the fields, leapt the stone wall on to a waiting motor-cycle, and got away, sah, under the eyes of the warder!"

"But the cycle?"

"Had been put behind the wall by some person unknown—how the devil he knew it was there—"

At Stanmoor, Goldring found a telegram waiting for him from his Chief:

BLAND HAS BEEN SEEN. HE SAYS THAT BARNES IS STILL ON THE MOOR, AND HE WILL LEAVE FOR LONDON VIA STANMOOR STATION.

"Will he!" muttered Goldring between his teeth; "will he!"

No man passed from the moor that day who did not come under the vigorous scrutiny of police and guards. Farmers' wagons were halted and searched—even the sacks of potatoes that some carts carried were emptied before the wagon was allowed to proceed.

Night brought no relaxation of the watchers' vigilance. A battalion of soldiers was brought from Taverton to assist the guard, and big motor head-lamps flooded every road with light.

A weary-eyed Goldring paced irritably up and down in the lemon yellow sunlight of morning.

"I'm going to have that fellow if I keep awake for a week!" he said, shaking his fist at the unoffending moor. "You know me, Barton. These secret service people, these amateur policemen, are not going to get away with it. We'll have Barnes!"

"What like of man is he in appearance!" asked his subordinate.

"A six-footer and broad—you can't mistake him," said Goldring. "Look at that poor little devil!"

"That poor little devil" sat in an open wagonette which was passing down from the moor to the town. His drab convict dress and certain distinguishing marks showed him to be a man whose time had nearly expired, so that Goldring might have spared his sympathy.

He was a merry little fellow, with a bullet head and a bright eye, and he jingled his manacled hands as he hummed a song under the disapproving eye of the warder who sat on the opposite seat.

As he passed Goldring he turned his head and called:

"Catch him, Boss! Don't let him go!"

The warder snarled something and the little man relapsed into silence.

"Going to Wormwood Scrubs for discharge," said Goldring's companion, with a professional glance at the prisoner; "they always get fresh the last week or so."

A motor-car came streaking down the road from the moor and pulled up with a jerk by Goldring's side.

"We've located him, sir," said the occupant, a "P.V." man. "We've found the cycle and the convict clothes in Hiding Wood, and the warders are beating it."

Goldring rubbed his hands.

"I'll send a wire to the Chief," he said, and walked back to the station.

He had dispatched his telegram from the tiny office, and had returned to the platform, when the London train drew in, and he stood watching idly.

He saw the diminutive convict (he was well under five feet and so thin that he looked no more than a boy) hustled into a third-class carriage, and saw the blinds pulled down. Then, as the train drew slowly out and the carriage with the convict came abreast, the blind was flung up, the window fell and the little prisoner poked out his head, resting his handcuffed fists on the window edge.

"Don't you look for that lad in Hiding Wood, Mister Busy-fellow!* He went up in one of them Zepp'lins. He's—"

[* "Busy-fellow"—"Detective" in thieves argot.—E. W.]

At this point a uniformed sleeve crossed the man's chest and he was flung backward, the blind was pulled down and the train sped on.

The stationmaster, a witness of the occurrence, smiled at Goldring.

"That fellow is a bad lot," he said; "the warder told me that he was one of the people who had assisted this convict you are looking for, to escape. Name of Jerry Carter."

"The warder had no right to tell you anything," snapped Goldring.

He had more reason for shortness of temper an hour later, when Hiding Wood drew blank.

Throughout the day the search went on and was continued on the morrow and the next day, but without result.

At the end of a week Goldring returned to London a very sick man, and sought Sir George.

What happened at that interview has never been revealed, but if he went into the Minister's room sick, he emerged, figuratively speaking, a chronic invalid.

He saw Bland at his office, and after the fashion of men in disgrace was prepared to accept sympathy even from his most implacable enemy.

"Come to me this day week," said Bland, "and I may be able to tell you something. But you must give me your word that what I tell you doesn't go any further. Otherwise you shall know nothing."

Curiosity and pique induced the promise, and took him to the appointment.

Bland was sitting in his big arm-chair smoking a comfortable ciga.

"Sit down, Goldring," he invited cheerfully; "have a cigar—you'll find them in the silver box."

He leant over and pushed a bell, and after a short delay the door opened and a man came in.

Goldring sprang to. his feet with an exclamation of surprise, for the newcomer was the little convict he had seen leaving Stanmoor Station.

"One of us," introduced Bland largely, waving his hand. "Mr. Martin Caxton of the Intelligence."

"How do you do?" said the little man, offering his hand. "I'm afraid I was awfully impertinent to you the other day."

"But what—what?" stammered Goldring.

"I'll explain," said Bland. "Oh, by the way, Barnes has arrived safely in the United States, you'll be sorry to learn. I won't tell you how he actually got away from the gaol or give you the names of the people who helped. Getting away from the prison was child's play. It was leaving the moor that was the difficulty. I knew that every kind of person who attempted to reach the town would be stopped and examined—every kind of person save one."

"And which was the one?" asked Goldring curiously.

"A handcuffed convict," said Bland. "Martin Caxton was the convict —he was waiting in Hiding Wood for two days."

"Letting my horrible whiskers grow," said the little man complacently.

"But Barnes?" asked Goldring. Bland blew a ring of smoke and watched it dissolve.

"Barnes was the warder," he said.

2. FINDINGS ARE KEEPINGS

Findings are keepings. That was a favorite saying of Laurie Whittaker—a slogan of Stinie Whittaker (who had other names), her father.

Laurie and a youthful messenger of the Eastern Telegraph Company arrived simultaneously on the doorstep of 704 Coram Street, Bloomsbury, and their arrival was coincident with the absence, in the little courtyard at the back of the house, of the one domestic servant on duty in that boarding-house. So that, while the electric bell tinkled in the kitchen, the overworked domestic was hanging up dishcloths in the backyard.

"I'm afraid there's nobody in," said Laurie, flashing a bright smile at the youth, and then saw the cablegram in his hand. "It's for Captain John Harrowby, isn't it?" she asked. "I'll give it to him."

And the boy, who was new to his job, delivered the envelope and accepted her signature in his book, without a very close regard to the regulations of the Cable Company.

Laurie slipped the envelope in her bag and pressed the bell again. This time the servant heard the signal and came, wiping her hands on her apron, to open the door.

"No, miss, Captain Harrowby's out," she said, recognizing the visitor, and giving her the deference and respect which were due to one who lived in the grandest house in Bedford Square. "He's gone up to the city. Will you step in and wait, miss?"

If Laurie felt annoyed, she did not advertise the fact. She gave her sweetest smile to the servant, nodded pleasantly to the pretty girl who came up the steps as she went down, and, re-entering her limousine, was driven away.

"Who is the lady, Matilda?" asked the newcomer.

"Her?" said the girl-of-all-work. "That's Miss Whittaker—a friend of Mr. Harrowby's. Surely he's told you about her, Miss Bancroft?"

Elsie Bancroft laughed.

"Mr. Harrowby and I are not on such terms that he discusses his friends with me, Matilda," she said, and mounted to her tiny room on the top floor, to turn over again more vital and pressing problems than Captain Harrowby's friendship.

She was a stenographer in a lawyer's office, and if her stipend was not generous it was fair, and might have been sufficient if she were not the mother of a family—in a figurative sense. There was a small brother at school in Broadstairs, and a smaller sister at a preparatory school at Ramsgate, and the money which had been left by their father barely covered the fees of one.

Two letters were propped on her mantelpiece, and she recognized their character with a quaking heart. She stood for a long time surveying them with big, grave eyes before, with a sigh, she took them down and listlessly tore them open. She skimmed the contents with a little grimace, and, lifting her typewriter from the floor, put it on to the table, unlocked a drawer, and, taking out a wad of paper written in a crabbed handwriting, began to type. She had got away from the office early to finish the spare-time work which often helped to pay the rent.

She had been typing a quarter of an hour when there was a gentle tap at the door, and, in answer to her invitation, a man came a few inches into the room—a slim, brown-faced man of thirty, good-looking, with that far-away expression in his eyes which comes to men who have passed their lives in wide spaces.

"How are you getting on?" he asked, almost apologetically.

"I've done about ten pages since last night," she said. "I'm rather slow, but—" She made a little grimace.

"My handwriting is dreadful, isn't it?" he said, almost humbly.

"It is rather," she answered, and they both laughed. "I wish I could do it faster," she said. "It is as interesting as a novel."

He scratched his chin.

"I suppose it is, in a way," he said cautiously, and then, with sudden embarrassment, "But it's perfectly true."

"Of course it's true," she scoffed. "Nobody could read this report and think it wasn't true! What are you going to do with the manuscript when you have finished it?"

He looked round the room aimlessly, before his eyes returned to the pretty face that showed above the machine.

"I don't know," he said vaguely. "It might go into a magazine. I've written it out for my own satisfaction, and because it makes what seems a stupid folly

look intelligent and excusable. Besides which, I am hoping to sell the property, and this account may induce some foolish person to buy a parcel of swamp and jungle—though I'd feel as though I were swindling a buyer!"

She had pushed the typewritten sheets towards him, and he picked up the first and read:

"A Report on the Alluvial Goldfields of Quimbo,"

and, reading it, he sighed.

"Yes, the gold is there all right," he said mournfully, "though I've never been able to find it. I've got a concession of a hundred square miles—it's worth less than a hundred shillings. There isn't a railway within five hundred miles; the roads are impossible; and even if there was gold there, I don't know that I should be able to get it away. Anyway, no gold has been found. I have a partner still pottering away out there: I shall probably have his death on my conscience sooner or later."

"Are you going back to Africa?" she asked curiously.

He shook his head.

"I don't think so." He hesitated. "My—my friends think I should settle down in England. I've made a little money by trading. Possibly I'll buy a farm and raise ducks."

She laughed softly.

"You won't be able to write a story about that," she said, and then, remembering, "Did the maid tell you that Miss Whittaker had called?"

She saw his start, and the color deepen in the tanned face.

"Oh, did she?" he asked awkwardly. "Really? No, the girl told me nothing." And in another minute he was running down the stairs. She did not know whether to be angry or amused at this sudden termination of their talk.

Captain Harrowby had been an inmate of the boarding-house for three weeks, and she had gladly accepted the offer, that came through her landlady, to type what she thought was the story he had written. The "story" proved to be no more, at first glance, than a prosaic report upon an African property of his, which, he told her, he was trying to sell.

Who was Miss Whittaker? She frowned as she asked herself the question, though she had no reason for personal interest in the smiling girl she had

met at the door. She decided that she did not like this smart young lady, with her shingled hair and her ready smile. She knew that Captain Harrowby spent a great deal of his time at the Whittakers' house, but she had no idea that there was anything remarkable in that, until the next day, when she was taking her lunch at the office, she asked old Kilby, who knew the secret history of London better than most process- servers.

"Whittaker?" the old man chuckled. "Oh, I know Stinie Whittaker all right! He runs a gambling hell in Bloomsbury somewhere. He was convicted about ten years ago for the same offense. I served a couple of writs on him years and years ago. He's more prosperous now."

"But surely Miss Whittaker doesn't know?" said the shocked girl. "She's—she's the friend of a—a friend of mine."

Old Kilby laughed uproariously.

"Laurie? Why, Laurie's brought more men to the old man's table than anybody else! Know? Sure she does! Why, she spends all summer going voyages in order to pick up likely birds for Stinie to kill!"

The news filled the girl with uneasiness, though she found it difficult to explain her interest in the lonely man who occupied the room beneath her. Should she warn him? At the mere suggestion she was in a panic. She had quite enough trouble of her own, she told herself (and here she spoke only the truth). And was it likely that a man of his experience would be caught by card-sharps? For six days she turned the matter over in her mind and came to a decision.

On the evening she reached this, John Harrowby dressed himself with great care, took a roll of notes from his locked cash-box, and, after contemplating them thoughtfully, thrust them into his pocket. His situation was a serious one; more serious than he would admit to himself. Laurie had cautioned him against playing for high stakes, but she had not cautioned him against Bobby Salter, the well-dressed young man-about-town, whom he had met first in the Bedford Square drawing-room. Bobby had told him stories of fortunes made and lost at cards, and even initiated him into a "system" which he himself had tested, and had been at his elbow whenever he sat at the table, to urge him to a course of play which had invariably proved disastrous.

John Harrowby was without guile. He no more thought of suspecting the immaculate Bobby than he thought of suspecting Laurie herself. But tonight he would play without the assistance of his mentor, he thought, and drew a deep breath as he patted his pocket and felt the bulge of the notes.

He threw a light coat over his arm, and, turning off the light, stepped out on to the landing, to stare in amazement at a girl who was waiting patiently, her back to the banisters, as she had been waiting for ten minutes.

"I wanted to see you before you went, Captain Harrowby," said Elsie, with a quickly beating heart.

"Anything wrong with the manuscript?" he asked in surprise.

She shook her head.

"No, it isn't that, only—only I'm wondering whether—"

Words failed her for a second.

He was palpably amazed at her agitation, and could find no reason for it.

"Oh, Lord," he said, remembering suddenly. "I haven't paid you!"

"No, no, no, it isn't that." She pushed his hand from his pocket. "Of course it isn't that, Captain Harrowby! It's something—well... I know you'll think I'm horribly impertinent, but do you think you ought to play cards for money?" she asked breathlessly.

He stared at her open-mouthed.

"I don't quite know what you mean," he said slowly.

"Haven't you lost... a lot of money at Mr. Whittaker's house?" She had to force the words out.

The look in his face changed. From amazement, she saw his eyes narrow, and then, to her unspeakable relief, he smiled.

"I have lost quite a sum," he said gently. "But I don't think you—"

"You don't think that's any business of mine? And neither is it," she said, speaking rapidly. "But I wanted to tell you that Mr. Whittaker ... is a well-known—"

Here she had to stop. She could not say the man was a cheat or a thief; she knew no more than old Kilby had hinted.

"I mean, he has always had... play at his house," she faltered. "And you're new to this country, and you don't know people as—as we know them."

This time he laughed.

"You're talking as though you were in the detective service, Miss Bancroft," he said, and then suddenly laid his hand on her shoulder. "I quite understand that you are trying to do me a good turn. In my heart of hearts I believe you're right. But, unfortunately, I have lost too much to stop now—how you knew that I'd lost anything, I can't guess."

She nodded, and, without another word, turned abruptly away and ran up the stairs to her own room, angry with herself, angry with him, but, more than anything else, astounded at her own action.

No less puzzled and troubled was John Harrowby as he walked into Bedford Square.

Elsie had some work to do; but somehow she could not keep her mind fixed upon her task, and, after spoiling three sheets of paper, gave up the attempt and, sitting back in her chair, let her mind rove at will.

At half-past nine the maid brought her up a cup of tea.

"That Miss Whittaker's just gone, miss," she announced.

Elsie frowned.

"Miss Whittaker? Has she been here?"

"Yes, miss; she come about a quarter of an hour ago and went up to Captain Harrowby's room. That's what puzzles me."

Elsie stared at her, open-mouthed.

"Why on earth did she go there?" she demanded.

Matilda shook her head.

"Blest if I can tell, miss. She didn't know that I was watching her—she sent me down to the kitchen to make a cup of tea for her, which was only a dodge of hers, and if I hadn't come back to ask her whether she took sugar, I wouldn't 'a' known she'd been out of the droring- room. I see her coming out of Captain Harrowby's room as I was standing in the hall. You can just see the door through the banisters."

Elsie rose, and went downstairs. Harrowby's door was ajar. She switched on the light. What she expected to find, she did not know. There was no sign of disorder. Possibly, she thought, and she found herself sneering, it was a visit of devotion by a love-stricken lady; but there was a cupboard door ajar, and half in and half out the cupboard, a japanned box that was open. She

took up the box. It was empty. She put the box back in the cupboard and went thoughtfully out on to the landing.

"I think I'll go and see Captain Harrowby," she said, obeying a sudden impulse, and, a few minutes later, she was walking through the rain to Bedford Square.

She was within a dozen paces of the door of Mr. Whittaker's house when a cab drew up, and she saw Laurie Whittaker alight, pay the cabman and, running up the step, open the door of the house. Where had she been in the meantime? wondered Elsie. But there was no mystery here. It had begun to rain heavily as Laurie left the house in Coram Street, and she had sheltered in a doorway until a providential taxi came along.

Possibly it was the rain that damped the enthusiasm of the amateur detective; for now, with the Whittaker house only a few paces away, she hesitated. And the longer she waited, the wetter she became. The taxi-man who had brought Laurie lingered hopefully.

"Taxi, miss?" he asked, and Elsie, feeling a fool, nodded and climbed into the cab, glad to escape for a second from the downpour, and hating herself for her extravagance.

The cab had turned when her hand touched something on the seat. A woman's vanity-bag—

"Findings are keepings," according to the proverb, though there is an offense in law which is known as "stealing by finding."

Elsie Bancroft knew little of criminal law, but she was possessed of an inelastic conscience, so that when her hand touched the bag in the darkness, her first impulse was to tap at the window of the taxi-cab and draw the attention of the driver to her find. And then, for some reason, she checked the impulse. It was a fat bag, and the flap was open. Her ungloved fingers stole absently into its interior, and she knew that she was touching real money in large quantities.

During the war she had worked in a bank, and the feel of banknotes was familiar. Mechanically, she slipped their edge between her nimble fingers. One... two... three... she went on, until....

"Eighty-four!"

They might be five-pound notes—four hundred and twenty pounds. She felt momentarily giddy. Four hundred and twenty pounds! Sufficient to pay the

children's school fees—she had had an urgent, if dignified, request from the principal of Tom's boarding-school and a no less pointed hint from Joan's—sufficient to settle the problem of the holidays; but—

She heaved a deep sigh and looked through the rain-blurred windows. She was painfully near to her destination, and she had to make her decision. It came as a shock to her that any decision had to be made; her course of duty was plain. It was to take the number of the cab, hand the bag to the driver, and report her discovery to the nearest police station.

There was nothing else to be done, no alternative line of action for an honest citizen....

The cab stopped with a jerk and, twisting himself in his seat, the driver yanked open the door.

Harrowby blinked twice at the retiring rake. A mahogany rake with a well-worn handle, and with an underlip of brass so truly set that even the flimsiest of banknotes could hardly escape its fine bevel. And there were banknotes aplenty on the croupier's side of that rake. They showed ends and corners and ordered edges, notes clean and unclean, but all having a certain interest to Harrowby, because, ten minutes, or maybe ten seconds before, they had been his, and were now the property of the man who wore his evening suit so awkwardly and sucked at a dead cigar.

John Harrowby put his hand in his pocket; as an action it was sheerly mechanical. His pocket, he knew, was a rifled treasury, but he felt he must make sure.

Then came Salter, plump, philosophical, and sympathetic. Salter could afford both his sympathy and philosophy; the house gave him a ten per cent commission on all the easy money he touted, so that even his plumpness was well inside his means.

"Well, how did you do?"

Harrowby's smile was of the slow dawning kind, starting at the corner of his eyes and ending with the expanse of a line of white teeth.

"I lost."

Salter made a noise, indicative of his annoyance.

"How much?" he asked anxiously.

He gave the impression that if the loss could be replaced from his pocket, it would be a loss no longer. And Stinie, he of the awkwardly worn dinner-jacket, sometimes minimized a client's losses and based his commission note on his pessimistic estimate.

"About two thousand pounds," said Harrowby.

"Two thousand pounds," said Salter thoughtfully.

He would be able to buy the car that he had refused in the afternoon. He felt pleased.

"Tough luck, old man—try another day."

"Yes," dryly.

Harrowby looked across to the table. The bank was still winning. Somebody said "Banco!" in a sharp, strained voice. There was a pause, a low consultation between the croupier and the banker, and a voice, so expressionless and unemotional that Harrowby knew it was the croupier's, said "I give."

And the bank won again.

Harrowby snuffled as though he found a difficulty in breathing.

He walked slowly down the stairs and paused for a second outside the white-and-gold door of the drawing-room, where he knew Laurie would be sitting. A moment's hesitation, then he turned the handle and went in. She was cuddled up in the corner of a big settee, a cigarette between her red lips, a book on her lap. She looked round, and for a second searched his face with her hard, appraising eyes. She was a year or two older than he ... he had thought her divine when he came back from Central Africa, where he had spent five bitter years, a trader's half-breed wife and an occasional missionary woman, shrivelled and yellow with heat and fever, the only glimpses he had of womankind.

But now he saw her without the rosy spectacles which he had worn.

"Have you been playing?" she asked coolly.

He nodded.

"And lost?"

He nodded again.

"Really, father is too bad," she drawled. "I wish he wouldn't allow this high play in the house. I hope you're not badly hurt?"

"I've lost everything," he said.

For a second her eyebrows lifted.

"Really?" It was a polite, impersonal interest she showed, no more. "That's too bad."

She swung her feet to the floor, straightened her dress, and threw away her cigarette.

"Then we shall not be seeing a great deal of you in the future, Captain Meredith?"

"I'm afraid not," he said steadily.

Was this the girl he had known, who had come aboard at Madeira, who had made the five days' voyage from Funchal to Southampton pass in a flash? And now he must go back to scrape the earth, to trek into the impenetrable jungle, seeking the competence which he had thought was his.

"I think you are damnable!" he said.

For a second her brows met, then she laughed.

"My dear man, you're a fool," she said calmly. "I certainly invited you to come to the house, but I never asked you to gamble. And really, John, I thought you would take your medicine like a little gentleman."

His heart was thumping painfully. Between the chagrined man whose vanity has been hurt, and the clean anger of one who all his life had detested meanness and trickery, he was in a fair way to making a fool of himself.

"I'm sorry," he said in a low voice, and was walking out of the room when she called him by name.

"I hate to part like this." Her voice was soft, had the old cooing caress in it. "You'll think I'm horrid, John, but really I did my best to persuade you not to play."

He licked his dry lips and said nothing.

"Don't let us part bad friends." She held out her hand, and he took it automatically. "I thought we were going to have such a happy time together," she went on, her pathetic eyes on his. "Can't I lend you some money?"

He shook his head.

"I'm sure the luck would turn if you gave it a chance. Couldn't you sell something?"

The cool audacity of the suggestion took his breath away.

"Sell? What have I to sell?" he demanded harshly. "Souls and bodies are no longer negotiable, even if there was a twentieth-century Mephistopheles waiting round the corner to negotiate the deal!"

She toyed with the fringe of a cushion.

"You could sell your mine," she said, and his laugh sounded loud and discordant in the quietness of that daintily furnished room.

"That's worth twopence-ha'penny! It is a cemetery—a cemetery of hope and labor. It is the real white man's grave, and I am the white man."

She brought her eyes back to his.

"As you won't borrow money from me, I'll buy it for a thousand pounds."

Again he shook his head.

"No, I'm afraid there's nothing to be done," he said, "except to wish you good-night."

As he turned, she slipped between him and the door.

"I won't let you go like that, John," she said. "Won't you forgive me?"

"I've already forgiven you, if there's anything to forgive," he said.

"Sit down and write me a letter saying you forgive me. I want to have that tangible proof," she pleaded.

He was impatient to be gone, and the foolery of the suggestion grated on him.

"Then I'll write it," she said, sat down at the little escritoire and scribbled a dozen words. "Now sign that."

He would have gone, but she clutched him by the sleeve.

"Do, please—please!"

He took the pen and scrawled his name, without reading the note, which was half concealed by her hand. Looking through her open fingers, he saw the words "Quimbo Concession."

"What's that?" he said sharply, but she snatched the letter away.

"Give me that paper!" he demanded sternly, reaching out for it, but in another second an automatic pistol had appeared in her hand.

"Go whilst the going's good, Harrowby," she said steadily.

But she had not reckoned on this particular type of man. Suddenly his hand shot out and gripped her wrist, pinning it to the table. In another second he had snatched the letter and flung it into the little fire that blazed on the hearth. He held her at bay till the last scrap of blue paper had turned to black ashes, and then, with a little smile and a nod, he went out of the room into the street and the pelting rain.

He was wet through as he opened the door of No. 704 Coram Street. Matilda, half-way up the stairs, turned with her startling news. He listened and frowned.

"Miss Whittaker been here?" he said incredulously.

"Yes, sir... and Miss Bancroft went to tell you all about it. Didn't you see her?"

He shook his head.

What had Laurie Whittaker wanted? he asked himself, as he went up the stairs to his room. The girl must have been mistaken.

He took one glance at the open cupboard, and then the truth leapt at him, and, snatching at the box, he put it on the table and threw open the lid. There had been a square sheet of parchment in a broad envelope, and on that parchment was inscribed his title to the Quimbo Concession. It was gone.

He turned with an oath. A girl was standing watching him with grave eyes.

"Is this what you're looking for?" she asked.

Her face was very pale. She held out the envelope, and he took it from her hand.

"Where did this come from?" he said, in amazement.

"I stole it," she answered simply; "and I think this is yours."

He took the envelope from her hand with a frown, extracted a cable form and read. It was from his partner.

"Gold found in large quantities near Crocodile Creek. Congratulations."

"How did you get this?" he gasped.

She held out a little French vanity-bag, and he recognized it instantly.

"I found it in a cab; Miss Whittaker left it there," she said. "There is also four hundred and twenty pounds which belongs to her."

"Which belong to us," said John Harrowby firmly. "Findings are keepings in this case, my child. She found me and kept most of my money—I've got fifty pounds left at the bank—and I think we're entitled to this little salvage from the wreck."

And then he kissed her, and it seemed such a natural thing to do, that she offered no protest.

3. THE JEWEL BOX

There were very few moments when Alys Southey could find sufficient placidity of mind to interest herself in the news of the day.

Fragmentary scraps of gossip came to her in the hurried luncheon hour, when girls, between their semi-confidential narratives of what "he said" and what "she" had replied, spoke of the world outside their own large universe. And she knew in a dim way that the houses of the great had been robbed, that the Duchess of Monfort had lost her family emeralds, and that William Sollette, the rich American, had lost a pearl necklace of fabulous value; she even knew that a society man, Henry Melville, had been arrested as a result of a detective having found Mrs. Callagan's diamond sunburst in his overcoat pocket.

Her drama was nearer at hand, and the complications of society were as nothing compared with the complex of her domestic situation. She possessed a stepfather and a stepmother. The stepfather had been tolerable during the lifetime of her mother, but when he had married again, and had imposed a new relationship upon her, the outlook became blacker and more hopeless than ever it had been. To leave the house was a simple solution—so simple that it was freely tendered by the few who knew the circumstances; but there was Olga, her sister, and Olga was fourteen, easily scared, terrified of being left to the mercy of her new mother, and Alys barely earned sufficient to keep one. So Alys stayed; and staying, prayed for a miracle.

"And it may happen," said Olga wisely. "Perhaps Pots will get tired of us and give you the money to keep me." (Her stepfather's name was Potter.) "Or you may have a lot of money, Alys darling."

"Brown and Helder never pay more than thirty shillings a week, even for their best assistants," sighed Alys wearily, "and I'm not their best assistant!"

The child's forehead puckered in a frown.

"Perhaps that handsome man who buys gloves every day—" she began, but Alys stopped her.

"01ga, don't be a goop!" she said, with a little smile. "Fairy princes avoid Oxford Street."

"I saw him yesterday," said Olga, after a moment's thought. "He was talking to the milkman—"

Alys stared at her.

"You saw him!—my darling, you don't know him. And is he likely to come to Kilburn? I don't suppose he knows the place."

But the child was emphatic.

"I know it was him—he," she insisted. "You've described him so that I'm sure I recognized him. And he had a beautiful big car waiting at the end of the street. I'm sure he was making inquiries about you."

Alys gasped.

"You shall have no more detective stories from the library," she warned. "You're dreaming."

The mysterious and good-looking stranger who had piqued the curiosity of the staff by buying a new pair of gloves every day had become almost part of her daily life. Sometimes he amused, sometimes irritated her. She had woven many stories about him, but never once did she associate him with romance, for romance played no part in her day-dreams.

It was at ten that night that the bolt she had feared was launched.

Mr. Potter, a stout, bald man, entirely dominated by his shrewish young wife, cleared his throat before he spoke.

"Alys, don't you think yon could get a better job?... It is a great expense to me, keeping two big girls like you and Olga... you ought to be able to support your sister... When I was your age—"

He rambled off into reminiscences, but his wife brought him up with a jerk.

"I'm tired of people asking me if I'm your sister, and if Mr. Potter is my father. It makes things so very, very awkward, my dear. It sort of—well, it emphasizes the May and December-ness of my marriage, and I'm getting fed up!"

"But I can't possibly earn enough to keep us," protested Alys. "If father would give me an allowance—"

Mrs. Potter bridled.

"An allowance! If he would give me an allowance, I should be glad! What nonsense! Of course you could earn enough—or you could marry. Young Phillips has asked you, and his father is well off."

"Mr. Phillips is out of the question," said Alys, rising. "Just give me a day or so to think it over."

It was lightly said, but not a day or two, or even a year or two, could solve her problem, thought Alys, as she went up the stairs with a heavy heart.

Yet, in twenty-four hours, the solution came...

The girl at the glove counter recognized the tall young man who was moving slowly through the store in her direction, and hardened her pretty face into a frown.

Any other girl in the store would have been flattered by the marked and, so far, respectful attention of this man about town.

Some of them knew his name—knew, through the porters' department, that he occupied one of the best suites at the Ritz-Carlton; knew that he used, even if he did not own, two speedy cars—a very desirable friend for a shop-girl scornful of the conventions and immensely satisfied that she could look after herself."

His name was Stenton. He was, according to reliable accounts, a rich man, and he had come on successive days to the Universal Store, had walked straight to the glove counter, and had bought one pair of reindeer gloves, size eight.

Alys Southey, watching his approach, recalled none of his desirable qualities. She only knew that for weeks she had been the target for dubious witticisms addressed to her by her fellow-workers; that she had been jollied and ragged at every meal! that she had gone red and white under crude raillery; and that this young man was the conscious or unconscious cause of it all.

He walked up to the counter, settled his gold-headed cane against a chair, and slowly stripped his gloves. Alys waited, neither embarrassed nor unhappy in the consciousness that a dozen pairs of eyes watched the meeting; her own private embarrassment was so much more real.

"I want a pair of reindeer gloves, size eight," he drawled.

He was something more than ordinarily good-looking. There was a strength and a character in the mouth and jaw, a grave knowledge in the gray eyes that looked at her, a hint of purpose in his every action which did not accord with the mess-room's conception.

"Size eight—brown or gray!" asked the girl mechanically.

"Gray—you're having a pretty bad time at home."

There was no pause between the words, and for a second the girl did not comprehend his meaning. She had half opened a drawer when she realized that he had put into words the disquiet of her own mind.

"Why " she began. "You mustn't—you haven't any right—"

He could admire dispassionately the characteristic beauty of the girl, the slim line of her figure, the regularity of feature, the curve of lip and chin, the dusky blue of eyes now opened wide in pained astonishment.

"Life is becoming insupportable at home," he said, examining the gloves and continuing in an even, conversational tone. "There's a way out."

She faced him, calm and outwardly self-possessed.

"Not for me," she said quietly. "I am afraid you do not understand—I suppose you mean no great insult to me, but it is not fair for a man of your position—oh, I think you are horrible!" she burst out, and he saw the quick rise and fall of her bosom and heard the indignant tears in her voice.

"There is a way out," he repeated, "for you and for me. I've been watching you for weeks—I've had you photographed from every angle—an impertinence which you must forgive. And I want your services. I will give you two thousand pounds, and I will ask nothing that a good woman cannot give."

She stared at him, bewildered.

"But—but I don't know you—I've never met you before you came here—I've not spoken to you until today—it is absurd to pretend you love me—"

"I don't," he said.

He was turning over the gloves that lay in the drawer she had put before him, and he seemed to the watchers behind the ribbon counter to be wholly absorbed in his inspection.

"0h no, I don't love you, and I don't expect you to love me. I like you as a man might like a Botticelli statuette or a Corot landscape or da Vinci's portrait of Beatrice d'Este. One does not love those things, unless one is quite crazy, any more than one loves a woman for the satisfaction she brings to the eye. One can only love minds and characters and the intangibility which is called Soul—and I am not only ignorant of these factors in your make-up, but I am sincerely incurious."

She listened, dumbfounded, perhaps a little piqued, since she was human. He made his selection, and she wrapped his purchase and scribbled his bill automatically.

"I am not coming here again," he said as he took the pa<2ket and the bill. "I repeat that I want you to undertake a piece of delicate work on my behalf, and I will pay you two thousand pounds for your services."

Mr. Cyrus Stenton raised his glossy hat, and turned and walked to the cashier's desk.

Alys looked after him; then a glimpse of something white on the counter brought her eyes down. It was a visiting card, and underneath the name was written:

"My 'phone number is Regent 1764, Extension 9. Meet me at 7 o'clock at Fozolli's restaurant. Private Room No. 4."

For the remainder of the day Alys moved like one in a dream. It was so fantastical, so unreal, so like all the stories she had ever read. All her reason told her that men did not offer girls £2000 for any service that they could honestly perform, and yet her instinct told her that there was no danger from this tall, good-looking stranger.

It was early closing day, and she left the store soon after two o'clock and made her way home. Olga was at school—at the cheap little school which Mr. Potter had chosen for her.

£2000! What would it mean to Olga? An end to this life of fret and strain, a good school for Olga, and an opportunity for herself to take up the Art course she longed for.

Again the doubt came to her mind with overwhelming force. Why should a man pay her £2000 for a simple duty which any girl might perform? But was it?

Throughout that afternoon, in the privacy of her little attic bedroom, she wrestled with this grotesque problem. At half-past six she was hovering in the region of Fozolli's, with neither the courage to take the bold step or to withdraw. Seven o 'clock struck, and, summoning all her courage, she crossed the road quickly and passed into the broad vestibule of the famous restaurant. The liveried attendant seemed to be expecting her.

"You're come for Mr. Stenton?" he said.

"Yes," she answered breathlessly. "I—I want to speak to him."

She knew how feeble was the reply, and hated herself for the weakness she was showing. Before she could order her thoughts, the elevator had taken her up two floors, and she was conducted along a broad, heavily carpeted corridor. The attendant stopped before a rosewood door and tapped gently; then, as a voice bade him come in, he opened the door and, stepping aside to allow her to pass, closed it behind the girl.

She was in a room quietly but luxuriously furnished. A table was laid for two, and, most grateful sight of all, a woman of middle age in the uniform of a serving-maid was standing near a second door. Mr. Stenton was in evening dress, and was even better-looking than she had imagined. She was sufficiently human to notice this fact before he came toward her.

"This is indeed very good of you. Miss Southey," he said, taking her hand for a moment. "You would like to take your coat off? Mary, will you please attend to Miss Southey?"

Scarcely knowing what she did, Alys followed the woman into the second room. It was a dressing-room, for on the settee was spread a beautiful gown. The table held a variety of articles, including a diamond and platinum chain, a double row of pearls, and an open case in which glittered a beautiful bar brooch.

She looked around for the owner, and Mary, the maid, smiled as if she guessed the girl's thoughts, which, however, Alys did not put into [words.

She returned to the man, and found him, his hands clasped behind him, looking out of the window, evidently absorbed in his thoughts, for he started when she spoke to him. Throughout the meal no reference was made to the object of her visit or to the £2000. It was not until the maid had withdrawn that he came directly to the subject.

"Miss Southey," he said, "I am going to asK you to do something for me which you may well hesitate to agree to, since behind a very simple service you may imagine there lurk all manner of sinister meanings. I must start right off by telling you that my name is not Stenton—though I am not prepared at the moment to tell you what it really is. How late can you remain out tonight?"

She looked at him quickly, suspiciously.

"Until midnight," she said, "or even till later. There is a dance at the Art School, and I had half made up my mind to go."

"An Art student?" He raised his eyebrows. "Really I I was hoping that you had some such interest. You are not a typical shop lady," he smiled.

"There isn't such a thing as a typical shop girl," she replied quietly. "There are typical girls and typical men, and the fact that they are engaged in one or another profession or business doesn't alter the type."

He seemed surprised at her answer, and looked at her again a little oddly. And then he put his hand in the pocket of his evening coat and took out a flat leather case. This he opened. She did not look at him during the process, but it required all her control to keep her eyes averted. She heard the rustle of banknotes, and his hand came across the table.

"Here are ten notes for a hundred pounds^ each," he said. "I will give you this in advance as an earnest of my sincerity. The other thousand you will receive when your work is completed."

"How long will it take!" she asked.

"It may take a week—a month. It may be finished tonight. I hope it will be finished tonight," he said gravely. And then: * * I may want you tomorrow. What will happen supposing you do not go back to the store!"

"I shall get the sack," she said, with a faint smile, * * and I shall forfeit exactly sixteen shillings of my pay."

"I think that can be remedied." His voice was grave. He was considering this little problem of hers as profoundly as though it were the fate of an empire. "That, of course, can be remedied, and the sixteen shillings can be made good."

She laughed aloud.

"I don't know that the sixteen shillings matters much in relation to a thousand pounds," she said, looking down at the notes, yet afraid to touch them. "Mr. Stenton, what am I to do? You know so much about me that you may be able to advise; and though my child-like faith may sound absurd, I am almost willing to abide by the advice you give. Should I do this work? Is it work that you would ask anybody who was related to you, or whom you were"—she flushed—"fond of, to perform?"

He considered a moment, then nodded.

"Yes, it is. If you were my sister, I should ask you to help me in the same way," he said quietly.

She took the money up, folded the notes, and put them into her bag.

"Now tell me what I must do," she said, almost briskly.

He looked at her for a long time before he spoke.

"In the next room there are some clothes. I haven't attended to all the details, but Mary, who was in my mother's employ, has, I think, procured all the necessary articles and will assist you to dress."

"Me?" she said in amazement. "You want me to wear that wonderful dress?"

He nodded.

"And the pearls? Oh no!"

"I want you to dress exactly as Mary suggests to you, because Mary knows."

"And then?"

She looked at him, her lips parted in amazement, her eyes bright with eagerness, for now the spirit of the adventure was upon her.

"And then I propose taking you to a party. You will be there for exactly half an hour, possibly three-quarters of an hour—not longer, I should imagine. You will speak to nobody unless it is absolutely necessary, and I will give you a partner who will save you from that embarrassment. At the end of three-quarters of an hour you will come away; but during the time I imagine you will learn something."

He got up from the table and, going to a sideboard, pulled open a drawer and took out a black portfolio. This he opened, extracting what was evidently a page from an illustrated weekly. It was obviously a portrait—she saw that at a distance—and it had been cut carefully round, so that the inscription below did not appear. Without a word he handed her the picture, and she stared and gasped. She was looking upon her own portrait.

"But—but—I don't understand," she said, bewildered. "You said you had had me photographed, but not in those clothes... they are not mine... I have never worn them."

The picture that looked up to her was singularly beautiful—she had to admit that, in spite of the likeness to herself. About the fair throat were row upon row of pearls; a big diamond butterfly caught up the dress at the shoulder; and the hand that was held to the face was encrusted with rings.

"Little too many, don't you think?" said Mr. Stenton. "But that is the fashion nowadays."

She turned the page over, and saw it was from the Bystander.

"This is not me," she said, "but the likeness is perfect."

He smiled slowly.

"Now don't ask any more questions. That is the one promise I want to extract from you, that you will not ask me, at inconvenient moments, any question which I might be embarrassed to answer. You will carry out all my instructions to the letter. You will not interfere in any scene which you may witness, however remarkable and sinister it may seem to you. Do you promise?"

She nodded. Looking at his watch, he stood up.

"I think we will go," he said, with a smile. "I don't know how long it takes a lady to dress, but I am going to give you twenty minutes."

It was half an hour before she came out of the room, and at the sight of her he was stricken dumb. She flushed red at the admiration in his eyes, and for a second felt foolish.

"Wonderful!" he breathed. "Wonderful!"

The night had fallen when they came through the vestibule, a great green chiffon cloak about her shoulders. At the door was a big Rolls, and a footman was standing with the open door in his hand. Blindly, dumbly, she stepped in, still in a dream. She felt ridiculously like Cinderella, and expected to wake up any moment in the garret bedroom. These things did not happen in real life, she told herself again and again as the car sped through the crowded West End and went swiftly down Piccadilly. They only happened in story-books. She was dreaming.

Where was the party to be? They had passed Hammersmith and were crossing the bridge, when she asked the question.

"It is in the country," he said. "We have an hour and a half's drive, though we are not due for another two hours."

Through Barnes and Kingston, past San-down, into Cobham. She recognized the places up to there; beyond that, she was in a strange land. The bright headlamps of the car illuminated the road, and she sat, staring through the window, wondering... wondering.

They had been an hour on the journey when the car slowed and stopped. There was no house in sight, and, looking out, she saw the boles of trees on either side. They had come to a forest road, and for a moment her courage failed her.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"Now please don't be alarmed. I want you to step out, because the car is going to make a rather uncomfortable journey into the shelter of the trees," he said kindly. "You must trust me. Miss Southey."

Trembling, she stepped down upon the hard road, and he wrapped the cloak around her.

They stood watching whilst the chauffeur put the bonnet of the car toward the wood, and drew it into the cover of some laurel bushes. Then the lights were extinguished.

"You can go back now. I shall be close at hand, and you will not be waiting for longer than a quarter of an hour."

Then she saw another man. He was in evening dress; she caught the flash of his white shirt-front as he lit a cigarette. A man of more than middle age, with a gray moustache and dark, forbidding eyes. Stenton and he talked together in a low tone for some time. Where had he come from? He must have been waiting on the road for them, and that red lamp he carried in his hand had signalled the car to stop.

She went back to the limousine, and, letting down the big plate window, looked out. Her eyes were now growing accustomed to the darkness, and she could see the two men in the road clearly. Then suddenly the red lamp began to wave. From the distance came the dull whine of a motor-car. The red lamp waved more furiously, and the man with the gray moustache was suddenly illuminated by the glaring headlamps of the oncoming car, which stopped suddenly.

Stenton walked to the door and jerked it open.

"I want you, Jane," he said. There was a note of harshness in his voice.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

She saw a woman bend forward and heard a cry.

"Philip! What is the meaning of this!"

"Step out," said Stenton curtly.

"I'll do no such thing; I—"

"Step out. I don't want to use force on you. You know why I am here. Your scheme has been discovered."

"You're a fool!" cried the woman shrilly. "And a blackguard! How dare you stop me, Philip!"

He had whispered something to her, and the shrill quality went out of her voice, and she spoke now in a low tone, which did not reach the astounded ears of Alys Southey.

She was wondering what was happening, when she saw Stenton coming toward her.

"Now, Miss Southey," he said, "I want you to get into that car."

"But why " she began.

"You must ask no questions," he said almost roughly. "You promised!"

His arm guiding her, she walked back to the road and, looking round, she saw the figure of a woman talking to the man with the gray moustache, vehemently, tearfully.

"Get in," said Stenton, and she obeyed.

The interior of the car was heavy with the aroma of an Eastern scent. She was about to let down the window when he stopped her.

"I don't think I should do that," he said gently. "I forgot the scent."

"I don't understand what it all means, but I'll do as you tell me," she said.

She felt that, if she gave way now, she would get hysterical. And then, to her surprise, he patted her hand.

"The Colonel is going along with you—Colonel Dayler. I shall follow later."

He called the man with the gray moustache, and that gentleman hurried toward him, and, without a word, climbed into the car, and, before she realized what was happening, it was moving on.

"My name's Dayler. I don't know whether—Philip told you. I am a Colonel of the 195th "Wessex."

"Who is Jane?" she asked.

The extraordinary was becoming the normal. She had ceased to worry, ceased almost to thinK independently.

The Colonel chuckled.

"Oh—Jane? Jane's a nice gel," he said and chuckled again.

"I didn't promise I wouldn't ask you questions," she said presently. "Where are we going now?"

"We're going to Lord Ilcombe's country house," said Dayler. "And you've got to stick tight to me, and I'll fend off all inconvenient inquiries. Until you feel me squeeze your arm, you're to take no notice of anybody. They'll certainly try to talk to you, but you trust me."

She could only sit helplessly and wait. Presently the car turned from the road, and passed up a lordly avenue of elms, stopping before the brightly illuminated facade of a big house. As the footman assisted her down, she heard the sound of music, and, clinging tightly to the Colonel's arm, she passed, bewildered and puzzled, into the big hall. As she did so a butler opened a door. She was in a big banqueting-hall. In one gallery a band was playing, and the floor was crowded with dancers.

Somebody nodded to her. A girl who swept past said something which she could not catch. And then a young man checked himself to lift his eyebrows and say:

"You're late, Jane."

"Jane!" The significance of the name came upon her with a rush. Jane was the woman whose portrait she had seen in the paper. She was impersonating her. At the thought of all that might signify, she hung heavily on the Colonel's arm; and realizing that she had discovered the role she was playing, he hurried her into an alcove and sat her in a big armchair.

"Now let me assure you, Miss Southey," he said earnestly, "that you will have no cause to reproach yourself for this night's work. You are impersonating Lady Jane Dinford. That is why Philip has chosen you."

"But—but " she began.

"I swear to you, on my honor, that you will come to no harm, and that we are asking you to do nothing that is dishonorable," said the Colonel

emphatically. "Your big test is to come, my dear, but I'm sure that I'll be able to see you through with it."

It was when the dance had stopped that the test really came, for two men and a girl came to the alcove and greeted her.

"You're not to bother Jane," said the Colonel. "She's got a fearful headache. Her car met with a little accident coming down, and she's shaken. Smile," he hissed under his breath, and Alys forced something which, she felt sure, looked more like a death's-head grin than the amiable smile of a pretty woman.

The Colonel was watching. She sensed, in that quick left and right glance of his that swept the hall, an expectancy out of the ordinary. Presently she saw a woman—tall, graceful, and a little passee, crossing the room with slow, leisurely steps.

"Ah!" whispered the Colonel. "When she speaks, you call her Edith."

"Who is it?" she asked in a whisper.

"Lady Carleigh."

As the woman came up, the Colonel rose.

"You know Jane Dinford?" he said.

"I think we have met," said Lady Carleigh languidly, and put out her cool hand.

To the girl's amazement, she left behind a little wad of paper, which Alys had the presence of mind to conceal. Lady Carleigh did not wait, but went on to the next alcove as though that had been her objective.

"What does it mean?" asked Alys fearfully.

"Did she give you anything I" asked the Colonel quickly, and she passed him the slip of paper that the woman had left in her hand.

"Let's go out," said the Colonel. His voice was husky.

They crossed the floor into the hall, and, as though expecting them, a servant stood outside the front door with the girl's cloak on his arm. The car was waiting, and before she realized what had happened, she was speeding down the drive again. They had left the house well behind before the Colonel

switched on the light and unrolled the ball of paper that Lady Carleigh had given her.

"10.45 to London. Bonton Tunnel 11.17. Be on the down road near entrance, dressed in white so that I can see you. I will drop the box. It will be well wrapped."

"What does it mean?" asked Alys.

"It means that your work will be at an end tomorrow," said the Colonel.

"Where is Mr. Stenton!"

"I think he has gone back to town with his cousin."

"Lady Jane?"

The Colonel nodded.

It was nearly midnight when the car turned into a quiet London square and stopped before the sedate portals of a big house. The door was opened to them at once, and, conducted by the Colonel, she passed into a gorgeous drawing- room, lit by softly shaded wall- brackets. Stenton, his back to the empty grate, was waiting, and at the sight of the girl he came forward eagerly.

"Well... do you know—?"

"I know I was supposed to impersonate Lady Jane Dinford," she said.

"We've got it, my boy," said the Colonel's voice exultantly, and he produced the slip of paper.

Stenton read. When he had finished, he nodded.

"Thank you, Colonel," he said. "And now, will you go along and arrange for supper for Miss Southey, while I tell her the truth?"

He closed the door upon his companion and turned again to the girl.

"Won't you sit down. Miss Southey I" he said gently. "The story I have to tell you is not a very long one, but I think you have had sufficient shocks for one evening. Nevertheless, I am going to give you another.

"You have heard of the jewel robberies which have been occurring in various country houses?"

She nodded.

"To those of which you know, I will add another. A few weeks ago Lord Ilcombe's best friend was arrested, charged with stealing a diamond ornament, and he is now waiting his trial. Lord Ilcombe was satisfied that his friend was innocent, and that the real culprits were two ladies, who apparently were not very great friends, but who, working in conjunction, had carried out a series of most audacious thefts. The reason for their conduct I will not go into. They are both more or less poor women, and certainly both more or less unscrupulous. There have been incidents at cards which it is unnecessary to recall.

"Lord Ilcombe fixed upon these two women as the culprits, but he found it impossible to prove that they were acquainted with one another. The two were invited to the house-party, of which you were momentarily an uncomfortable guest. Last night Lord Ilcombe showed his guests six very valuable rubies that had come down to him from an ancestor of the eighteenth century. They were in a jewel case, and he knew that, if these women were guilty, they could not resist the temptation of adding yet another to their long list of thefts. Only one saw the casket; the other—who, I need hardly tell you, is Lady Jane Dinford—has been ill in London. But this morning an urgent wire was sent to her, asking her to come down for the evening.

"Tonight his jewel case will be stolen. The loss will not be discovered until after the departure of the guests. Lady Carleigh will, of course, be the culprit. But she is clever. She was nearly caught at the Earl of Pinkerton's house, but managed to secrete the stolen property in the overcoat pocket of Lord Ilcombe's friend."

"You are Lord Ilcombe?" said Alys quietly, and he nodded.

"Yes, I am Lord Ilcombe," he said.

"Where is Lady Jane now?"

He looked up to the ceiling.

"I have taken the liberty of holding he: prisoner until I have proved beyond doubt that my suspicions are correct. That proof has already been given to me by the paper which her confederate slipped into your hand."

"But what is she going to do?"

"She will throw the box from the window as she passes through the tunnel, and you will be there to take it."

"But why?" interrupted Alys. "Why could she not take it to London!"

"Her job is to get rid of it as quickly as she can," said Lord Ilcombe quietly. "The only fear I have is, that in the daylight she may recognize you. You must go to Bonton Tunnel to take that box from her. I know what you're going to say." He smiled faintly. "You are going to ask me why I do not have her arrested the moment I know that the box is in her possession. There are many reasons, not the least being that she is my mother's sister, and I do not want a scandal. What I want to do is to be able to furnish proof, without the assistance of the police, that she is the robber. And you, my dear young lady, are going to assist me."

The girl scarcely slept that night, and long before Mr. Potter was down she had left the house. Lord Ilcombe's car was waiting for her, and that young man himself was standing talking to the chauffeur when she came up.

"You have an hour's drive, and I've ordered breakfast at an inn en route," he said.

He was not a good conversationalist that morning. Apparently some trouble clouded his mind, and presently it came out.

"I'm worrying about you, young lady. I think that I have scared you unnecessarily. I should have told you the truth at first. You see," he confessed, "I was rather chary of taking anybody into my confidence. Both these women are relatives of mine—yes, Lady Jane is my first cousin, and I did not want the fact to be generally known. And"—he hesitated—"I was very fond of Jane, and would have helped her if I'd known—though I doubt if I could ever have reformed her."

She shot a swift glance at him, and in that moment felt a pang of sorrow for the woman who had sacrificed so much.

It was a silent meal, that breakfast, but one which ever remained in the memory of the girl. Lord Ilcombe was so immersed in his thoughts that he scarcely answered when she spoke to him.

A few minutes before eleven the car stopped near a railway line, and the two got out and walked along.

"There is a pathway down the embankment for the use of plate-layers," said Ilcombe, leading the way through the hedge.

Following him, the girl saw the black month of the tunnel.

"I hate asking yon to go into that unpleasant-looking place, but I am afraid I must," smiled Ilcombe, and with a gaiety in her heart which was unusual, and wholly foreign to the seriousness of the business, she laughed, and ran down the path.

The tunnel was short but dark. It was filled with the suffocating, sulphurous odor peculiar to tunnels, and, with a glance backward at the watching man, she sat down on the bank and waited. She heard the rumbling of the train long before it reached the far end of the tunnel, and, rising, walked quickly to the entrance.

Would she be recognized? Would there be time for Lady Carleigh to see that her plot had failed! Alys moved further into the shadow of the tunnel and waited. With a shriek and a roar, the train thundered past, deafening her. Then, from a window, something big and round was thrown, striking the metals and rebounding almost to her feet. Stooping, she picked up the ball of paper and cardboard, the train vanishing in the distance.

With knees that trembled, she ran up the path breathlessly and put the parcel in his hand.

"Thank Heaven, that's over!" he said, and with a knife cut the string.

Under the paper, wrapped in fine shavings, was a cardboard box, and within was yet another box, padded tightly with cotton wool.

He opened this, only to reveal a third box. The girl watched eagerly. At last the case was revealed, and with a jerk of his finger the lid snapped up.

As it did so, he uttered a cry of amazement. The jewels were not there. Instead, was a letter, which he opened.

"Dear Philip," it ran, "I recognized Jane's double the moment I put the paper in her hand. Even if I had not, Jane's telephone message this morning would have told me all I wanted to know. We are leaving for the Continent by the afternoon train. If you want a scandal, you can have us arrested.—Your loving Aunt."

There was a P.S.

"As you have so completely compromised your very pretty girl, the least you can do is to marry her."

Without a word, he handed the letter to the girl.

"For the first time in my life," he said, and his voice was very gentle, "I agree with my aunt. Let's lunch."

"You've lost your rubies," she said in dismay, and he looked at her with a strange light in his eyes.

"There's a Biblical proverb somewhere about rubies, if I remember rightly—the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs and the tenth verse. Look it up, Alys."

4. THE UNDISCLOSED CLIENT

A snowy night in early March; underfoot, the stone sidewalk smeared with a film of mud. Yet Mr. Lester Cheyne did not hurry: his walk, the slow pace of a man who was thoroughly enjoying a happy experience which he was loathe to bring to the end, which was marked by the cozy lobby of Northumberland Court and the luxury of a suite that lay beyond.

The snow fell in a picturesque and almost theatrical way, large distinct flakes that fell vertically and showed themselves to the best advantage in the light of the big arc lamps. Along the Embankment the bare arms of the plane trees were marked white; in the dark river that ran at the far side of the granite parapet, two tug-boats were passing, one up and one down river. They were tagged with green and red lights that splashed shivering and grotesque reflections on the water. A span of yellow lamps located a distant bridge...

Lester, his throat enveloped in the upturned lambskin of his coat collar, could admire and absorb and enjoy. He had a wonderful feeling of content, such as any healthy man might experience who had performed a difficult task to his entire self-satisfaction.

It was the rush hour: the offices were emptying and the sidewalk held a triple line of hurrying walkers. He edged near to the railings of the Temple, not desiring to hamper the toilers of the world in their homeward trek. He also was a toiler, but in another sphere. He liked to think of himself as a general who, in the silence of a room aloof from his fellows, planned subtle and successful movements against an enemy, overwhelmingly superior in point of numbers and backed by limitless resources.

He was a slim, good-looking man of thirty-five, who looked ten years younger. When he was revealed to strangers as a successful lawyer, they were politely incredulous; yet he was very successful, and his sleek limousine and the apartment with the waxed walls and the silken tapestries were there to proclaim his prosperity to the world.

It was not a novel experience to be jostled as he strolled: elbows had grazed him, shoulders had lurched against his. A grunted pardon politely waved, and they passed on into the obscurity of the night and the oblivion of their unimportance.

But the Girl in the Brown Coat did more: touched him with her arm, slipped sideways, and was caught deftly by the smiling Lester, and remained everlastingly in his life as a memory never to be expunged.

She fell ungracefully, one foot sliding outward, one doubled beneath her, arms flung violently in an effort to balance.

He caught her as awkwardly under the arm, and she slid forward, so that she became a human wheelbarrow that he was unconsciously pushing.

"Sorry... awfully sorry!"

He must either allow her to sit down in the snow and mud, or she must get up of her own power, for his rubbers had caked up with half-frozen slush and his foothold was precarious.

She recovered herself with the commendable agility of youth.

Twenty... younger perhaps. Or older. He wasn't sure. The white light of the spluttering arc lamp was merciless enough to tell whatever unpleasant truth there was to be told. But the verity was very pleasant. Eyes any color, but big and with little droops at the corners that gave her a certain lure. Mouth very red. Complexion faultless so far as could be judged.

She came erect, gripping at his fur collar: it was not an unpleasing sensation.

"I'm dreadfully sorry—I slipped."

"I noticed that," he said, and laughed.

When she smiled she was rather beautiful. He had not seen any woman... girl, whatever she was... quite so beautiful. At least, not for a very long time. And because they met in the atmosphere and environment of adventure she was almost painfully interesting.

"I knew something was going to happen to me this night," she said in the friendly way of one who shared equal mastership of the situation, if mastership was called for. "I slipped up once this morning at home, and I slipped over a rug in the office; the third trip was sure to come."

She gave him the grim little smile that naturally accompanies a nod of farewell, and quickened her pace to leave him behind. Then her right arm shot out and caught hold of the railings. In a fraction of a second he overtook her.

"You'd better walk with me—I am wearing rubbers. Have you far to go?"

"Charing Cross tube," she said ruefully. "Thank you, I will: I seem rather short on suitable footwear."

She lived in a girls' club at Hampstead and worked in an office on King's Bench Walk. She had seen two of the plays he mentioned...

Shabby? Not exactly. Cheaply dressed described her better. He could price the coat—the bargain stores sold them in saxe, tête de nègre, tobacco, fawn, navy, and black, and the fur collar had been, in the lifetime of its original wearer, attached to a frisky white tail and a pair of lop ears.

Mr. Lester Cheyne had his private and personal record of past adventures, and these included at least one young lady who had pounded the keys of a typewriter by day, and had grown sentimental in his society after business hours.

But high or low, he could not parallel that face or overcome the irritating sense that he had once met... seen... heard her before. A face in a crowd perhaps, or he had caught a glimpse of her one sunny evening in summer. He often walked this beat before dinner. The river inspired him.

"Have you had dinner?" he asked.

"I? Lord, no! I take supper when I get home—when I'm hungry. I think I shall be hungry enough tonight!"

He seemed to be considering something; his head drooped forward.

"If I suggested that I should give you dinner, would you call the police?"

He had a mock solemn brand of banter that never offended even a chance acquaintance, and seldom failed to bring about whatever lay at the end of it.

"I don't think so. One can't walk between the Temple and Charing Cross six hundred times a year without gathering a few invitations to dinner," she smiled.

"And how many have you accepted?" he asked blandly.

She shook her head. He gathered that these extemporaneous hosts had drawn blank.

"I didn't think you would," he said, "and yet I am most respectably placed. I have a Member of Parliament as my neighbor on the left, and the Dean of Westchurch has the flat on my right—"

There was the slightest tinge of disappointment in her voice. "That would be impossible, wouldn't it—I mean..."

She did not say what she meant, but that hardly mattered. He was not amazed that she had even considered the dinner invitation, because women could not amaze him. He understood them too well. They were made of the very stuff of unexpectedness. But he was a very quick thinker: as a general he struck like lightning at the first weak spot exposed. This quality of his had been of enormous profit to him.

"I almost wish my dean was a bishop and the Member of Parliament a Cabinet Minister," he murmured regretfully, "and that I, instead of being the most humble of lawyers, were the Chief Justice on his bench!"

Here was the parting of her ways. She had either to talk of snow and tugs that went gleaming up and down Thames River, or else she must dovetail a comment to his last words.

"Are you a lawyer? Then I must know you. There isn't a barrister in the Inner Temple I haven't seen."

So he talked lawyers and his own insignificance until they began to slow their paces, the yellow glow of the Underground station being just ahead of them. Before the open booking-hall they lingered, yet nearer to the sidewalk's edge than to the station. She wore a sort of pinky-brown silk stocking, ludicrously inadequate in this weather. The neat ankles were mottled with mud.

"I would not dare ask you to dine and go to a show—you'd hate going as you are. But a grilled pheasant and a spineless sole and a plebeian rice pudding to follow—"

"Don't! You are making me feel like a shipwrecked sailor."

Still she hesitated and shook her head.

"It is awfully nice of you, and somehow I know that you are—right. But I couldn't possibly. Where do you live?"

He nodded towards the railway bridge. Beyond, you can just see the austere corner of Northumberland Court, all gray stone and sedate and statesmanlike windows.

"Where is that?"

"Northumberland Court—next to the National Liberal Club. Its austerity is depressing. My two maids are Churchwomen, and, fearing the worst, peek through keyholes to make sure they are not missing it. At least I suspect them. One goes to church on Sunday morning and one on Sunday night.

They are very English and can reconcile their deep religious convictions with a moderate but regular consumption of Pale Ale!"

She was looking at him all the time he talked, a half smile on her face, a kind of reluctant amusement in her eyes. They were gray, turning blue on the slightest provocation.

"You talk like a novelist!" she said, and he was faintly annoyed. There was an inference of plagiarism. "There is no sense in half-adventures," she said. "Produce your roasted pheasants and your Church of England parlormaid!"

She walked more quickly now; seemed to him a little breathless. He hoped that he was not mistaken in this. He thought he could define exactly her point of view. She was crossing a Rubicon—but a shallow Rubicon. One could wade back at the first hint of danger—could even stop in the middle and cogitate upon the wisdom of the passage. So many women had created in their minds this practicable stream, learning later in some pain of soul the unfathomable depth of it, the swirl and fury of its inexorable current.

His flat was on the ground floor. One frosty-faced virgin opened the door to him, and vanished rapidly into the dining-room to set another place. Her counterpart hovered at the door of the little drawing-room, ready to act as guide or vestiare, or to perform whatever service woman can render to woman.

"Put your coat and hat in my room," said Lester. "Mary will show you—"

"Gosh—look at me!"

The girl's eyes were wide opened—she pointed a white finger towards the photograph that leant limply against a vase on the mantelshelf.

His first emotion was of anger at his stupidity in leaving the photograph lying about. It came that morning; he thought he had locked it away in the drawer. Possibly the dyspeptic Mary had propped it against the Chinese candlestick.

Followed a thrill of wonder. There certainly was a distinct likeness between Lady Alice Farranay and Miss Brown Coat. A likeness and yet not a likeness... that of course accounted for the strange sense he had had of meeting a familiar face. He explained the dissimilarity.

"Don't be silly!" She had the lofty contempt of an elder sister. "I'm shingled and she isn't—that's the only difference. I don't know"—she was suddenly

dubious—"the nose... These studio photographers retouch so... but I am like her."

She had pulled off her hat with a shake of her head, and now the likeness was not so apparent.

"She has a fringe... I haven't. If I grew a fringe and allowed my hair to grow, and dressed it in that blobby way over the ears..."

Mary at the door was stepping from foot to foot impatiently—the girl became aware of her ingratiating smirk—a painful grimace which at once beckoned and inquired and went out.

Lester took up the photograph, examined it coldly, and laid it away in a drawer. After dinner it must go into the safe, with the photograph of Lady Alice that the butler took the day Johnny Basterby went to India, and the letters he wrote to her, vulgarizing in the crudity of words a something which had brought Alice Farranay into the splendid haze which is God.

A difficult proposition.

That is why Lester looked so coldly on the picture. The stuff of unexpectedness was here. A fighter, and yet she did not have the appearance of a fighter. Would she go down battling?—that was a question which very nearly concerned Lester Cheyne. Never before had he felt a qualm of misgiving or had the shade of a desire to back out, or recognized the depth and strength of his own private Rubicon. The letters? Could they be interpreted in any other than the obvious way? The butler's photograph... a back view, though unmistakably her ladyship. But might not a second cousin be permitted the liberty of an encircling arm as they paced towards Gollards Covert? He was leaving for India the next day, remember. These problems Mr. Cheyne had taken to the Thames Embankment and had settled to his complete satisfaction, when the brown-coated girl had executed pirouettes in the snow.

She would not fight. That kind of woman never fought, especially when they had money to burn. Not intelligent women. Alice could draw a check for twenty-five thousand pounds as easily as for ten. And the Undisclosed Client would benefit as usual.

Lord John Farranay was immensely rich. If he lived to inherit his father's dukedom he would be even richer. There was some doubt as to whether he would live. His father was ninety, Lord John a little over fifty, nearly thirty years his wife's senior. But John Farranay had lived—not nicely, it is true,

and he was an older man than his father, who had sown his wild oats in the hunting-field.

A tap at the door.

"Oh, there you are!"

He was relieved to see her. That word was revelation. Relieved. Never before in all his life had he welcomed diversion from the business at hand.

"You look awfully nice. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Nothing. I tried to work down a fringe. What have you done with the picture? What a shame! You have put it away!"

"Pheasant!" he smiled. "And rice pudding!"

She admired the furnishing, the taste, the quiet luxury of everything. In the hall she stopped to look at the etchings, and before she sat down at the polished table must inspect the Corot over the sideboard.

"Soft... and air and breeze in it, isn't there!"

The lace mats on the table were rather fascinating. She fingered their texture with a sure, understanding touch.

"I suppose you are married? There's a sort of woman atmosphere which can't be your Pale Ale—"

Entered Mary with plates and dishes on a dumb waiter, and comment continued along these lines would have been embarrassing.

She was immensely pretty; not skinny either, as so many of these poor-eating typists are. And rather beautiful hands. Her throat too—he was a connoisseur in the matter of throats. The line of them should incline a little forward and have as their capitol a peculiarly rounded chin.

"Wine you won't have, of course. Water is good for the young. I think I will take water too, Mary."

When the white-aproned servitor woman had gone:

"Do you know, this is very unreal? It is rather like one of those day- dreams that wanders on under its own power and brings you into such strange places. My name is Lois Martin. I suppose you are entitled to know that."

"Mine is Lester Cheyne... I'm sorry, I should have told you that before."

She took up the glass of water and drank slowly; put it down, patted her lips with the serviette.

"Who is she?—is that a very impertinent question?"

"Who? You mean the photograph? She's—er—just an acquaintance... a friend of a friend. I don't know much about her except that she is married to a very rich man who is rather jealous, rather mean, and desperately unwholesome. He is thirty years older than she."

"Why did she marry him?"

"He is very rich."

Lois Martin sighed.

"I suppose one ought to have a contempt for women who marry rich men. But money means an awful lot: it comes into everything. It keeps you out of crowds, and you can't get into crowds without having something rubbed off—polish or bloom. And it keeps other people—people you love—out of crowds and queues. The divine thing that money buys is—isolation."

Curiously he looked at her. She spoke with a strange earnestness.

"And whom do you love?" he asked.

She was thinking of something, for she started at the sound of his voice.

"Nobody—yet. I love dreams and the beautiful things that come in dreams."

Her left hand rested on the table. Sure of her agreement, he reached out and covered it with his, and she did not draw her hand away. So far and no farther he went. This almost resemblance to Lady Alice was rather amusing—added a piquancy to the situation. To make love to one woman and to blackmail her twin ... it was amusing.

"I rather like you," he said. "Do people worry you who have immediate likings and dislikings?"

"No. An interest which has to be flogged or coaxed is a pale substitute for the real thing. People either magnetize you and you jump an awful long way towards them, or else they belong to the crowd."

He was encouraged.

"My view entirely. I like to jump right into the grand salon of friendships—I loathe giving my name at the door and being handed on through the

antechambers, my virtue explained at every stage. By the time you've got to the middle of things there is nothing to be learnt about you and you're a bore exposed!"

When she said, as she did at eight o'clock, that she must go, he offered no objection.

"But I do hope that you will come to dinner one night—soon. I have an idea at the back of my head that we may be awfully useful to one another—I am shamelessly utilitarian, aren't I? But I feel that way towards girls—especially girls who are working for their living, and who aren't just looking for a good time and hang the consequence."

The paternal note seldom failed him, but for once there was a serious purpose behind his little speech. But how she might be employed, or whether he could employ her at all, were questions that tomorrow must answer.

She was hesitant again.

"I don't know... I should like to come, awfully."

Her scrutiny of his face was searching: she seemed baffled at the end of it. Not that his face was inscrutable to the student of physiognomy. Superficially he was handsome in a dark, pinched way. There were pictures of notable Florentines in the National Gallery that were of his type without his glossy little moustache. He was thin-lipped, blue-chinned, deep-eyed. Giovanni Bellini painted a Doge of Venice who was not unlike Lester Cheyne, though he was darker than Loredano.

"I don't know—would you like me to come, really?"

Here was the conventional surrender.

He drove her home to Hampstead in a taxi and they held hands lightly most of the way.

She was quite different in most respects from the average pick-up, ladylike if not a lady. Though this quality was not essential, he had found. One pair of red, warm lips differed only from another in respect to the soul and the imagination back of the caress they offered.

Therefore he had every reason to be pleased with himself when he returned to Northumberland Court to the contemplation of Lady Alice Farranay, that beautiful but stiff-necked lady who might go down fighting but probably would not.

Mr. Cheyne's office was in the city of London, near Aldermanbury. It was like and yet unlike a lawyer's office. The appointments and furnishings reflected his own luxurious tastes. His staff was restricted to a girl who typed with two fingers and got through life with half a brain. She came in to him when he rang his bell, a dumpy young lady in an artificial silk jumper and a string of imitation amber beads.

"Mr. Mortlake has been waiting half an hour," she said in a hushed voice.

In two years of service she had learnt only this: she must not shout.

"Show him in, Clarissa."

His mood was gay and friendly. Her homely face was distorted in a smile of respectful reproof, for her name was Annie, but she was usually called Miss Synes.

A dapperish man, with a head too big for his thin body and an unhealthy white face, tiptoed into the room, holding a derby hat in his hand. He sat down in the chair which the girl had placed, and laid his hat on the floor.

"Anything?" He drooped his head on one side—a gesture of interrogation.

"Nothing, Mortlake."

Mr. Cheyne had already run through the letters: there was none bearing the Melton Mowbray postmark.

"Ah—she'll write. Her ladyship is very obstinate, but she won't... you don't think she will?"

Mr. Cheyne shrugged his shoulders.

"You know her ladyship best," he said. "I am rather worried about the business—in fact, I am almost sorry that I agreed to act for you. The case is so very peculiar; in fact, it has almost the appearance of blackmail."

The peculiarity of Mr. Cheyne's operations was that there always came a moment in his relationship with his Undisclosed Clients when he expressed the wish that he was not acting for them and when their "cases" bore some verisimilitude to the crime of extorting money by threats. And yet invariably he went on to the bitter end, until, in fact, a check or a sealed packet of banknotes enabled him to write "finis" to the episode.

There was sometimes an unpleasant aftermath. His clients had been known to complain in bitterness of the inadequacy of their reward.

There was the valet of the Honorable Arthur Keverling, who found a bundle of letters from the young wife of the Minister of Justice; and Millie Winston, the lady's maid, who brought to Aldermanbury the stupidly indiscreet diary of her mistress'; and that wretched wastrel, the brother of Fay Lanseer, who thought that five thousand was a mighty poor share of the seventy thousand pounds which Lord Charholm had paid rather than hear his letters read in open court—Fay being his wife's best friend. But in the end they had been glad enough to avoid the alternative which Mr. Cheyne had offered—the return of money and documents under cover of a letter in which Mr. Cheyne would express his pain and indignation that he had been unwillingly and innocently the agent of blackmailers.

Mortlake was visibly alarmed.

"I don't see how you can say that, Mr. Cheyne. When I came to you first, you told me that I was to sue her for money lent and for damages... my being kicked out at a minute's notice and all that."

Which was true.

Mr. Cheyne was a blackmailer, but no vulgar blackmailer. He might very properly threaten to sue for the return of mythical loans; that is part of a lawyer's business. He might take into his possession documents of a most compromising character, letters such as men and women have written to one another since the art of writing was invented, but he only did this to prove that the mere possession of such letters by his client was proof of his trustworthiness. For who would give letters of this kind to a servant for safe custody unless he or she was on such terms of friendship with the hireling that the loan, for the recovery of which action was taken, might very well have been solicited and granted? And if the victims of the Undisclosed Client retorted that the letters had been stolen, that was a very serious charge indeed, and Mr. Cheyne over his own signature suggested, nay demanded, that the pilfering servant should be prosecuted.

"You left Lady Alice's employment six weeks ago—were you with her long?"

"Eighteen months," said Mr. Mortlake. "His lordship engaged me soon after the marriage. I must say she's the best of the pair. His lordship is a swine in every way."

"Jealous?"

Mr. Mortlake smiled.

"Of his own shadow! He used to be, anyway, till he took up with Miss Wenbury. He'd give his head for a divorce and her ladyship knows it. He's poisonous...."

He explained just why Lord John Farranay was poisonous, and Mr. Cheyne listened. He was not at all squeamish.

"The letters might get him the divorce—the photograph is worthless. We want something more. I wonder..."

His brows met in a disfiguring frown.

The Girl in the Brown Coat beautifully arrayed and with that fringe manipulated, might very well be Lady Alice But exactly how he might use this resemblance was not clear.

"All right—don't come tomorrow. Say Friday, or, better still, next Monday."

Miss Synes' answered the bell and stood imploringly at the open door until the visitor passed her.

Another letter, thought Mr. Cheyne. He dipped his pen in ink.

Dear Madam,

Yourself and an Undisclosed Client

We are surprised that we have not had a reply to our letter of the 13th inst. You will, we feel sure, appreciate our desire to spare you unnecessary trouble and expense, nor is it our wish to place on record the name of our client, since we feel sure that it would be painful to you to have thus emphasized a financial transaction which might not be regarded as consonant with your dignity.

Briefly we restate our claim: in October last you borrowed from our client the sum of fifty thousand pounds, giving him as security certain letters which passed between yourself and Captain John Basterby, now on the staff of H. E. the Viceroy of India. The statement in your brief note of the 3rd to the effect that the letters were stolen by our client, who had never possessed so large a sum as fifty thousand pounds, constitutes a very serious charge. We feel in the circumstances that we must challenge you to prosecute our client for his alleged theft. In so far as concerns his ability to command so large a sum, we have our client's assurance that he inherited a considerable fortune from an uncle in America. We have again to request the name of your lawyer, who will accept service on behalf of our client.

Very correct; very proper. He blotted the draft and summoned his typist to make a fair copy.

Two nights later came the Girl in the Brown Coat—punctually. Mr. Cheyne let her in.

"Do you mind a cold dinner? My maids have developed symptoms of influenza. Don't be alarmed!"

She smiled.

"I'm not a bit alarmed," she said.

He was afraid she would come in evening dress: bargain-basement evening dress might spoil her. Except that she wore a lighter frock and had a pair of new shoes obviously purchased for the occasion, she was the same exquisite lady of his recollection.

"I have been thinking a lot about you," he said.

"Like?"

"Well—these beastly mornings and nights, and the thought of you tramping through the slush with a herd of dirty people—and packed in stuffy cars. You don't belong to crowds. I've thought of what you said about crowds. How much do you earn a week?"

She named a sum as he relieved her of her coat. A ridiculously small sum it was.

"Absurd!"

He chucked the coat on the settee and led her to the fire, and when his arm went round her she did not so much as shiver. She even smiled up into his face.

"We are getting along," she said.

"Do you mind!"

She shook her head.

"No. I suppose I should if I were properly constituted. But it is rather easy to be made a fuss of, and one doesn't carry around the Girl Guides' Code of Conduct."

Stooping, he touched her lips with his, and then she pushed him gently away from her.

"Tell me something. Are you in the Temple?"

"No—City. I'm commercial. I've a bleak little office off Queen Victoria Street."

She made a little face.

"How uninteresting! I hoped at least you were a police lawyer. Crime is so awfully fascinating. We are Chancery lawyers; dull! I could scream sometimes. You do a lot of work here, don't your'

She pulled at the handle of the green wall-safe.

"How funny! That doesn't seem to go with the furniture, and you have wonderful taste."

"Come and eat," he replied, purring. He loved appreciation of his finer side.

There was wine on the table, but he offered her none until she pushed forward her glass.

"Bless your bright eyes!" He toasted her, and immediately afterwards: "I am going to make you rich," he said, and she laughed.

"That sounds like temptation," she said, and he admitted that it was. Women love directness. He knew all about women. Too great a subtlety silts up progress. Yet he was a delicate speaker and she listened without protest.

"I couldn't... I don't think I could. There would be awful trouble at the club. One is supposed to be in by twelve. And... no!

And yet it was an easy matter to send somebody for her belongings next day. She had a friend there who would pack them.

"Talk about something else. Where is the picture of the beautiful lady like me? Who is she—really?"

He poured her another glass of wine and then filled his own.

"She is the defendant in a case I am bringing on behalf of—an Undisclosed Client."

She wanted him to explain further, pleaded with him to bring the picture.

"A little alteration and you would be her double," he said, when he brought it back and laid it on the table before her.

She stared down at the photograph.

"Who was she?"

"She was the daughter of a disagreeable old soldier," he said carelessly. "But to the devil with her! Let us speak of really important things."

He was behind her as he spoke; both his arms went round her, meeting at the waist; the shingled head was against his cheek, the fragrance of hair and skin was a little heady, and he had his first heart-thump.

"Perhaps she has an Undisclosed Client too," she suggested, and he laughed softly.

"Even now you don't understand—and after all the trouble I took to explain! Only lawyers have clients—"

Her head turned—his lips sought hers.

"No... I couldn't. I was stupid to come here. Drink your wine."

She struggled out of his grasp, but not frantically. Surrender was in every gentle movement of her.

He lifted the glass.

"Here's to us!" he said.

"To the Undisclosed Client!" she mocked, and they drank together.

"Queer how you and I met," he said, and dabbed his lips with a silk handkerchief. "Out of all the millions that walk these greasy streets—you are terribly like her."

"Like?"

"Lady Alice—except for the way you dress your hair, you might be her double."

The girl had been looking down at the tablecloth, fiddling with the stem of her wine-glass. Now she raised her eyes and there was a queer smile in them.

"I suppose I am—I should be, you know. I am Lady Alice Farranay!"

His mouth opened in surprise and then he laughed.

"You took my breath away: your little joke, eh!"

She shook her head.

"I am Lady Alice. You see, you are a difficult man to fight. I had heard about you—Fay Keverling told me. Of course you had the letters and things from Mortlake—my butler? I see I am right."

"You're—Lady—Alice?"

He was numb with amazement—he had never felt quite as he felt now, so dazed, so peculiarly stupefied.

"I thought it would be easy—but not so easy as it was. And when you asked me here to a little dinner, I knew that you would be alone. I had to do it. I have an Undisclosed Client too—one worth fighting for," she said, and he smiled crookedly.

"By gad—you've a nerve... now suppose you go, Lady... Lady Alice..."

His forehead was wet, he was surprised to find when he put up his hand to it.

"What d'you expec' to get... coming here?"

Why was his speech so thick, and his heart bumping so?

"The letters... they are in your safe. I had to guess that. And the key is on the chain in your pocket. I put some stuff in your wine when you were out of the room. Morphia and something else—there is a dear old doctor who would have given me poison if I had wanted it.... Of course I knew you would be alone..."

He did not hear the rest very distinctly. Clutching the edge of the table and bringing all his will power to bear, he attempted to walk to the door. And then his knees doubled under him and he found the floor very pleasant to lie upon and dream upon...

The girl watched him till he lay still, and then, leaning over him, she unfastened the golden key-chain he carried, examined the ring, and, choosing a key, walked to the safe. This she unlocked with a hand that did not tremble.

She took out the letters and read their beginnings... near the end of one a sentence arrested her eye.

"...I have a feeling something happened. You will tell me, beloved, won't you? And I'll stand by you..."

Lady Alice Farranay smiled faintly and dropped letters and photograph into the fire and watched them consumed to ashes. On the table was her photograph. It had been a shock to find herself confronted with that when she first entered the flat. But by drawing his attention to the resemblance she had stifled surprise before it had formed. This photograph went the way of its fellow; curled blackly in the flames, and was poked to fragments.

Relocking the safe, she fastened the keychain to the pocket of the unconscious man, picked up her overcoat, then she walked out into Northumberland Avenue and hailed a taxi.

Mr. Cheyne was in retirement at a little Italian town when he read the announcement in the Paris edition of an English paper. He knew, of course, that the old Duke and his impossible son had died in the same week, but this intelligence was both new and startling:

"Lady Alice Farranay gave birth yesterday to a son, and Billshire is rejoicing that the Dukedom is not, as was feared, extinct. Lady Alice is the daughter of the late General Sir Gregory Starmart, and comes of a famous fighting family."

"Humph!" said Mr. Cheyne—for very good reasons he called himself "Mr. Burton Smith," and he had shaved off his moustache. "Humph! Baby!... Undisclosed Client! I never thought of that!"

5. VIA MADEIRA

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

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

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

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

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

Lou yawned.

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

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

It was true that Larry had never worked the North Atlantic. He had confined himself mainly to the Pacific trade, and had made bigger pickings between Shanghai and Vancouver, B.C., than any man in his line. He had worked scientifically, allowing certain routes to lie fallow for years, had watched and noted changes in personnel, so that he could tell you off-hand who was the

captain of the Trianic and just whereabouts in the world you might find that red-nosed purser who nearly gaoled him in '19.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mrs. Larry nodded her head slowly.

"That sounds so much like me that you might be painting my portrait," she said; "but I gather you want a different type."

That day she sent in an advertisement to two newspapers. On the third day came Mary Perella. Mary walked from Bayswater because she had reached the stage where pennies counted. She had had three jobs in six months. Her three employers suffered from a common misfortune, which they confessed at an early stage of her engagement—they were unhappily married. Unhappily married employers who absent-mindedly paw their secretaries' hands are not so infrequent a phenomenon as many people would imagine. Mary descended the secretariat scale from rich city merchants to a musical composer who lived in a world of writs, and she had broken her last pound sterling and was owing one week's rent when she set forth to Jermyn Street,

never dreaming that the lady who required a secretary-companion to travel abroad, at a wildly exorbitant salary, would be likely to choose her from the thousands of applicants.

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

"We'll travel on the Frimley passports."

He was very practical now.

"She '11 want some money for clothing—give her twenty-five on account. You told her that she was my secretary and not yours!"

Mrs. Larry nodded.

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

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

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

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

The excuse, flimsy as it was, convinced Mary.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You're coming to us for Christmas," said his aunt. ^ ^ I am not going to allow you to wander alone. If you go away, I '11 come with you—I warn you."

"Thank you," said Jeremiah gratefully.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But "the gels" were in complete sympathy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To the purser, as he handed in the counterfoil:

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

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

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

He looked up and saw a girl.

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

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

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

Jeremiah glared up at her from his writing-table.

"Oh, Mr.—?"

He got to his feet slowly.

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

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

Jeremiah frowned.

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

"Not Mrs. Le—" he said.

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

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

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

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

Then he became conscious of his remissness.

"Won't you sit down?"

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

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

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

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

"Isn't she here!" she gasped.

Jeremiah blinked at her.

"Who—Mrs. Fallowby? I hope not!"

Mary Perella went pale.

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

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

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

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

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

"Really!"

He could think of no comment more illuminating.

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

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

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

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

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

Suddenly:

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

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

She nodded wisely.

"A book—I know."

She left him a little dazed.

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

"I haven't seen your—" she began.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The purser looked at him with suspicion.

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

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

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

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

"There is no person named Mrs. Leslie Fallowby on the ship," said the purser, and Jeremiah stared at him. "The young lady," went on the officer, " states that she is your secretary, and that she is traveling in that capacity."

"My secretary!" said Jeremiah incredulously.

"She says she is your secretary, engaged by your wife."

Jeremiah sat down with a thump.

"Say that again," he said.

The obliging purser repeated his tremendous tidings.

"Now I don't want any trouble with you, Mr. Fallowby," he said, not unkindly, "or with your wife. I'm going to show you a copy of the wireless we have received from London, and you'll understand that the game is up."

"Which game?" asked Jeremiah faintly.

The purser took a sheet of paper from his pocket, evidently a typewritten copy of a radio that had been received that day. It ran:

"To Captain, London Castle. Believe passenger named John Frimley and his wife are traveling under assumed name on your ship. They booked Suite No. 17, but they may be traveling separately to avoid detection. Frimley escaped our officers sent to arrest him at Waterloo, and has not been traced. He is a tall, good-looking man, clean-shaven, may wear horn-rimmed spectacles—"

(At this point Jeremiah quickly removed the reading-glasses he had been wearing when the purser came into the stateroom.)

"His wife is pretty, looks younger than she is. If any persons answering this description or occupying Suite 17, hand them to Portuguese Police, Funchal, to await extradition."

Jeremiah read the document twice.

"Your wife is already under guard in her cabin," said the purser, "and there'll be a master-of-arms on duty outside your stateroom to see that you do not attempt to leave until the Portuguese authorities arrive."

Jeremiah gaped at him.

"My wife is what?"

The purser waved a majestic hand and left the cabin before Mr. Jeremiah Fallowby began the exercise of the colorful vocabulary which he had acquired in his travels.

It was in the bare and whitewashed office of a Portuguese police office that he saw again Miss Mary Perella. He expected her to be carried in, a pallid and wilting wreck, whose nights had been made sleepless by the thought of her tragic sorrow; but it was a very healthy and indignant girl who came across the uncovered floor towards him.

"What is the meaning of this, Mr. Frimley!" she asked. Reproach was rather in her eyes than in her voice. "It isn't true that you are a jewel thief?"

"My name is Fallowby," protested Jeremiah.

"You told me your wife was on board, and she isn't."

He guessed that this was his real offense.

"I never said my wife was anywhere," said Jeremiah loudly. "I was talking about my aunt, Mrs, Leslie Fallowby. You told me you were her secretary."

"I did nothing of the kind," she stormed. "I told you I was your secretary—that your wife had engaged me."

"But I've never had a wife!" he wailed.

"Attention!" The fat man behind the desk boomed the word. "I know English too well! Now you spik my questions when I ask them!"

"Fire ahead," said Jeremiah recklessly.

He slept that Christmas Eve in a stone cell which was very dark and very unpleasant in other respects. He had no acquaintance with the Portuguese language, but he spoke Spanish rather fluently, and he learned that the girl had been taken to a convent. The British Vice-Consul had been requisitioned, but that worthy was not in Funchal. So Jeremiah despatched long and vehement cables to London... and might have saved himself the trouble.

In the early hours of the morning came a wire to the Chief of Police, announcing the arrest of "Mr. and Mrs. Frimley," whose other name was Vanne, and an apologetic police dignitary of the first class came personally, and in uniform, to offer apologies.

It was from him that Jerry learned of Mr. Vanne's little plot (revealed to the London police by his wife); of the engagement of a secretary who was to charm from a susceptible millionaire a view of his diamonds and such information about their safeguarding as she could secure.

Apparently, Miss Mary Perella had been similarly informed: he met her half-way up the steep slope which led to the convent, and she came running down with her hands outstretched.

"Welcome, and a merry Christmas, fellow-convict!" she said, with a gaiety that was immensely infectious.

He took her arm as they walked down the cobbled hill lane together, and came to a bench that overlooked the bay.

She was beautifully sympathetic—apparently saw nothing in her own experience but a thrilling adventure.

"I knew, of course, that something must be wrong. I couldn't imagine you were a burglar, or whatever this Mr. Frimley was." She sighed. "I've lost a very good job," she said ruefully.

"Let me find you another," said Jeremiah eagerly. "I really am going to write a book—I have threatened to do it for years, and you can come along and correct my spelling."

She half shook her head. Yet apparently she accepted the position, for they went on to the Cape by the next mail steamer, and the English chaplain who had married them on the morning they sailed came down to see them off.

6. THE COMPLEAT CRIMINAL

Mr. Felix O'Hara Golbeater knew something of criminal investigation, for he had been a solicitor for eighteen years and had been engaged in work which brought him into touch with the criminal classes, and his ingenuity and shrewd powers of observation had often enabled him to succeed in securing a conviction where ordinary police methods had failed.

A spare man, on the right side of forty, he was distinguished by a closely cropped beard and shaggy eyebrows, and in the cultivation of these he had displayed extraordinary care and patience.

It is not customary, even in legal circles, where so many curious practices obtain, to bother overmuch with one's eyebrows, but O'Hara Golbeater was a far-seeing man, and he anticipated a day when interested people would be looking for those eyebrows of his, when their portraiture would occupy space on the notice boards of police stations—for Mr. Felix O'Hara Golbeater had no illusions and was well aware of a most vital fact, which was that you cannot fool all men all the time. Therefore he was eternally on the qui vive for that mysterious man who would certainly appear on the scene some day and who would see through Golbeater the lawyer, Golbeater the trustee, Golbeater the patron of field sports, and last and greatest of distinctions, Golbeater the intrepid aviator, whose flights had caused something of a sensation in the little Buckingham village where he had his "country seat." And he had no desire to be "seen through."

He was sitting in his office one night in April. His clerks had long since gone home, and the caretaker, whose duty it was to clean up, had also left.

It was not Felix O'Hara Golbeater's practice to remain at the office until 11 p. m., but the circumstances were exceptional and justified the unusual course.

Behind him were a number of japanned steel boxes. They were arranged on shelves and occupied one half of the wall space from floor to ceiling. On each box was painted in neat white figures the name of the man, woman, or corporation for whose documents the receptacle was reserved. There was the "Anglo-Chinese Pottery Syndicate" (in liquidation), "The Erly Estate," "The Late Sir George Gallinger," to name only a few.

Golbeater was mainly interested in the box inscribed "Estate of the Late Louisa Harringay," and this stood wide open on his polished desk, its contents sorted into orderly heaps.

From time to time he made notes in a small but stout book by his side, notes for his confidential guidance apparently, for the book possessed a hinged lock.

In the midst of his inspection there came a sharp knock at the door of his sanctum.

He looked up, listening, his cigar stiffly held between his even white teeth.

The knock came again, and he rose, crossed the carpeted floor softly, and bent his head, as though by this process he could intensify his auricular powers.

Again the visitor rapped on the panels of the door, this time impatiently. He followed up his summons by trying the door.

"Who's there?" asked Golbeater softly.

"Fearn," came the reply.

"Just one moment."

Golbeater stepped back to the desk swiftly and bundled all the documents into the open box. This he replaced in the rack, then returning to the door, he unlocked it.

A young man stood in the doorway. His long Raglan was splashed with rain. In his plain, kindly face embarrassment as at an unpleasant mission struggled for mastery with the expression of annoyance peculiar to the Englishman kept waiting on the door-mat.

"Come in," said Golbeater, and opened the door wide.

The young man stepped into the room and slipped off his coat.

"Rather wet," he apologized gruffly.

The other nodded.

He closed the door carefully and locked it.

"Sit down," he said, and dragged forward a chair. His steady black eyes did not leave the other's face. He was all alert and tense, obeying the atavistic instinct of defense. The very angle of his cigar spoke caution and defiance.

Frank Fearn seated himself.

"I saw your light—I thought I'd drop in," he said awkwardly.

There was a pause.

"Been aeroplaning lately?"

Golbeater removed his Havana and examined it attentively.

"Yes," he said, and spoke confidentially to the cigar.

"Queer that a fellow like you should take it up," said the other, with a glint of reluctant admiration in his eyes. "I suppose studying criminals and being in touch with them... helps your nerves... and things."

Fearn was marking time. You could almost hear the tramp of his intellectual boots.

He began again.

"Do you really believe, Golbeater, that a chap could—could escape from justice if he really tried?"

A wild thought which was half a hope flashed through the lawyer's mind. Had this young fool been adventuring outside the law? Had he overstepped the mark too? Young men do mad things.

And if he had, that would be salvation for Felix 0'Hara Golbeater, for Fearn was engaged to the young heiress who had inherited Miss Harringay's fortune—and Fearn was the man of all men that the solicitor feared. He feared him because he was a fool, a stubborn fool, and an inquisitive fool.

"I really believe that," he answered; "my contention, based on experience, is that in a certain type of crime the offender need never be detected, and in other varieties, even though he, is detected, he can, given a day's start, avoid arrest."

He settled down in his chair to pursue hts favorite theory—one which had been the subject of discussion the last time he and Fearn had met at the club.

"Take myself for instance," he said. "Suppose I were a criminal —one of the swell mob—what could be easier than for me to mount my machine, sail gaily away to France, descending where I knew fresh supplies awaited me, and continuing my journey to some unlikely spot. I know of a dozen places in Spain where the aeroplane could be hidden."

The young man was eyeing him with a glum and dubious expression.

"I admit," Golbeater went on, with an easy wave of his cigared hand, "that I am exceptionally placed; but really in any case it would only have been a matter of prearrangement: elaborate and painstaking preparation which any criminal could take. It is open to him to follow the same course. But what do we find? A man systematically robs his employer, and all the time he is deluding himself with the belief that a miracle will happen, which will allow him to make good his defalcations. Instead of recognizing the inevitable, he dreams of luck; instead of methodically planning his departure, he employs all his organizing power in hiding today the offense of yesterday."

He waited for the confession he had encouraged. He was aware that Fearn dabbled on the Stock Exchange; that he was in the habit of frequenting racecourses.

"H'm," said Fearn. His lean brown face twisted into a momentary grimace.

"It's a pretty good thing," he said, "that you aren't on the lawless side, isn't it? I suppose you aren't?"

Now Felix O'Hara Golbeater was a man very shrewd in the subtleties of human nature and very wise in the reading of portents. He knew the truth which is spoken with a smile, and may be taken either as an exhibition of humor or a deadly accusation, and in the question put to him with quizzical good humor he recognized his finish.

The young man was watching him eagerly, his mind filled with vague apprehensions, so vague and so indefinite that he had spent four hours walking up and down the street in which Golbeater's offices were before he had screwed himself up to the interview.

The lawyer laughed. "It would be rather awkward for you if I were," he said, "since I have at this moment some sixty thousand pounds of your fiancée's money in my possession."

"I thought it was at the bank," said the other quickly. The other shrugged his shoulders. "So it is," he said, "but none the less it is in my possession. The magic words, 'Felix O'Hara Golbeater,' inscribed in the south-east corner of a check would place the money in my hands."

"Oh!" said Fearn.

He made no attempt to disguise his relief.

He got up from his chair, a somewhat gauche young man, as all transparently honest young men are, and spoke the thought which was uppermost in his mind. "I don't care two cents about Hilda's money," he said abruptly. "I've enough to live on, but—for her sake, of course—one has to be careful."

"Oh, you're being careful all right," said Golbeater, the corners of his mouth twitching, though the beard hid the fact from his visitor; "you had better put a detective on the bank to see that I don't draw the money and bolt."

"I have," blurted the young man in some confusion; "at least—well, people say things, d'ye know—there was a lot of talk about that Meredith legacy case—really, Golbeater, you didn't come well out of that."

"I paid the money," said Golbeater cheerfully, "if that's what you mean."

He walked to the door and opened it. "I hope you wont get wet," he said politely.

Fearn could only mutter an incoherent commonplace and go stumbling and groping down the dark stairs into the street. Golbeater stepped into an adjoining room, closing the door behind him. There was no light here, and from the window he could observe the other's movements. He half expected Fearn to be joined by a companion, but the hesitation he showed when he reached the street indicated that he had no engagement and expected to meet nobody.

Golbeater returned to the inner office. He wasted no time in speculation. He knew that the game was up. From an inner drawer in his safe he took a memorandum, and glanced down it.

Twelve months before, an eccentric Frenchman, who had occupied a little country house in Wiltshire, had died, and the property had come into the market; not, curiously enough, into the English market, because its late owner had been the last of a line of French exiles who had made their home in England since the days of the Revolution. The heirs, having no desire to continue residence in a land which had no associations for them, had placed the sale of the property in the hands of a firm of French notaries.

Golbeater, a perfect French scholar and an earnest student of the Parisian papers, came to know of the impending sale. He had purchased it through a succession of agents. It had been refurnished from Paris. The two servants who controlled the tiny ménage had been hired and were paid from Paris, and neither of these staid servitors, who received remittances and letters

bearing the Parisian postmark, associated M. Alphonse Didet, the employer they had never seen, with the London solicitor.

Nor did the good people of Letherhampton, the village adjoining the property, trouble their heads overmuch about the change of proprietorship. One "Frenchie" was very much like another; they had grown up accustomed to the eccentricities of the) exiled aristocrats, and regarded them with the same indifference which they applied to the other objects of the landscape, and with that contempt which the bucolic mind reserves for the ignorant fellows who do not speak its language.

Also there was in the neighborhood of Whitstable a little bungalow, simply furnished, whither Golbeater was in the habit of making week-end excursions. Most important and most valuable of its contents was a motor cycle; and in the cloakroom of a London terminus were two trunks, old and battered, covered with the labels of foreign places and the picturesque advertisements of foreign hotels. Felix O'Hara Golbeater was very thorough in his methods. But then he had the advantage of others' experiences; he had seen the haphazard criminal, and had profited by the lesson to be found in the untimely end which rewards carelessness in flight.

He walked to the fireplace, struck a match, and burnt the memorandum to ashes. There was nothing else to burn, for his was the practice of clearing up as he went along. From the safe he took a thick package, opened it, and revealed a tightly compressed wad of banknotes, English and French. They represented the greater part of sixty thousand pounds, which, if every man and woman had their own, should have been at the bankers of Miss Hilda Harringay.

The whole of the sixty thousand was not there, because there were other deficiencies which had claimed more urgent and pressing settlement.

He pulled on a raincoat swiftly, put out the light, artistically left a half-finished letter in the open drawer of his desk, and went out. The advantage of being a bachelor occurred to him as the theatre train pulled out of Charing Cross Station. He had nothing to trouble his conscience: he was the ideal defaulter.

From Sevenoaks Station he made his way on foot along the two-mile road which led to the hangar. He spent the night in the shed reading by the light of a portable electric light. Long before dawn he had changed into his mechanic's kit, leaving his everyday working clothes neatly folded in a locker.

It was a perfect day for a flight, and at five in the morning, with the assistance of two laborers on their way to work, he started the aeroplane and rose easily over the sleeping town. It was his good fortune that there was no wind, more fortunate still that there was a mist on the sea. He had headed for Whitstable, and when he heard the waters washing beneath him in the darkness, he came down and found the shore; he recognized a coast-guard station and went on for a mile, keeping touch with the beach.

The newspapers which published an account of the aeroplane tragedy described how the machine was found floating upside down two miles from shore: they described the search by coastguards and police for the body of the unfortunate Felix O'Hara Golbeater, who in an endeavor to reach his bungalow had evidently got lost in the mist and was drowned. They observed in guarded language that he was making for the French coast and with good reason.

But none of them described how Felix O'Hara Golbeater had set his planes at a sky-climbing angle when only a few feet from the water—and from the water's edge by the same token and had dropped into the sea with close on sixty thousand pounds in the waterproof pocket of his overalls.

Nor how, with surprising swiftness, he had reached the isolated little bungalow on the shore, had stripped his wet things on the verandah, had entered, changed, and reappeared to make his sodden mechanic's kit into a portable bundle: nor how he had placed this in a specially weighted bag and dropped it down a well at the back of the house. Nor how, with incredible rapidity, he had removed his beard and his eyebrows with such tidiness of operation that not so much as a single hair was ever found by the police.

None of these things were described, for the simple reason that they were not known, and there was no reporter sufficiently imaginative to picture them. In the early hours of the morning, a clean-shaven, young- looking motor cyclist, goggled and clad in a shapeless mackintosh kit, went spinning back to London, stopping only in such towns and at such hostelries as motor cyclists most frequent. He reached London after nightfall. His motor cycle he left at a garage, together with his wet waterproofs. He had considered a more elaborate scheme for disposing of them, but he did not regard it as necessary, nor was it.

Felix O'Hara Golbeater had ceased to be: he was as dead as though indeed he lay swaying to and fro on the floor of the ocean.

M. Alphonse Didet, from the porter of the Baggage Department, demanded in French good, and in broken English not quite so good, the restoration of his two trunks.

As for Letherhampton, the expected Frenchman had arrived or returned (they were rather vague as to whether or not he had already stayed at the château), and it served as a "fill" to conversations, heavily charged with agricultural problems and the iniquities of Welsh statesmanship.

In the meantime, London, with breathless interest, discussed the story of Felix O'Hara. Scotland Yard conducted a swift examination of Mr. Golbeater's Bloomsbury offices, and of Mr. Golbeater's Kensington flat, and of Mr. Golbeater's banking account, but though they found many things which interested them they did not discover any money.

A white-faced girl, accompanied by a lean and homely young man, interviewed the detective in charge of the case.

"Our theory," said the policeman impressively, "is that in endeavoring to effect an escape to the French coast he met with a fatal accident. I think he is dead."

"I don't," said the young man.

The detective thought he was a fool, but considered it inexpedient to say so.

"I'm sure he's alive," said Fearn vigorously. "I tell you he's too diabolically clever. If he wanted to leave England, why should he not have gone by last night's mail-boat There was nothing to prevent him."

"I thought you employed private detectives to watch the boats?"

The young man blushed

"Yes," he confessed; "I had forgotten that."

"We'll circularize all the stations," the detective went on, "but I must confess that I do not expect to find him."

To the credit of the police it must be said that they went to work in no half-hearted fashion. The bungalow at Whitstable was searched from end to end without result; there was no trace of him; even the mirror at which Golbeater had shaved was thick with dust; this had been one of the first articles of furniture the detective had examined.

The ground about had been searched as systematically, but it had been a wet day when the fugitive had departed, and moreover he had carried his motor cycle at some discomfort to himself until he had reached the road.

His flat gave no indication of his whereabouts. The half-finished letter rather supported the theory which the police had formed that he had had no intention of making his hurried exit.

Fortunately the case was sufficiently interesting to the French journals to enable Felix O'Hara Golbeater to acquire a working knowledge of what was going on. Punctually every morning there arrived at his château Le Petit Parisien and Le Matin. He did not patronize English papers: he was much too clever for that. In the enterprising columns of the Matin he discovered something about himself: all that he wanted to know, and that all, most satisfactory.

He settled down to the comfortable life of his country house. He had planned the future with an eye to detail. He gave himself six months in this beautiful little prison of his; at the end of that time, he would, by an assiduous correspondence tactfully and scientifically directed, establish his identity as M. Alphonse Didet beyond any fear of identification. At the end of six months he would go away, to France perhaps, by excursion, or more elaborately, by sailing yacht.

For the moment he gave himself over to the cultivation of his roses, to the study of astronomy, to which the late owner's tiny observatory invited him, to the indictment of a voluminous correspondence with several learned societies situated in France.

Now there was at Letherhampton in those days a police superintendent who was something of a student; there were unkindly people who expressed the opinion that his studies did not embrace one necessary to him in his profession—the study of criminology.

Superintendent Grayson was a self-made man and a self-educated man. He was the sort of individual who patronizes Home Correspondence Schools, and, by a modest outlay and an enormous capacity for absorbing in a parrot- like fashion certain facts obscure to the average individual, he had become in turn an advertising expert, a civil engineer of passable merit, a journalist, and a French and Spanish scholar. His French was of the variety which is best understood in England, preferably by the professors of the Home Correspondence Schools, but of this fact the superintendent lived in blissful ignorance, and he yearned for an opportunity of experimenting upon a real Frenchman.

Before the arrival of M. Alphonse Didet he had called many times at the château and had spoken in their native language with the two servants who were established there. Being poor ignorant menials, they did not, of course, understand the classic language he spoke, and he dismissed his uncomprehending victims as being provincial, though as a matter of fact they were Parisian born and bred.

With M. Alphonse on the scene, Superintendent Grayson searched round for an excuse to call, in the same helpless fashion that the amateur picture-hanger looks round for the hammer at the critical moment. The ordinary sources of inspiration were absent. M. Didet, being a French subject could not be summoned to a jury, he paid his rates duly, he had never run any person down in his motor car, and, indeed, did not possess one.

The inspector was in despair of ever finding an opportunity when an unfortunate member of the constabulary was badly injured in the execution of his duty, and the county started a subscription for the man, with the permission of the Chief Constable. Inspector Grayson was entrusted with the collection of local offerings.

Thus it was he came to the Château Blanche.

M. Alphonse Didet watched the burly figure arriving, booted and spurred, frogged across the chest, and beribboned, as a superintendent with some army experience should be, and tapped his teeth with his pen speculatively. He opened a drawer of his desk and took out his revolver. It was loaded. He threw open the chamber and extracted the cartridges, throwing them, an untidy handful, into the wastepaper basket. Because if this meant arrest, he was not quite sure what he would do, but he was absolutely certain that he would not be hanged.

Paul, the elderly butler, announced the visitor. "Let him come in," said M. Alphonse, and posed easily in the big arm-chair, a scientific work on his knee, his big spectacles perched artistically askew on his nose. He looked up under raised eyebrows as the officer entered, rose, and with true French courtesy offered him a seat.

Clearing his throat, the superintendent began in French. He wished Monsieur good-morning; he was desolated to disturb the professor learned at his studies, but hélas! an accident terrible had befallen a gend'arme brave of the force municipal. (It was the nearest the good man could get to county constabulary, and it served.)

The other listened and understood, breathing steadily through his nose, long, long sighs of relief, and feeling an extraordinary shakiness of knee, a sensation he had never thought to experience.

He too was desolated. What could he do?

The superintendent took from his pocket a folded sheet of manuscript. He explained in his French the purport of the appeal which headed it, giving the ancestry and the social position of the great names which offered their patronage. Huge sprawling names they were, monstrously indistinct save in the money column where prudence and self-preservation had advised that the figures of the donations should be unmistakable.

What a relief! Alphonse Didet squared his shoulders and filled his lungs with the air of freedom and respectability.

Very gaily within, though outwardly sedate and still the French professor with spectacles askew, he stepped to his desk. What should he give? "How much are a hundred francs?" he asked over his shoulder.

"Four pounds," said the inspector proudly.

So M. Alphonse Didet signed his name, put four pounds carefully in the column allotted for the purpose, took a hundred franc note from his drawer, and handed it with the subscription list to the inspector.

There was some polite bowing and complimentary sentiments murmured on both sides; the superintendent took his departure, and M. Alphonse Didet watched him down the path with every sense of satisfaction and pleasure.

That night when he was sleeping the sleep of the just, two men from Scotland Yard entered his room and arrested him in bed. Yes, they arrested this most clever of criminals because on the subscription list he had signed "Felix O'Hara Golbeater" in a hand which was bold and exuberant.

7. RED BEARD

One of his most jealously guarded secrets should have perished when the safety- catch of John Mildred's Browning pistol caught in a loose strand of thread as he was pulling his gun. How that thread came to be there may be explained in technical language by Mildred's housekeeper, who kept his clothes in repair.

The thread was stout, but broke at the second jerk, and the mischief was done. At the first tug a loop had formed about the catch and had pulled it to safety, and when John threw his gun at Red Beard nothing happened. He saw the mischief and thumbed down the catch, but by this time the visitor had fired three times, shattering the aorta arch and the pulmonary artery.

John, his hands widespread on the table, stared at his murderer, and in his last moment of life God gave him vision.

"I'm glad... didn't shoot," coughed John Mildred thickly, and smiled.

Then he sat down carefully in his writing-chair and as carefully died. I found him reclining over the table, his head on his arms, and 'phoned Central Office.

Evidence produced: One Browning pistol unfired, with loop of thread jammed between safety-catch and chamber; one broken thread in hip pocket; one weeping, hysterical housekeeper who admitted Red Beard at 10:15 p.m., and had heard the shots and "Mr. Mildred's last words, poor gentleman," and had subsequently been pushed aside by Red Beard. Evidence of unexploded cartridges in Mildred's faithless pistol, and three shells from the murderer's gun—and Mildred. He was killed by three shots from a Holt automatic 45 calibre.

Brinkhorn, Deputy Chief of the Department, came along with me to conduct the examination, and he kept the real police at bay in the hall below until we had finished; this by virtue of our special warrants and the fact that Brinkhorn is all sorts of a great white chief, a deputy sheriff, a puller of strings, and what not.

"Rum how old Mildred hated people with whiskers," I said, remembering John's eccentricity. "I'll bet it was the humiliation of being shot out by Red Beard that hurt him most."

"You can't choose your murderer in these times," said Brinkhorn, always the philosopher; "help me lay him on the sofa, I want to search his pockets."

But I suggested leaving him until the real police came—they are frantically jealous folk, and Brinkhorn agreed.

John had a little smile on his white face when we, having admitted the impatient coppers, put him down. It was as though he had lived long enough to see a capital joke in circumstances which arranged his dissolution.

The police made notes and would have collected his papers and probably would have sealed up the room also, but Brinkhorn stopped them, 'phoned the Chief Commissioner, and secured endorsement of the divine right of Military Intelligence to interfere. Then we bundled the cops out of the room, lit our pipes, took off our coats, and got busy. It was a warm room, being centrally heated. We opened the drawers systematically, taking the locked drawers first.

John was one of those card-index maniacs, who flourish even in departments like ours. If you wanted to discover his trouble you turned up "T" so to speak. As a matter of fact, we knew most of his secrets, but not the cause of his feud with the red-bearded man. We hoped to find it here. He had told us, of course, little bits about Red Whiskers, but had so punctuated his recital with those deep, choking chuckles of his, that we never really knew how much there was in it.

"The point is," said Brinkhorn, sitting down suddenly in the chair from which we had just removed the dead man (you cease to be sentimental after your tenth violent death), "the point is, was old man Mildred pulling our legs when he told us that he was being threatened?"

I shook my head.

"I have seen the letters," said I; "they followed him about all over the shop. They used to be waiting for him at the club. Even when he went on secret missions, which nobody but you and I knew about, he would find them waiting for him at his hotel, addressed to him in his assumed name. They were always signed 'Red Beard,' and always telling him that his time was near at hand."

I shall always remember Brinkhorn as he sat, his chin resting on his hand, his elbow on the table, his eager, handsome face momentarily clouded.

"He never showed them to me," he said, half to himself; "that is curious, because I was one of his best pals. I am not saying," he said, hastily apologetic, "that you didn't know him better in many ways than I, and it is only natural that you should, because you were working together, and most

of the coups he pulled off during the war were as much to your credit as to his."

"In some cases more to his than mine, in some cases more to mine than his," said I. "He deserves the whole credit for catching von Klotz, the woman, Minnie Lauer, and the Pfeifer gang, whilst I think that pretty well all the credit for catching Schmidt, da Silver, and Martinique go to me."

That may sound immodest, but four years of strain and danger and sleepless anxiety have destroyed most of my affectations, even the pose of modesty.

Brinkhorn nodded.

"I think we had better go through the record of the men he pinched," he said; "this is obviously a vendetta, and one of the relatives of the gentleman who 'marched with a firm step to the gallows' as the newspapers say, is behind this affair. Afterwards we will talk to the housekeeper lady if she has quite recovered. By the way," he said suddenly, "what happened to that card that was on the floor when we came in!"

There certainly had been a card, one of those large index cards on which Mildred was wont to enter data, and it had assuredly been lying-midway between the door and the desk when we came into the room. It was not there now.

"I picked it up," I said, "and put it on the desk."

Brinkhorn turned over the papers, but there was no card. "Whereupon he cursed all interfering policemen, and 'phoned the nearest station, but without success. The two active and intelligent officers of the law who had made a superficial search of the desk, had taken nothing away with them. I looked at Brinkhorn and Brinkhorn looked at me.

"It is strange," he said, and we dropped the subject temporarily.

There was no difficulty at all in unearthing the record of the men whom Mildred had hunted to death. We found the index number under "E"—"Espionage, convictions for," and we took their dossiers out of the deep twin cabinet beneath the bookcase. There they were, the whole crowd of them, and it pleased me to see how he had marked my cases, or rather those in which I played a more prominent part than he, with a big "T" for Templey, which is my name.

We carried them to the desk under the light, and went through them carefully. Willie von Klotz, Hans and Johanna Pfeifer, the van Lauer woman, Bissing, Prensa, Schumacher—they were all there.

"Who was Goertz?" asked Brinkhorn suddenly. "I don't seem to remember that case."

"You were in France at the time," I said, "but it was an ordinary typical case of espionage. Mildred shadowed him for a week before he arrested him at Plymouth. He was shot in the Tower."

Brinkhorn read through the closely written precis in silence, his head in his hands.

"Listen to this," he said.

"'Von Goertz is an officer of the Prussian Hussars. He speaks English and French fluently. In appearance he is a fine-looking fellow, tall and well made. He has a good forehead, blue eyes, and'—" Brinkhorn paused and looked up.—"'A striking red beard!'"

"H'm," said I, "this is not our Red Beard at any rate, for Goertz was shot and Mildred saw the execution."

"You are sure of this?"

"Absolutely," said I. "I can give you the name of the Provost Marshal who superintended the business."

"There is no chance of course, of his having got away or having escaped death?" mused Brinkhorn.

I smiled.

"Men who are shot at twelve paces with soft-nosed bullets do not, as a rule, escape death," said I dryly.

Brinkhorn looked across to the sofa where Mildred lay.

"Then it wasn't Goertz," he said; "let us have the lady up."

Mrs. Cummins, the housekeeper, had reached the feeble and helpless condition of hysteria, when even the sight of Mildred's body would not unduly distress her, but to make absolutely sure, Brinkhorn and I pushed the sofa into the dressing- room and shut the door.

We got her seated, and I put her through a mild cross-examination.

At 9:30, Mr. Mildred being out (so her story went), there came a ring at the front door, and, thinking it was her employer, she opened it to discover a man on the doorstep. It was snowing heavily, a particularly wild night, and there was only a dim electric light in the doorway and that covered by an art- shade, so that she had the vaguest impression as to the visitor's appearance.

"Was he tall?" I asked.

"Middle size, if anything. He wore a long fur-lined overcoat and a soft hat, and he had gloves—big furry gloves on his hands."

She was emphatic as to the red beard which flowed over the front of his coat and glistened with melting snow. Equally sure she was that that part of his face as was visible was "as white as death."

He asked if Mr. Mildred was in, and when she said No, he said he would wait. She hesitated, but he was urgent, speaking in a gruff voice which somehow did not seem to her to be natural.

Mr. Mildred had so many strange visitors, she said in extenuation (and this we understood perfectly well), that she did not like to deny him, and led the way up to Mildred's room, switching on the table-lamp and bringing forward an arm- chair where he might sit. Happily her perturbation of mind was set at rest a few moments later, when she heard Mildred's key in the lock of the front door, and went to meet him with the information that a gentleman had called.

"And he expected him, sir," said the trembling housekeeper. "When I told him a gentleman was waiting, he said, smiling quite pleasant, 'Has he got a red beard?'"

"And you said 'Yes,'" said Brinkhorn, nodding. "Did he say anything more to you?"

"Nothing more, sir. I heard him go into his room, and then I thought I would go upstairs to find if he wanted anything—he usually had a cup of tea. I was outside the door when I heard voices, then three shots"—her lips trembled. "I heard Mr. Mildred say, 'I am glad I didn't shoot you,' and for a bit I thought it was all right. I was very frightened, sir. I was going downstairs when the door was flung open and the red-bearded gentleman dashed down past me. Then I telephoned to Mr. Templey at his club—Mr. Mildred told me I was always to telephone to Mr. Templey in case of emergency, and that is all I know, sir."

"You heard nothing beside the shots and Mr. Mildred saving, 'I am glad I didn't shoot you'?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Has the red-bearded gentleman been here before?"

"No, sir."

"Have you ever been warned not to admit the red-bearded man?"

"No, sir."

Again she was hesitant.

"Mr. Mildred did say," she said, "that he was expecting a funny visitor one of these days, and he asked me how tall I was."

"That's a rum question to ask you," smiled Brinkhorn.

"I thought it was, sir, but you know Mr. Mildred would have his little joke."

Brinkhorn lifted his head.

"There's the bell, Mrs. Cummins. I think you will find it is the police ambulance. I shall leave one of my men here tonight. Nothing must be dusted or tidied or in any way touched in this room until I give you permission."

We accompanied Mildred's body and saw him put away in the hospital mortuary, then I accepted Brinkhorn's invitation to go home with him to supper.

"If your wife doesn't object to a visit at this hour," I said.

"I have just telephoned to her," said Brinkhorn, "and she will be glad to see you."

(One of the advantages of marrying a widow, thought I, as the taxi drove slowly across Westminster Bridge in a perfect blizzard, is that she is accustomed to the eccentricities of mankind and nothing surprises her, even the apparition of her husband arriving home with a guest at midnight.) Great minds think alike, and Brinkhorn must have had a telepathic wave.

"God has given me a very intelligent wife," he said, with a happy little laugh. "I would like to bet if we gave her all the facts of the case she would find a solution to the mystery of Red Beard. How she hates the Huns, poor girl!"

The story of Mrs. Brinkhorn was known to me. She had been the wife of a Canadian officer, and was on her way to England, accompanied by her baby boy, to join her husband. Her voyage coincided with the big gas attack in the Ypres salient, and her husband was killed on the very day that U.97 had torpedoed a liner in which she was traveling. She and a few passengers who were landed on the Irish coast were the only survivors. Undoubtedly she hated the Hun.

"The case is a pretty simple one," Brinkhorn went back to our dead friend. "Mildred is, or was, a clever servant of the Department of Justice, lent by Washington to our Counter-Espionage Bureau. In the course of the four years he brings to justice a large number of German agents, amongst them von Goertz, whose brother determines to be revenged upon the slayer of his relative. Being a Hun, and totally ignorant of the Anglo-Saxon temperament, he thinks he will terrorize Mildred by writing threatening letters, the terrorization consisting not so much in the letters and their contents, but lying in the fact that this unknown avenger is able to demonstrate his knowledge of Mildred's movements.

"He awaits a favorable opportunity, gains admission to Mildred's room, probably ransacks his bureau—by the way we must find out what happened to that card—and shoots our pal."

"How do you account for Mildred's curious speech?" I asked.

"About being glad he didn't shoot him? Yes, that's rather quaint! Have you any theory?"

I made no reply.

"Of course it may be this," Brinkhorn went on, "that Mildred preferred that his murderer should endure the suspense of a trial."

"That wasn't Mildred's way," said I. "There wasn't a kinder-hearted man in the world than John."

"Then what do you think?"

"I'll tell you one of these days," said I, as the cab drew up before the house in Bryanston Square where Brinkhorn lived.

Mrs. Brinkhorn was a truly remarkable woman. She showed neither annoyance nor impatience with her husband for bringing a guest to the house at that hour, and had a nice little supper waiting for us. I had met her once before, but had never been so struck by her ethereal beauty. She wore

a negligee costume of deep blue chiffon velvet. It was a sort of costume which to my ignorant eyes might have either been a dressing-gown or a dress, but I can only recall an impression of stateliness which was particularly pleasing.

"The telephone awoke Frank," she said with a smile; "he wants to come down to say goodnight."

"Have him down," smiled Brinkhorn.

When the sleepy little fellow came toddling into the room, it was clear to me that Brinkhorn loved the child as much as if it was his own. He pushed him toward me for my admiration. He was a plump, sturdy little chap, and Brinkhorn laughed as I pulled up the leg of his pyjama.

"A sturdy boy," said I, patting his calves.

Mrs. Brinkhorn smiled faintly and put out her hand to the boy.

"Come along, Frank dear; you must go back to bed," she said.

She rejoined us a few minutes later, and by this time we were deep in the discussion of Mildred's end.

She listened without interruption until Brinkhorn turned to her.

"I was saying, my dear," said he, "that if we could leave this case in your hands, we would be pretty certain to find Mildred's murderer."

"You have a very great opinion of my genius," she said.

"And very rightly," said Brinkhorn warmly. "Now I am going to tell you, Templey, what I have never told anyone else. I have had a great deal of success in this war, and half of it is due to my wife. She has been my ghost and has done a lot of the work I have got credit for. Yes, you have, dear," he said, when she laughingly protested; "I rely upon your judgment absolutely."

"Mr. Templey is shocked," she smiled; "he thinks you have been betraying terrible Government secrets to me."

"It takes a great deal to shock me, Mrs. Brinkhorn," said I, "and I must confess that I am tremendously interested in what your husband says. Although he is not aware of the fact, I have taken up Mildred's murder, and intend applying myself single-handed to tracking down Mr. Red Beard, and I believe you can be of the greatest assistance to me."

They both stared at me.

"You think I am impertinent," said I, "and it certainly does sound as though I was taking advantage of your confidence and hospitality, but there are points in this case which your husband has overlooked, and which I feel sure I could, with your assistance, elucidate. Mysteries which could be cleared up—"

"Including the mystery of the disappearing index card?" interrupted Brinkhorn.

"Even that," said I.

"I should be glad to help you, said the girl—I judged her to be about twenty-seven. "When would you like to call me into consultation?" she asked, with quiet laughter in her eyes.

"There's a challenge for you," mocked Brinkhorn.

"If it were not so late, I should say—now!" said I.

Brinkhorn roared with laughter.

"I will go up and hold the boy's hand until he goes to sleep," he said. "How long is this consultation going to last?"

"Ten minutes," I suggested.

Brinkhorn exchanged amused glances with his wife.

"In ten minutes, when I come back, you shall have the whole mystery cleared up. Mildred's assailant shall be in the hands of justice."

"I won't promise that," said I, "but I promise that I shall know who committed the murder."

He paused at the door.

"Don't forget the missing card," he said.

"That is the first mystery which shall be unraveled," said I, and the door clicked behind him.

For a second or so we looked at one another, and then the laughter died out of her eyes.

"Now, Mr. Templey?" she asked quietly.

"Are you left-handed, Mrs. Brinkhorn?" I asked.

"No. Why?" She colored slightly.

"I will tell you in a moment," said I, and putting my hand in my inside jacket pocket I took out a card and laid it on the table. "We will settle the question of the missing card straight away," I said. "I picked it up from the floor and put it in my pocket. Will you read it?"

She took it in her hand and her eyebrows rose.

"Why, this is all about me," she said.

"I think you know," I said, "that Mr. Mildred had a passion for collecting data about his cases. Let me read this to you:

"'Mary Mabel Tensthall. Born New Jersey 1891. Married George O. Fenton, citizen U.S.A. Detroit 1912. One son. Lived Canada. Husband killed Ypres salient, April 1915 (1st Canadians). Mary Mabel and her child on way to meet her husband, April 1915 in S.S. Calgary. Mined or torpedoed off the Fastnets with all hands and passengers except few survivors brought to Queenstown. Note, they were third class.'—"

Underneath was written:

"'M.M.T. booked from St. Paul (local sipping office) First-class saloon tickets.'—"

"I and my boy were two of the survivors," she said.

"Read underneath, Mrs. Brinkhorn; you will see these words: 'M.M.T. booked from St. Paul (local shipping office) First-class saloon tickets.'—"

"But that proves what I say. I traveled first class."

"No first-class passengers were saved," said I.

"That is a mistake," she replied quietly. "Mr. Mildred got things all wrong."

"Now I will read you a little memorandum that I took myself this evening about a man named von Goertz, who was shot in the Tower of London in the early part of 1915.

"'Von Goertz is supposed to have been working with his wife and child.'—"

"Well?" asked Mrs. Brinkhorn.

"Here is another little item I jotted down from Mildred's description. It was from the body marks of von Goertz:

"'Mole right shoulder. Large orange-colored birth-mark on inside of left calf."

"Well?" said Mrs. Brinkhorn again.

"Your boy has that mark too, Mrs. Brinkhorn," I said.

There was a long silence then:

"And now," I asked, "will you please show me your right hand."

She made no movement.

"You served me tonight with your left. That is why I asked you if you were left-handed. You passed the bread with your left hand. You poured out the wine for me with your left hand. "Will you please let me see your right?"

"What an absurd request!" she said, but she did not show me.

"When a Browning pistol is fired," said I, "there is an escape of gas from the chamber, which leaves a black patch on the hand between the finger and thumb. Will you show me your right hand?"

There was a silence.

"No, I will not," she said.

"Then I will tell you the rest of the story," said I. "You were in Ireland when your husband was killed. You were at Queenstown when the survivors came in. To my knowledge, they were searching for the wife of von Goertz, and it was pretty well known that Mrs. Von Goertz—"

"The Baroness von Goertz," she corrected.

"I beg your pardon," said I—"was in Ireland. You had sworn to yourself to avenge the death of your husband, and the torpedoing of the Calgary gave you your opportunity. Posing as the wife of Captain Fenton, you made your way to London, sought out Brinkhorn, who fell in love with you. You married him that you might get deeper into the secrets of his Bureau. It was because he trusted you and confided in you that you know all the movements of Mildred, which were often known only to myself and your husband. It was you, and you alone, who shot him, and he recognized you just before his death and said he was glad he had not shot you."

She was as white as a sheet and sat bolt upright, her hands folded in her lap.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

It was the only question I could not answer. I had laid my watch on the table when Brinkhorn went out, and six minutes had already passed.

"You may think that I am trying to escape you," she said, "and that I am lying to save my life." There was a thrilling sincerity in her voice, and I did not doubt her. "I loved my husband. I adored him. To me he was a god. We German women have a capacity for adoration which you will never understand. You will understand less, and believe me less, when I tell you that I love Frank Brinkhorn. Will you give me until twelve o'clock tomorrow to decide?"

I nodded.

Brinkhorn came in a few minutes later.

"Well," he said jovially, "have you made your great discovery?"

I laughed.

"Mrs. Brinkhorn has been very helpful," I said, rising to go.

"Aren't you going to tell me?" he said, in mock disgust.

"Tomorrow," said I.

He looked at me sharply.

"What an officious devil you are, Templey!" said he; "and I didn't realize that you knew I had resigned from the Department."

"Resigned from the Department?" It was my turn to be surprised. "When did this happen?"

"Today," said he. "But for Mildred's death, Grace and I would be leaving for South America on Saturday. I have a ranch in the Argentine, and I want to get the bugs and cobwebs of war out of my brain."

I looked at Mrs. Brinkhorn, and there was an appeal in her eyes which I have never seen before, and I hope I shall never see again.

"Then," said I, with a gaiety which I did not feel, "I will extend your time, madam, until Saturday midnight."

I do not know whether she ever told Brinkhorn. I had a wire from him last week, saying that he didn't intend returning to England, and asking me to settle his bills, and the last word in the wire was "Thanks."

I found I had to settle Mrs. Brinkhorn's bills as well, and there was one from Clarkson for spirit gum and red crepe hair. I paid it without batting a lid. After all, Mildred, standing on the border-line of eternity, was glad he had not killed her, and Mildred was a pal of mine, and his implied wishes were sacred. Still, I thought it was funny that I should have to pay for the Bed Beard!

8. BULFOX ASLEEP

People say that Bulfox was a fool. Only, like many another man, he stopped being a fool when he married.

The marriage was all wrong, I grant you. It was wrong from the point of view of intellectual disparity, it was wrong because Lady Eva Thonsen was very beautiful and he was very plain, it was wrong because he was a rich American who married a poor English peeress—I use the word "peeress" wrongly, because, of course, Lady Eva Thonsen wasn't really a peeress, but a younger daughter of an impecunious Irish earl.

Especially wrong was this inversion of a conventional situation. We could not sneer at Eva Thonsen as we should have sneered at her elder brother had he contracted an alliance with an American heiress, and the humorous papers had an aggrieved and proper sense of disappointment.

Bulfox had had a father with large and tenacious hands: his motto was an adaptation of the singularly English maxim, "What we have, we'll hold." He Americanized it to the extent of adding, "What I haven't, I'll have."

Bulfox was a fool anyway, you remark. Say it again and I'll heave the ink-bottle at you.

You don't know that he was not a fool because you've only a garbled version of the affair.

He was an only son. Old man Bulfox rode him for a tender-mouth. Gave him all the breakfast foods that were advertised—Flaked Oats for phosphates, Skinned Barley for gray matter, Malt for brawn, and Dr. Olebuck's Boy Booster—I forget the real name of the muck—for stamina.

You see, the boy's mother had died of t.b.c., and the old man was in a blue funk lest the boy developed any symptom of the same disease. In those days tuberculosis was supposed to be as much hereditary as bad temper. He had the kid nursed on a farm in what he called Gard's own country, in Gard's fresh and beautiful air, surrounded by such of Gard's natural phenomena as would be calculated to bring the squalling son of a Pittsburgh iron-master to maturity.

His approval of Providence was a beautiful and a touching thing.

So young Bulfox had a pleasant path to manhood, and passed via a succession of nursery governesses and tutors to a condition where he could read the plays of Molière and play a reasonable game of golf.

Now, the last of these tutors was in every way the most vital and potent influence that had ever come into Percy Bulfox's life. I don't know where the old man picked him up. Unkind folks say that he salvaged him from the wrong end of the hunger-line. His name was Clarence. I am not putting this on to you as a fairy tale, though it sounds like it; for he was a Clarence by name, by nature, and by appearance.

A weed of a young man with a bulgy head and a weak chin and a feather-stitch of a moustache.

Bulfox, who never did a kind action in his life that didn't eventually pay dividends, discovered in Clarence a man of erudition and tone. Clarence knew Lord H—and Countess 0—; he had spoken to the King of England or the King of England had spoken to him. It is immaterial. Possibly he was standing in the way of the King's 90 Mercedes and the King—who, I understand, was a seafaring man at that time —had twenty-twoed him. It is, as I say, immaterial, and is certainly not a point to go to war about.

Clarence was acquainted with Botany, Astronomy, Art, Science, Chemistry, Eugenics, Psychology, Literature, and Etiquette. He had a curious little cockney twang and sounded the 'h'" in "honor." I believe that the secondary schools and polytechnics of England turn out thousands of Clarences per annum, but the majority of them steer clear of the hunger- line, because the majority keep away from Chicago.

I have no word to say against Clarence. He was the most wholesome influence in young Bulfox's life. If he imparted to his pupils the habit of making "a" sound like "i," he taught him something which is not included in the curriculum of the average college—a rigid chivalry, an austere appreciation of duty, and a sense of honor which most gentlemen are born with, which some have kicked into them by the born-rights, and others picked up from observing the kicks and profiting thereby.

Clarence, with his romances and his "h's" everlastingly playing tag, instituted the bushido spirit into Percy; made him a dear little Samurai —if you can imagine a Samurai who says "I siy, ole feller"—and prepared him, unconsciously, for the great moment of his life.

When Percy was twenty-two, Papa Bulfox took him to Europe, and Clarence, who had preceded them by a year with a dressing-case full of good money—old Bulfox was a spendthrift on all matters nearly affecting his son—met them in London and, true to a long-standing promise, introduced the old man to Countess 0—, who proved to be Countess Oharahn, the wife of the Irish peer before mentioned, and the mother of Lady Eva Thonsen.

I do not hazard a guess how Clarence had come to be acquainted with these high-tone folk. Some people say that the Oharahns were poor enough to know anybody except their servants, but the most likely explanation is that these good souls had been interested in the Democratic Educational Movement, of which Clarence was the rare and refreshing fruit.

Anyway, the Bulfox's were installed in the visiting list of Countess Oharahn, and that is how the youngster came to meet Lady Eva.

A straight, slender girl, with all the fire and tenderness of her Irish ancestry in her face, all the grace and beauty of line which her English grandmother had grafted to the mould. She was, I think, the most beautiful creature I have ever seen.

You may accuse me of being wise after the event, but I swear that I saw at that first meeting a hint of tragedy in her eyes, a strained, hunted look that came furtively at odd moments and vanished with her quick smile.

Bulfox took me to one of the Countess's shabby little "At Home's," and that is how I came to meet my lady. Percy at this time was a curious Thing. le was neither good American nor passable English. He was shy, diffident, awkward; ready to blush for the slightest reason, gauche to a painful degree, yet withal altogether charming.

He was good-looking too, in a fresh, healthy, boyish way, and he fell head over heels in love with the girl.

It was most hopelessly foolish, he said (he used nice gentle words that impressed by their very mildness), he was in despair (these were his own words), and yet he was happy in his secret heart. I doubt whether he ever thought of marriage: he desired no tangible, no concrete expression of so divine a thing. You can't understand that? I never thought you would.

But Percy understood: he had a soul, and at first he had no more idea of possessing the girl than a poet has of having a sunset stuffed for his sideboard, or putting the aurora borealis in a gilt frame, or, say, cleaning his teeth with the Moonlight Sonata.

He worshipped her, and it came as a shock to him to learn that practical, hard-nutted old Bulfox had opened pourparlers with Countess Oharahn for the hand of her daughter.

My own view is that the idea came from the Countess via Clarence.

The girl was submissive: Percy dumbfounded. He found himself driving away from St. George's, Hanover Square, with a white angel by his side, before he realized that the angel was the Lady Eva Bulfox.

It was a strange marriage, the strangest ever witnessed. Percy just settled down to worship her, to compose sonnets to her hair, her eyes, and her grace. She never suspected this. For her part, she set herself to do her duty to a kindly, diffident American with a cockney accent. It was a difficult task she undertook, because the boy did not want duty of any active kind: he just wanted her to Be.

And all the time there lay deep down in her heart a realization of the wrong she had done this husband, a nagging, aching hunger for truth... There had been an "affair" years before when she was little more than a child. The man

...was gallant and gay,

Had loved and laughed and ridden away."

He had wrenched her young heart for his pleasure, had taken greedily with both hands less than she could give, more than she had thought to give.

Every day that she thought of him—and she thought of him every day—she hated him a little more.

As at first her respect, then the mother-love which inclines all women toward the simple, the good, and the helpless, grew for her husband, so her hatred for the man who had laid his black hand on her life intensified and concentrated within her.

Percy had taken a big house near Tonbridge, and it was here that the first year of his married life was spent. The girl was content to forgo the London season: happy, save for the gnawing of that little devil in her heart, in the society of her husband. She came near to loving him in the dark days when he mourned his father, whom he had idealized in his romantic way, until old Bill Bulfox, hard of head, hand, and heart, had become a shining figure of kindliness and chivalry.

Eva Bulfox had no such illusions, for she was a woman with a woman's uncanny trick of detaching actualities from their wrappings. But Percy's pure grief was a revelation to her. She went into mourning for the old man, and the boy adored her for her graciousness.

The death occurred three months after their marriage, and Percy paid a flying trip to America to settle up the estate.

It was during that period that Captain Gregory Cassilly reappeared upon the horizon.

I only saw him once, but I retain a very vivid impression of the man, possibly because he was a vivid man—vivid in coloring and in certain qualities which need not be enumerated.

He was announced one spring afternoon.

Eva took the card from the salver and read.

She held it for quite a long time in her hand, as though she did not really understand the three words of title and the two words of club which were inscribed upon it.

"Ask Captain Cassilly to come up," she said.

She stood by the fireplace as he entered, a much finer thing than the angular girl he had left. Black became her, intensifying the pallor of her cheeks, making her a little pathetic and wholly adorable.

So, I presume, six feet of muscle and breadth thought as it stood hesitating in the doorway.

"Why, Eva," he said heartily, "you look delicious."

She did not take the outstretched hand.

Instead, she pointed to a chair.

"Sit down, please, Captain Cassilly," she said.

There was no hint of the storm that raged in her heart, nor the bitter self-contempt which dominated all other conscious emotion, in her voice or gesture.

"Captain Cassilly?" he reproached. "My dear child! You're angry with me! And I can explain everything..."

He spoke jerkily, with almost visible marks of exclamation at the end of each sentence. He was a whirlwind of a man, cyclonic in address, a maelstrom in passion, a romanticist of a kind.

"I have no interest in explanations," she said quietly. "I cannot undo what is done: I am glad you came, though I dreaded seeing you."

He smiled to himself.

"I thought I hated you," she went on, "but that must go with my other illusions—I have no feeling of hatred for you, only a sense of curiosity."

"Curiosity," he began, and was preparing an epigram when she spoke.

"I am glad you have come," she repeated, "because I wanted to tell you this: I have not told my husband all—all—"

It was not an easy thing to abash Cassilly, as I know. You might have thought such a freezing welcome would have sent him—a wilted and dispirited man—down the long avenue, his soul in harmony with the east wind.

But he stood there as if deliberating a commonplace business problem. He pulled at his long yellow moustache; his head drooped on one side, his eyes on the carpet.

He was a perfectly dressed man, a handsome man, by certain standards. He had grown a little bovine with the years: the subtle qualities which had attracted her had matured by crude and well-defined phases.

She had no illusions about Captain Cassilly—nor he about her, it seemed.

"You have not told him, eh?" he said thoughtfully.

He said no more. Turning without a word, he left her.

She might have thought she was rid of him, but he turned up again. This time Bulfox was at home.

He greeted her with the familiarity of an old friend. It was in a roomful of people: she could do no less than acknowledge his civility: no less than introduce him to her husband. She was bewildered and a little frightened; his line of attack was a new one, it was as though he had agreed in a fit of magnanimity to sweep out the past and to start afresh.

Bulfox liked him: he admired his ease, his worldliness, his command of the situation, his vitality.

If she had any doubt as to why the gallant captain continued his attentions despite rebuffs, she had the matter made clear to her very soon.

Bulfox, as you know, was an amiable, kindly man, with simple tastes and bourgeois habits, which he had acquired from Clarence. His simple tastes lay in the direction of gramophones and amateur gardening: he could prune

roses, and had uncanny scraps of knowledge about flowers. He was a potterer par excellence.

If Lady Eva required his attendance be sure he would come guiltily from the gun-room, his. hands behind him like a naughty child, stained with oil and grasping a wash-leather polisher. Or from the garden, with a pair of huge gloves testifying to his bourgeois upbringing. But worst of all, from the aesthetic point of view, was his practice of taking forty winks after lunch. Usually he chose the drawing-room and the long, low chair in the window. Here he would settle himself, with a bandana handkerchief over his face—a habit acquired from Clarence—and enjoy his siesta.

Cassilly must have learnt of this practice; he chose to call for a little talk with Lady Eva Bulfox, one afternoon, at a moment when he knew the master of the house would be snug and unconscious.

Instinctively, she knew the object of his visit. She chose the library for the interview: he came to the point with the promptitude of a man who realizes the value of time. She sat at one side of the library table, he at the other.

"I came to see you today," he began, "because I am in a hole."

She made no reply. "I am in a hole," he repeated carefully. "I have been losing a lot of money lately; my people seem to have got rather tired of extending to me that helping hand, the possession of which is the main reason for their existence."

"I am afraid I do not take a great deal of interest in your private affairs, Captain Cassilly," she said clearly.

"You will," he said; "I think you will. I want twenty thousand pounds next Monday. I'm going abroad for a year or so, and it is essential to my happiness that I should have the money. Listen, Eva"—he leant across the table and shook an admonitory finger in her direction"when I ran away with you in—I forget the year—you swore to love me, honor me, and obey me. It is unimportant," he went on carefully, "that the marriage was illegal owing to my first wife being at that time in the land of the living. An oath is an oath, and I have a claim upon your services."

She rose from the table, desperately white.

"You have no claim upon me," she said steadily; "not even a claim for forgiveness. You tried to wreck my life and succeeded in part."

"I want the money," he went on, taking no more notice of her than if she had not spoken. "You have a very rich husband, an adoring husband, and, I think, a sensible husband, who will hand you a check without pressing inquiries."

"I shall ask him for nothing," she said. "I shall tell him—everything."

He inclined his head slowly, almost approvingly.

"Then I shall tell everybody else—everything," he said. "I know a number of excellent journalists on the other side of the ocean who would welcome a tit-bit of this description. That will do your husband no good."

He watched her, standing there, with the curiosity which had been his undoing.

"I shall call on Friday," he said; "you have an 'At Home,' I believe —just an informal affair with tennis. I shall expect you to give me the money."

He rose from the table deliberately.

"And we will have no nonsense," he continued, "when I want money, you must get it for me—you are rich, I am poor."

She said nothing, fingering a rose at her belt nervously.

"If you take a sensible view," he went on, "you will not have one moment's unpleasantness."

Did she dare tell Percy? Did she dare? That was the thought in her mind as she stared out of the window. She knew in that moment of trial that she loved her husband; that his opinion counted more than anything else was suddenly evident to her.

She opened her mouth to speak, and then stopped dead and staggered back, a look of horror in her eyes.

Stretched in the cosiest and most shady corner of the room, his legs outstretched on a chair, his bandana over his face, his hands clasped on his waistcoat, was Percy, taking his siesta. He did not move; save for the regular rise and fall of his breast he gave no sign of animation.

She looked back at the man, his eyes had followed hers.

"He's asleep," he whispered; "don't forget—Friday."

For the first time there was a menace in his voice.

She did not see him go; her eyes were fixed on her husband, then she went softly from the room, closing the door behind her.

Now, here you have a situation which the experienced dramatist could handle to advantage. Suppose she told her husband everything; defied this blackmailing scoundrel—in what way would it serve her? Save for the easing of her conscience, in no way. Percy would pay the money, because the good name of his wife was in violent hands. Percy would pay cheerfully.

Whilst Cassilly lived there was this black shadow over her life; and you cannot in these enlightened days hire assassins to still tongues inconveniently glib.

I went down to Carulm on that Friday. She had not told her husband. She was bright, ready to laugh, a phase of nervousness peculiar to some temperaments.

There was an electric thrill in the air, a certain tingling which made itself felt. It is difficult to describe exactly what I mean. I think it was she who infected the more sensitive of us with a sense of coming storm.

Cassilly was there, dressed for tennis, and there were a heap of other people—the Bryans of Bryanlaker, Sir George Tandall, a judge of the King's Bench, the chief constable of the county, Major Fairfax, two or three well-known barristers, an author or two, a few members of the hunting set who gathered in little groups and talked hounds from the moment they arrived to the moment they departed. An extraordinary representative gathering, and I wondered how Lady Eva had got them together. Then I learnt, to my surprise, that although she had issued the invitations, the more distinguished members of the party had come at Percy's request.

It suited Cassilly well. It made the situation more tragic for Lady Eva, for she had not spoken to her husband. There was no difficulty so far as the money was concerned, because Percy had settled a million on her, though Cassilly did not know this.

I went to look for Percy and found him, as usual, pottering. Tennis had no attractions for him; his duties as a host he had never taken seriously. He was farm-bred and thoroughbred.

I found him in the gun-room, and he told me a really amusing joke which was good enough to repeat when I joined the party at tea in a big marquee which had been set up on the lawn near the gun-room.

There was a clatter and a tinkling and a ripple of light laughter as I went in. Lady Eva was very silent and very white. Near her stood Cassilly, composed and cheerful. He was curling his moustache absent- mindedly.

"Have you seen my husband?" she asked. "I wish you would ask him to come."

At that moment Percy came in, and there was a roar of laughter from his friends, because in his absent-minded way he carried a treble barrelled shot-gun in one hand and in the other a square of wash- leather.

"I—I'm so sorry," he stammered.

I saw Cassilly smile. He was still smiling when the gun exploded, and I saw the face of the tall man go suddenly red and horrid.

A coroner 's jury brought in a verdict of "Accidental Death," and Percy was censured by the coroner for his carelessness.

People say he's a fool who ought not to be trusted with weapons: that aspect has never occurred to me.

He may be a fool, but I am certain he's a chivalrous fool, who would risk his neck for the woman he loved.

The only thing I am not certain about, and upon which I seek information is: Was he asleep in the library? I have never asked Percy, and indeed the opportunity has never occurred. He and his wife have been traveling for the last three years—four years if you reckon the twelve months they spent in Virginia where their child was born.

THE END

Freeditorial