

# ANYBODY'S PEARLS

HULBERT  
FOOTNER



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NOVELS BY  
HULBERT FOOTNER

*Anybody's Pearls*  
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*A New Girl in Town*



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BY  
HULBERT FOOTNER

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*ANYBODY'S PEARLS*

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*PART I*

SITTING in the lounge of the Chester, the most expensive hotel in London, Dick Shemwell looked as if he belonged, but he had not a cent in his pockets, and not a soul in the world to back him up.

Fortune had not smiled on Dick lately; in the middle of his senior year, his benefactor and guardian had died without having made a will in his favour; and almost overnight Dick had dropped from the position of a leader in the most expensive set at Haleson to that of a broker's messenger.

His present position was due to a crack-brained impulse that he had yielded to. A week before he had been drawn by a sort of sickness of the heart to the Brevard Line pier in New York to see the *Baratoria* depart for Europe with those luckier young fellows who had fathers with well-filled pockets. On the pier he had fallen in with four former class-mates who were about to sail, and Nutty Filbert had hilariously suggested that they smuggle Dick across.

They had actually got away with it. Dick had been passed along from cabin to cabin, and the others had simulated sea-sickness by turns, so that they might order meals served in their cabins. The officers of the *Baratoria* never suspected that they were carrying one in the first-class, who was not down on the passenger list. The voyage had been one long joke.

But as they approached Southampton, a more serious difficulty confronted them; how to get Dick ashore without a passport? It was then that Nutty Filbert *et al* proved themselves to be lads of more spirit than staying power. They were scared off by the English officials. In short, the four sickened of their joke, and Dick was left to get himself ashore as best he could.

This he had accomplished without much difficulty, by bribing a steward to lend him a uniform. With the aid of the uniform he had escaped down the service gangway, unmolested. But the bribe, together with his fare to London, and dinner the night before, had taken every cent he possessed. He had spent the night on the Embankment, and here he was in the Chester seeking to panhandle a breakfast.

The worst of it was, that Filbert *et al*, conscious of not having treated Dick squarely, were now trying to keep out of his way. A few minutes before Dick had seen one of them get out of an elevator, and seeing him, Dick, dart back again. Ah! the quitters! thought Dick sorely. He was sore and anxious too. If the American lads failed him, what would he do? He had blithely set out from New York with the intention of living by his wits thereafter. Only broken-spirited nags submitted to the harness, he told himself. But in a foreign town where one didn't know the ropes, where was one to begin?

He anxiously felt of his chin. Not much there yet, because he had shaved with Nutty's razor the day before. But if another day passed without his getting a shave, he would have to resign all claim to be considered one of the upper classes. He couldn't sit in the Chester all the time, and they said it rained in England nearly every day. One good shower would ruin him!

While Dick was sitting there a prey to these gloomy thoughts, a handsome young Englishman came into the hotel, followed by a boy carrying his kit bag and great coat. A tall, slender fellow in his early thirties, most beautifully turned out from monocle to white spats. He looked around him with a lordly assurance that made Dick secretly envious. This was the type upon which Dick and his friends at Haleton had modelled themselves. Dick stored away details for future use; the small Fedora hat with just the right amount of curl to the brim; the well-cut blue suit—but not *too* well-cut; the plain stick of some rare tropical wood; the homely well-made shoes. But what Dick most admired was that cool, disdainful manner; Dick thought he must be the eldest son of an earl at least.

Dick was sitting immediately in front of the hotel desk, and he heard the young man ask for a room and “bahth.” Strangely enough, the clerk did not seem to be in the least impressed by his aristocratic hauteur. With a hard look he gave the young man to understand that the house was full.

“Full!” echoed the young man, running up his eyebrows. “I am Lord Greatorrex!”

I thought so! Dick said to himself, and looked to see the clerk collapse. But that composed man only smiled in a disagreeable fashion, and said, without raising his voice:

“I know who you are. You'd better go quietly, or I'll send for the police.”



Drawing himself up, the young man gave the hotel employee a terrible look; but the clerk coolly faced him out. Whereupon the young man turned on his heel, and with a haughty nod to the boy to fetch his things, strode out of the hotel again. The boy followed, grinning. The several clerks behind the desk laughed amongst themselves.

Dick was so much excited by this incident that he forgot his own anomalous position in the place. Stepping to the desk, he asked:

“Who was that?”

The clerk turned, smiling still. “Oh, he has many names,” he said. “He’s known to the police as George Allington. One of the smoothest swindlers in London.”

Dick did some quick thinking. He had been enormously impressed by the style and the assurance of this man. When he was caught out, they had got no change out of him. He had marched out as haughty as ever. He must have an iron nerve! You can expect nothing from the American crowd, Dick told himself; here’s a man who lives by his wits in London; why not make up to him?

Acting on the impulse, he walked out of the Chester. Allington, or whatever his name might be, was standing in the entrance court giving instructions to a taxi-driver. His things were put in the cab.

“Take them to 107, Artillery Mansions,” he said, tossing the man a silver piece.

The cab drove away, and Allington walked nonchalantly out into the crowded Strand, swinging his stick. Dick followed discreetly.

## 2

Allington walked westward in the Strand with his arrogant gaze fixed above the heads of the crowd as if he owned London. Every moment Dick feared to see him turn into some building where he could not follow. They came to an open space with a tall column in the centre, surmounted by a one-armed man, and having four huge lions at its base. Dick learned later that this was the Nelson column; the open space, Trafalgar Square. Crossing it, Allington passed under a colonnade which formed the gateway to a wide avenue lined with trees. This, Dick came to know, was the Mall, which led to Buckingham Palace. There was a lovely park with old trees on the left, and Allington turned into it. Dick hastened to overtake him.

“Good morning,” he said pleasantly.

The Englishman looked him over warily without replying.

“I’m a stranded American,” said Dick.

“Why not go to your consul?” said Allington sourly.

“He’d turn me over to the police.”

“Well, we’ve got our own unemployed,” said Allington with a hard smile.

“You get me wrong,” said Dick. “I’m not trying to make a touch. Though at that, I haven’t had my breakfast. I want you to put me wise to this burg, so I can scratch my own worms.”

The Englishman stared hard. “I don’t understand you,” he said.

“Say, you fellows ought to come to America and learn English,” said Dick grinning. “I was in the Chester just now when you came in. I saw them give you the razz.”

Allington bare his teeth in an ugly fashion, and his black eyes bored Dick through and through. Dick made haste to placate him.

“I liked the cut of your jib,” he said. “I fell for you, see? So I followed you.”

“What’s your name?” asked the other.

Dick had already made up his mind as to the part he would play. "Oh, my monaker's Kid Murray Hill," he said carelessly.

"Oh, a crook, eh?" said Allington, more at his ease.

"Well, it depends upon who uses the word," said Dick. "It's not a pretty word."

"No offence," said the Englishman, now quite anxious to be friendly. "I've heard how sharp you fellows are. . . . Did you hear what was said there in the Chester?" he asked with a keen look.

"Yes," said Dick, "I was right behind you."

"It's infamous!" cried Allington, brandishing his stick as if he had the clerk before him at that moment. "I'm Lord Greatorex," he went on with an air of simple dignity. "I don't suppose you ever heard of me in America, but I'm quite well known here. I own eighteen thousand acres in Northumberland."

Dick bit his lip to keep from smiling. "Oh, I spotted you for a lord first go," he said with a serious air.

"They made a terrible mistake at the Chester," Allington went on, "and the worst of it is, I can't make them smart for it. Because, well, to tell the truth, I went to the Chester on a very delicate piece of business, and I can't afford to have it get in the papers."

Dick pricked up his ears. "Yes!" he said sympathetically.

But Allington (or Greatorex as Dick called him from thenceforward) changed the subject. "Tell me something about yourself," he said affably. "You're a new type to me. I'd love to go to America."

"I'm too faint to talk," said Dick insinuatingly. "If I had a skinful I'd give you an earful."

"Oh, your American slang is priceless!" said Greatorex laughing. "You must teach it to me. Come on, I know a nice little place to eat in Queen Anne's Gate."

They had quite a merry meal in the little restaurant, each man playing his respective comedy part. Greatorex enlarged in his casual manner upon life amongst the aristocracy, while Dick countered with several detailed histories of "jobs" that he had pulled off with the aid of his pals in New York. Until his fifteenth year Dick had scrambled for a living in the streets, and this part of his life supplied him with plenty of local colour for his yarns. Dick

modestly confessed that it was owing to his having inadvertently “plugged a bull” that he had been obliged to beat it to England. As he downed the good food his spirits rose amazingly. He got more fun out of the situation than the other man, because he was on to Greatorex’s bluff, whereas Greatorex was not on to him. Dick said to himself: If this is one of England’s smart ones, I guess I’m just a little bit smarter.

All the while they talked, Greatorex was weighing and studying Dick with his sharp, hard glances. Trying to make up his mind whether he can use me to pull his chestnuts out of the fire, thought Dick. Does he think I can’t see it? Greatorex held off from making any confidences yet awhile. He excused himself from the table in order to telephone. After the meal he insisted on taking Dick for a drive in a taxi to show him Piccadilly and Hyde Park.

They returned to Victoria, and had themselves put down at what Greatorex called a “pub,” opposite the station. “Gosh! this is what the old fellows talk about at home!” said Dick, seeing the mahogany and the brass rail. But he realised there could never have been anything so democratic as this establishment in so-called democratic America. It astonished him to see silk-hatted gentlemen rubbing elbows with truck-drivers. The other sex, too. Elegantly clad ladies who had dropped in for a gin and ginger on their way to shop; and charwomen with their pints of ’alf-and-’alf. “It’s a relief to order a drink in a natural voice,” said Dick.

“Confound it, there’s a man I know,” said Greatorex in an annoyed tone. “Disgusting little Jew, but one must be agreeable to him, because one borrows money from him. We large landowners are frequently short of cash, you know.”

This individual approached them fulsomely. He was a more Jewish-looking Jew than the New York variety; hooked nose, hollow cheek-bones, thin grey beard; silk hat rubbed the wrong way, greasy frock coat. Dick perceived where the vaudeville comedians had got their idea. He answered to the name of Abrams. Something told Dick that this was the man Greatorex had telephoned to. Probably the brains of the gang, he said to himself.

Mr. Abrams insisted on treating, and the three of them sat down at a table in the back room. Greatorex and Abrams made an odd contrast, but in London nobody seemed to remark it. They all ordered a double Scotch. It occurred to Dick that he had better watch those drinks, but he dismissed the thought. Such stunts were never pulled in a crowded place like this. And

anyhow, I should worry, thought Dick. That's the advantage of having empty pockets.

The talk amounted to nothing at all; it had to do with the weather, and the impossibility of prohibition in England. It was funny to hear a Jew talking with a cockney accent; mixed Yiddish and cockney. Nothing was said that Dick could remember, but all the time he was aware that he was being subjected to a sharper and more experienced scrutiny than Greateorex's. Finally a slight signal passed between Abrams and Greateorex, and the Jew got up to go.

I have been accepted, thought Dick, with rising excitement.

### 3

Greatorex was now all affability, though he still worked in touches of arrogance in order to keep Dick impressed with his aristocratic quality, as when he said: "Let's go to my digs where we can talk quietly. I can't take you to my club, they're so damn particular. It's the Junior Carlton, you know."

Dick didn't know, but he silently damned the man for his impudence, and accepted his invitation with a grin.

They walked down Victoria street, which reminded the New Yorker of West Forty-Second between Sixth and Broadway. Coming towards them Dick beheld his four shipmates of the *Baratoria*, arm in arm, seeing the sights. Here was a chance. Dick took Greatorex's arm.

The four Americans seeing Dick's elegant companion, looked rather nonplussed. Dick hailed them cheerfully.

"Hello, fellows! I want you to meet my friend Lord Greatorex." He told them off to the Englishman. "Mr. Filbert; Mr. Manby; Mr. Debenham; Mr. Papps."

Greatorex screwed his monocle more firmly into his eye, and gave them each a curt nod. "Hah-je-do!" he enunciated four times, and looked away. He seemed not to see the outstretched hands. The four innocents were enormously impressed by his style. Up to that moment they had felt as if they were showing the Londoners something, but all were conscious that Greatorex made them look like hicks.

". . . Er . . . Let's go somewhere and have a smile," suggested Filbert.

"Sorry, old man," said Dick, "but Lord Greatorex and I are lunching with the Marquess of Salisbury . . . See you later."

They walked on. Dick felt avenged.

Greatorex's rooms were in a big apartment house—mansions they are called in London. They were pleasant enough, but rather small and dark; hardly a fitting town residence for a peer with eighteen thousand acres.

“Up until this year I’ve always lived at the Albany,” said Greatorex languidly, “but they’re letting in the stockbrokers.”

This remark was rather wasted on Dick, who did not then know that an address at the Albany is the hall-mark of the real thing in young blood.

Dick’s sharp eyes perceived that the numerous photographs displayed about the rooms did not suggest aristocratic relatives. There was one in a silver frame though, of a dark-eyed girl who was beautiful enough to be anything. Greatorex had good taste, he thought.

His host brought out a bottle of Scotch, apologising for the necessity of waiting on themselves. “I gave my man a holiday,” he said; “thinking I would be at the Chester for the next few days.”

“How could they have made such a mistake at the Chester!” said Dick sympathetically.

“Oh, I have enemies!” said Greatorex darkly.

Greatorex unobtrusively shifted the photograph in the silver frame, that it might the more easily catch Dick’s eye. And Dick allowed his eye to be caught, and waited for what would come of it.

“My sister, the Countess of Brentford,” said Greatorex carelessly.

“She’s easy to look at,” said Dick, dryly.

“I suppose so,” said the other, flicking the ash off his cigarette. “But of course, one hardly sees one’s sister. They call her the most beautiful woman in England.”

“I can well believe it,” said Dick.

“She’s married to a frightful rotter,” Greatorex went on, “but a big-wig of course, and all that. Fortunately he doesn’t trouble her much. They go their own ways.”

“She’s far too good for him,” said Dick encouragingly.

“Quite!” said Greatorex.

“Funny we should be talking about her,” Greatorex presently went on; “for it was poor Millicent’s business that took me to the Chester this morning.”

“Is that so?” said Dick.

Greatorex sprang up and began to pace the sitting-room. "Oh, it's the devil of a business! the devil of a business!" he cried in seeming agitation; but Dick perceived the glint of the self-pleased actor in his black eyes. "I don't know what to do now!"

"If I could help?" suggested Dick.

"No, my dear fellow, it's a family affair. And so I can confide in nobody, you see."

Dick merely waited, confident that the rest of it would soon be forthcoming now.

"And yet," said Greatorex, stopping short and fixing Dick with a piercing glance, "if you *would* do it, you would be far better fitted to carry the thing through than I, with your experience."

Ah, a burglary, thought Dick. "Try me," he said aloud.

Greatorex snatched up the photograph, and gazed at it with heart-broken eyes. He ought to be on the stage, thought Dick. "Would you risk something to save the most beautiful woman in England?" Greatorex cried dramatically.

"I reckon," drawled Dick.

"Poor Millicent!" mourned Greatorex, still gazing at the photograph; "like all the Greatorexes she is fatally reckless. We're decadent, I suppose. The family is too old. You don't know these high-bred English women of course; when they get the bit between their teeth, there is no stopping them. If she had been happy in her marriage it would never have happened. . . . Well, I have decided to tell you all now. Whatever your past may have been, there is something about you that has won my confidence, Kid—if that is what I must call you.

"Same here, Lord," said Dick.

"Oh, call me Greatorex, as between man and man. What does rank amount to? . . . Besides," he went on, dropping the histrionics for the moment; "there's a thousand pounds in it for you, Kid, if you carry the thing through."

"Oh, don't mention that, old man," said Dick.

"I must tell you," Greatorex went on, "that my poor sister lost her head over an American adventurer called Michael Rulon. Ever hear of him?"



Dick shook his head, and Greatorex looked relieved. “Well, when you see him,” he went on, “you will wonder what there could be about him to attract a woman like Millicent. You never can tell. There is some fatal attraction there. . . . The long and the short of it is, that this scoundrel Rulon took advantage of the poor girl’s infatuation to steal the Brentford pearls from about her neck! Oh! my blood simply boils when I think of it! Hanging is too good for such a man! He ought to be drawn and quartered!”

“You said a mouthful!” said Dick.

“We can’t have the man arrested without disgracing my sister,” Greatorex resumed. “On the other hand, the loss of the pearls cannot long be kept hidden from her husband, and she’ll be disgraced anyway. The only thing I could think of was to steal them back from that scoundrel. Would you blame me?”

“Absolutely not,” said Dick.

“He is stopping at the Chester. He is booked to return to America on the *Baratoria* on Wednesday. We have just three days. Well, I am blocked now. Will you act in my place, Kid? You can have all the assistance you need on the outside.”

Dick was thinking fast. He did not believe a word of this romantic story, of course. Gee! he must think eagles are downy birds! he thought. Stripped of its embroidery, this was just a plain, everyday robbery that was proposed. Rulon was undoubtedly the rightful owner of the pearls. In that case he must be a rich man. Dick’s best line was to seem to accept, and then tip the American off. He, Dick, owed these English crooks nothing. And blood was thicker than water. And besides, his grateful countryman ought to be glad to do something for him.

“All right,” said Dick laconically. “I’m on.”

## 4

Dick and Greatorex lunched at the Cheshire Cheese in Fleet street. Every visitor to London must see that ancient tavern where old Sam Johnson used to rule the roast, Greatorex said. The two were now as thick as—well, thieves, Dick thought with an inward chuckle. It is probable that Greatorex suspected Dick did not believe the romantic yarn he had told him, but he did not greatly care. Greatorex enjoyed romanticising for its own sake, even when no longer necessary.

After they had discussed the beefsteak and kidney pudding, they set about the pleasant business of shopping for Dick's outfit. Nothing but the best of everything would suite Greatorex; kit-bag; dressing-case; several changes of linen; cravats. Greatorex lent Dick one of his own suits. It would not fit him of course; he was not supposed to put it on; it was packed in the kit-bag merely for the purpose of impressing the servants of the hotel. Meanwhile Greatorex had Dick order a new suit from a fashionable tailor in Conduit street. It was highly agreeable to be dashing hither and thither about London. Shillings and half-crowns flowed like water from Greatorex's hand into the palms of taxi-drivers.

In only one respect was Greatorex disposed to be niggardly. He kept Dick pretty short of cash. "You won't need it at the Chester," he said. "Just sign for anything you want."

Finally Dick set off in a taxi-cab by himself, with his kit-bag at his feet. He was plagued by a nagging anxiety respecting the clerks at the Chester. Suppose they remembered his asking about Greatorex, and had watched him follow the Englishman? Dick naturally, had not said anything to Greatorex about what he had learned from the clerk. However, as luck would have it, Filbert and the others were in the lounge of the Chester when Dick walked in. They were glad to be friends now; they hailed Dick as one of themselves; and this immediately established him as a rich young American.

Dick was promptly shown to a room. It was on the seventh floor in the back of the house, and shared in that famous view over the Embankment gardens and the misty Thames. It was more inviting than the rooms of American hotels ever are. Dick looked around him with a comfortable

feeling of proprietorship, and tipped the apple-cheeked bell-hop a shilling. I'm lodged here sooner than I expected, thought Dick.

Having disposed his things, he set out again to meet Greatorex at the bar of the Strand Palace near-by. Greatorex had now to identify Michael Rulon to him. In the crowded bar Dick found a shabby little customer in the company of his elegant friend, whom Greatorex carelessly introduced as "Hawkins." "Hawkins has been doing a bit of detective work for me," he said.

Hawkins was remarkable only for his bad teeth and his cringing manner. In England apparently class distinctions were maintained even in the underworld. It appeared from his talk that this detective work consisted of trailing Rulon. "He's on the look-out for trouble," said Hawkins, "and he's been stickin' close to his hotel. However, this afternoon he went out to the Tivoli, the big picture palace across the way, yonder, and he's in there now. The afternoon performance is out at ten minutes to five. If the American gentleman will come with me to a certain little eating house Rulon's got to pass on his way to his hotel, we'll get a seat in the window, and I'll point him out as he goes by."

"Stow this in your pouch, Kid," said Greatorex, as they were about to leave him. "The pearls were on an endless string thirty-six inches long; that is to say, two yards of pearls if the string was cut. They're not the largest, but they're amongst the finest matched and coloured in Europe. Do you know anything about pearls?"

Dick shook his head.

"Well, even so, you could tell at a glance that these were something exceptional. When we saw them last they were contained in a thin box about four by eight, covered with green leather. It is possible that Rulon may have deposited them in the hotel safe, but I think not. His conscience is bad. He is almost certain to carry them on his person. He may have the box in his pocket; or he may have thrown away the box, and hung the string around his neck.

"I want you if possible to satisfy yourself of the fact that he has the pearls on his person. If he has, chum up with him, you have a winning way with you, and try to get him to accompany you to a little supper club called the Raquets Court in Pentland Mews, number 11. Write that down. If you can get him there, I and my friends will take care of the rest. We will be waiting there any time after eleven to-night and to-morrow night, just on the chance of your fetching him."

A little shiver chased itself down Dick's spine, and up again. What is this, murder? he asked himself.

The little lunch-room to which Hawkins took him was German in its character. Apparently London was as cosmopolitan in its eating-houses as New York. There was a big plate glass window looking out on the Strand, and they took seats which commanded a good view through this, but not too close to it. Tall, slender glasses of Pilsner and smoked salmon sandwiches were set before them.

When Hawkins whispered: "There he goes; there! Him with the black hat"; Dick received a queer start. He had expected to see—well, a prosperous, paunchy business man; a trust magnate, say; or a successful operator in oil, returning home with a handsome present for the wife: but this was a figure with a sinister quality that struck a terror to his breast. A tall, well-set-up man, whose chest measurement was noticeable greater than his waist, and who walked on the ball of his feet like a panther or an athlete; handsomely dressed in a quiet style, the whole topped with a modish derby; comely in the face, but with a hard, dry effect; lean, yellow cheeks. It was impossible to say how old he was; under the smart derby he looked thirty-five; but he was certainly older; that icy stare was ageless. He had the look of a gambler; a desperado.

All Dick's facile theories about this case collapsed. For a moment he wondered wildly if Greatorex's tale might not after all be true. But he dismissed that possibility; he had received too many intimations to the contrary. What *was* the truth, then? No answer was forthcoming. The part that he had designed to play, suddenly became meaningless. The idea of "warning" such a man, who, obviously, walked tip-toe in the expectation of danger, was merely silly. Silly, too, the hope of receiving an easy reward from the possessor of that stony face.

But it was too late to turn back. Dick was aware that little Hawkins was watching him keenly. No doubt but what the gang meant to keep him under surveillance henceforward.

"A tough bird, that!" said Dick with a laugh, to disarm Hawkins.

The little man smiled evilly. "Yes," he said, "they're all afeared of him." Evidently he was pleased by the discomfiture of better men than himself.

"Oh, I've dealt with his kind before this," said Dick loftily. "He trades on the hard-boiled effect. That bluff can be called as well as any."

“Yes,” said Hawkins, smiling still in his spiteful and cringing manner. Dick would have liked to smash him.

From his post of observation in an obscure corner of the lounge, Dick saw Michael Rulon descend to the men's restaurant for his dinner. He followed. Messrs. Filbert *et al*, whose friendly attentions had now become rather embarrassing to Dick, were out of the way for the moment, having gone to don their dinner coats, so they could sit in the main restaurant, and overlook the girls.

In the smoking room, as it was called in this hotel, Rulon chose a little table with the panelled wall at his side. Dick sat in the centre of the room, and a little behind him, where he could watch his man without himself attracting his attention. He was impressed anew with the man's power. He had shoulders on him like a mantelpiece. True to his upbringing, Rulon ordered a great beefsteak which was served half raw, followed by pie. He stoked it silently, looking neither to the right nor the left.

What does such a man think about? Dick wondered. The spectacle of one so perfectly self-contained, made the youngster feel sophomoric and frothy. He doesn't give a damn! Dick thought with a sort of awe. How foolish for a kid like you to think of handling such a case-hardened guy! But Dick couldn't leave him alone, either; the man fascinated him. Dick had no working plan now; but only an overmastering desire to learn the inwardness of this situation.

After he had finished eating, Rulon sat on, smoking long black cigars, and ordering up one double Scotch after another. He drank his whisky straight. Sipping his ginger ale, Dick watched him put down the potent spirit with growing astonishment. Apparently it had not the least effect. Rulon betrayed no interest in his surroundings, but kept his head slightly lowered as if brooding on his own thoughts. It *must* be getting him, Dick thought. I know the type. Whisky makes him quieter and quieter, but he's like a raging furnace inside. A word may set him off.

A long time passed. Dick could not leave Rulon alone. The thought of bracing that lowering desperado gave him the cold shivers, but he knew he would have to do it in the end. Dick never had been able to take a dare from himself. Once a dangerous thought suggested itself, it teased him until he gave it its way. After several false starts, he got up with a fast beating heart

and making a detour around the room, shaped a course that would bring him back alongside Rulon's table.

"Hello, you're an American," he said.

Rulon slowly raised his sullen glance. "Well, what of it?" he said coolly.

"So'm I," said Dick, pulling his well-known cheerful idiot stuff, "and as the two of us seem to be playing the title rôle in *Alone in London*, I thought . . ."

"I don't feel the need of company," said Rulon with a hard look.

Dick, all panicky inside, nevertheless sat down opposite the other. "Oh, you can't strike me," he said. "I used to sell lightning rods. What are you drinking?"

Rulon stared at him grimly and queerly. Evidently he was not accustomed to be thus bearded by youth. Evidently it amused him rather. "Double Scotch," he growled. "The damn stuff is watered."

"Double Scotch for my friend," said Dick to the waiter. "Bring me the same as I had before."

Dick perceived that Rulon, lacking his hat, was at least twenty years older than he had appeared on the street. But marvellously well preserved. It was only his expression that revealed a half a century of cruelty and cynicism. To look straight into his face was like getting a glimpse of hell. The influence of the whisky was apparent, too. He was poisoned with it. His eyes were bloodshot and full of subconscious pain, and his lip curled. If I said the wrong word he'd think nothing of leaning across the table, and smashing my skull with a blow, thought Dick.

"Well, it's good to hear the old twang," said Dick, hoping that his voice did not sound as hollow as he felt.

"Huh! there's no lack of it around here," rumbled Rulon. "This joint is run exclusively for American suckers. Makes me tired the way they rush over here and ask the English to do them."

"Well, you're here," said Dick.

"I come here to make money out of the English, not to spend it on them."

"What's your business?" asked Dick with great carelessness.

Rulon held his glass up to the light, and simply ignored the question.

Dick's heart missed a beat in sheer fright. Ah, go slow! go slow! he warned himself.

It occurred to Dick that the best way to lead a man to talk about himself, is to talk about yourself. "I'm flat broke," he said with a laugh.

"I don't lend money," said Rulon coolly.

"Wasn't asking you for any," said Dick. "I'll get a cable to-morrow. I only mentioned it to explain why I had to hang around this hotel all evening, where I can sign cheques."

Rulon was perfectly indifferent to Dick's affairs. "You don't have to pay for mine," he said, holding up his finger for another.

"We've pretty near got the place to ourselves now," said Dick, glancing around. "Everybody's gone to a show or something. That's what attracted my attention to you. Why should a man stick around home unless he's broke."

"Aah! what has London got to show to a man like me?" growled Rulon. "London's a sort of doll's town, all so proper and cleaned up. The police are the bosses of London. The people's spirit is broke. It's not what I call a man's town."

"What's your home town? Chicago?" asked Dick.

Rulon coolly stared Dick down, and did not reply.

Nevertheless Dick was assured that he was making progress. He rattled on. The mere fact that Rulon tolerated his impudence gave him heart. Dick was accustomed to having people like him. Good looks are a passport everywhere. By and by Rulon growled:

"Bright as a newly-minted dime, ain't yeh?"

It was said with a sneer, yet he meant it too. Indeed a sort of irascible fondness began to appear in Rulon's bloodshot eye. I've got him going, thought Dick. Dick was sensible of the fact that it was more dangerous to have Rulon like him, than to be indifferent. Like making friends with a tiger.

Later still, Rulon, now pretty drunk, but still holding himself stiff and wary, said: "Say Kid, stick around to-morrow, will yeh? Whether your cable comes or not, I'll buy you all you want to drink. Makes the time pass. I'm fair sick of this hole. And I got three more days to put in, before my ship sails."



“Sure thing! Anything to oblige a good hundred-per-center!” said Dick. “But why stick around the hotel?”

“Because I choose to,” said Rulon with his hard stare.

“Well, you needn’t jump down my throat,” said Dick. “It’s nothing to me one way or the other.”

Rulon grunted.

“I like to walk around this town,” Dick went on in his giddy fashion. “They have such swell layouts in the store windows. Take that cluttered-up alley they called Bond street. Talk about your diamonds and pearls. I never saw anything in New York like that.”

“What do you know about pearls?” growled Rulon, with a sharp look.

“Not a thing in the world!” said Dick with an innocent air. “But you gotta admit they’re pretty to look at. I’d like right well to hang a string of them ‘round my girl’s neck if I had the price.”

“Yes,” rumbled Rulon, scowling, “there’s hundreds of thousands in pearls displayed in those windows along Bond street, and not a crook in London with nerve enough to heave a brick through the glass. It’s never been done.”

“Well, let’s you and I try it on, just to create a little excitement,” said Dick.

Rulon only growled inarticulately.

“Not but what the phony pearls at a guinea a string look just as good to me!” said Dick flippantly.

“You must be blind,” said Rulon scornfully. “In the fake pearls the shine is only pasted on the outside. In the real ones it comes from the heart of ‘em!”

“You seem to know!” said Dick.

“I *do* know!” said Rulon irascibly. “You asked me what my business was. I’ll tell you. I’m in the jewellery business.”

Dick’s breast tightened up with excitement. “That so?” he said carelessly. He bit his lip to keep from smiling at the picture that rose before his mind’s eye, of the terrible Rulon round-shouldered behind a jeweller’s counter with a watch-repairer’s glass screwed into his eye. More likely *his*

business was done on the other side of the counter, with a gun in his hand. "Where's your place of business?" asked Dick.

"Don't need any," growled Rulon. "I trade on'y on commission. Big orders. Rich man comes to me for a string of pearls and I buy 'em in the market. Sort of broker."

"That so," said Dick.

"Want to see something?" said Rulon, glancing cautiously around him. He thrust his hand into the inner breast pocket of his coat, and drew it out with his fingers hooked in a glittering snarl of moon-drops. He cupped the mass of beaming cream globules in his two hands, so that nobody else in the room except Dick could have seen what he held. Dick looked at them with an inward cold shiver. Suppose Rulon repented of his imprudence during the night, and killed him next day just for having seen them. But oh, Heaven! how beautiful they were! A double handful of fairy moons! a myriad little balls of frost heaped in the sinewy brown hands, so delicate and cool, yet glowing too, with a dusky, inward fire.

Rulon was looking down at them with an insane joy. "There's the real thing!" he rumbled, like a tiger purring. "A hundred thousand dollars, Kid!"

"Oh, for God's sake put them away!" said Dick. "No wonder you don't want to walk out in the streets!"

## 6

Next morning Rulon was not in evidence. Sleeping it off, Dick supposed. Dick hung about the lounge of the Chester until eleven, and then, according to pre-arrangement, set off for Greatorex's flat in Victoria street, to give an account of progress. Dick had still no idea of what he was going to do when the decisive moment arrived. He was just being carried along by the initial momentum he had acquired the day before.

Greatorex received him in a blue brocaded silk dressing-gown. This morning the sight of the elegant, slender fellow with the shallow black eyes affected Dick with an active distaste. Greatorex's aristocratic anecdotes left him cold. There was something soft in the man along with his high and mighty manner. His voice, like the voices of so many elegant Englishmen (and their American imitators), had an unpleasant reedy quality. If this one's bluff was called, he would probably begin to whine. Of the two scoundrels, give me the blunt one, thought Dick. However, he was careful to dissemble all this. As a matter of fact, Dick didn't know where he was at. He felt something like a grain of wheat between two scoundrelly millstones.

He reported to Greatorex (a) that he had made himself solid with Michael Rulon; (b) that he had established the fact that Rulon carried the pearls on his person; (c) that it had seemed wiser not to press their new acquaintance too hard by trying to bring him to the Raquets Court the first night.

As to the last account, Greatorex agreed. "Bring him along to-night," he said with an ugly smile. "We'll be ready for him."

"I'll do what I can," said Dick warily. "He's not exactly one of these pliable guys."

"Oh, if you see that he drinks enough, you can do what you want with him. It's worth a thousand pounds to you."

"I have that thousand in mind," said Dick.

Back at the Chester, Michael Rulon made an appearance at lunch time. His face was yellow and inscrutable; he still bore himself like an athletic youth. Dick awaited the encounter with a sort of breathless dread. Will he

turn on me now? he thought. But no! actually a sort of bleak pleasure showed in that hangman's face at the sight of the youngster.

“ ‘Morning, Kid. Eaten yet?’” he asked with a vicious nod.

Dick shook his head.

“C'mon downstairs.”

On the stairs Rulon laid a hand on Dick's shoulder, and squeezed it until Dick thought the steely fingers were about to meet through the sinews. A cold shiver went through Dick—not at the pain, though that was considerable, but at the thought of the affection that his friendly grip implied. Good God! it was terrible to think of inspiring fondness in a savage breast like that. Dick had only too clear a picture in his mind of the fiendish rage that was complementary to such an affection. How vainly he wished himself clear of the whole business. He'll kill me before he's done with me! he whimpered to himself. Yet there was nothing he could do, but go on as he had begun.

They breakfasted or lunched, as the case was, in the lower restaurant overlooking the river. Dick had no eyes for the view. Yet to the outward seeming he was just a rattle-pated college boy without a care on his mind. He kept pumping it up. He was afraid to stop talking. Rulon paid very little attention, but apparently he liked it.

“Kid, your tongue is hung in the middle, and wags at both ends,” he drawled derisively.

“Sure!” said Dick, pulling down the corners of his mouth; “I was born talking. They had to stick a pacifier in my mouth so my mother could rest.” To himself he said plaintively: I wish somebody would tell my why I'm doing this. It's no pleasure to me.

In short they spent the entire balance of the day together, without leaving the hotel. From the restaurant they mounted to the lounge again; from the lounge they descended at tea-time to the men's restaurant (though not for tea) where they sat right through until dinner-time, and for several hours afterwards. By the end of that time, Dick's brain was as weary from the strain as if he had been taking an examination in mathematics.

Dick lost all count of the drinks they had; presumably the hotel knew. To-day it was all put down to Rulon's account. Dick stuck to ginger-ale which he had the waiter bring him in a glass. Rulon never noticed what Dick was drinking, so he got his own. It was astounding how little effect whiskey had on the man. To be sure, by the end of the evening he was drunk, but he

had become so only by infinitesimal degrees—like water wearing away a stone, Dick thought. And there was mighty little change in him drunk or sober.

Hour after hour he sat opposite Dick like an image, with that expression of contemptuous indifference on his face. He rarely opened his lips, and then only to say something offensive. Once in a while, with a truly hateful expression, he would lean across the table, and with the flat of his hand push Dick's face back until his neck was like to crack on the back of his chair, saying: "Get the blazes out of here, Percy!" Or: "I'm fair sick of looking at that smooth mug o' yours." Or something of that sort. Such were his demonstrations of friendship.

Dick began to hate him cordially. But he was fascinated, too. Rulon was no ordinary man. He was perfectly inhuman.

Eleven o'clock had gone some time, when Rulon suddenly bestirred himself and said: "What the blazes! I'm fed up with this joint, Kid. What say we go out and see the town. Know any place to go?"

By that Dick knew that he was thoroughly drunk. Like a thunderclap these words put the necessity of making a decision up to him. Well, he never hesitated. It was understood the man was a scoundrel, but at that, Dick had no intention of playing Judas for a thousand pounds, even if he got it. He couldn't see himself selling out his countrymen to a pack of equally scoundrelly Britishers. So he said:

"Forget it, Mike. You're drunk!"

"Drunk nothing!" growled Rulon. "I reckon I can take care of myself!" And he lugged an ugly, sawed-off automatic out of his hip pocket, and laid it on the table between them.

Dick shuddered. "Put that thing away," he said. "I tell you, you're drunk!"

"You're a liar!" said Rulon, fingering the gun.

Dick fell into a profuse sweat. Gosh! he thought despairingly, am I going to get killed now for trying to save a man's life? "Put that thing up," he said aloud. "You ought to know you're drunk, Mike. Last night you wouldn't have gone out; nor an hour ago you wouldn't have gone. If you drink any more you won't be able to take care of yourself."

"That's never happened yet," rumbled Rulon.

Dick was quite prepared to believe him. “All right, Mike,” he said. “If you’re bound to go, you’ll go alone. I won’t take the responsibility.”

For a long time Rulon sat there lowering at Dick from under black brows. Dick slouched in his chair, whistling between his teeth, and forcing himself to look away from the gun. Finally Rulon shoved the gun back in his pocket. Dick thankfully let the air escape out of his lungs. Rulon got up.

“Well then, I’ll go to bed,” he said.

He walked out of the room as sure-footed as a cat.

Next morning Rulon showed up for breakfast at ten o'clock. He had to go the American Consulate before sailing, he explained. Over the breakfast table he displayed an unwonted interest in Dick's affairs.

"Say, Kid, did you get that remittance from home?" he asked.

Dick thought: after yesterday, Mike owes me something. With a hundred thousand in his pocket he can well afford it, too. Aloud he said: "Aah! I was only bluffing. I don't expect any remittance. And what's more I haven't any home, or any folks to send it."

"The hell you say," said Rulon coolly. He took half a slice of toast at a bite. "What's the big idea, then? How you going to pay your bill here?"

"Search me!" said Dick. "When they present it, I'll just walk out and leave 'em my bag."

"Then what?"

"I dunno. The Embankment, I guess."

"Meanwhile you wouldn't object to makin' a touch offen me?"

"No," said Dick boldly.

"Do I look like the Panhandlers' Friend?" asked Rulon with a hard smile. "Not so's you could notice it. Yah! slack-twisted gentry *I* call them. I suppose you count on working your 'charm' for board and lodging. Is that a man's life? If you had some idea now. . . ."

"You gave me an idea yourself," said Dick cunningly.

"What's that?"

"There ought to be rich pickings in this town for a smart and nervy American."

"There's nothing to it, Kid!" said Rulon, wagging his big, shapely hand. "You can take it from me; I know life. That was on'y in the way of talkin', see? You gotta run straight, boy. There ain't but one man in ten thousand hard enough to get away with crime. The rest on'y flash in the pan. The law'n order combination is too strong for 'em."

Dick did not believe that Rulon could be sincere in this. “Well, if you ask me,” he said, “there isn’t much in running straight, either.” He gave Rulon a fairly truthful sketch of his recent life in New York. “I’m fed up with it!” he concluded.

Rulon’s blue eyes bored into him like gimlets. “On the level?” he asked.

“On the level!” said Dick.

Rulon took out one of the long cigars. “Oh well, if you’re resolved upon it, it’s all right,” he said coolly. “I didn’t want to corrupt your young morals. Make your mind easy about the future, Kid. You can join up with me.”

Dick’s jaw dropped. This was more than he had bargained for.

Rulon was busy with the cigar. “I can use you very well in my biz,” he said between puffs. “You’ve got a classy appearance. You’ve been through college and all. You’ve got a well-oiled tongue. . . .”

“But . . . but . . .” stammered Dick. “I was counting on staying over here.”

“Oh, we can return here,” said Rulon. “But you gotta learn your business first. Do you think you could keep ahead of these smart London police, a baby like you? Don’t make me laugh.” He bent his harsh and contemptuous smile on Dick. “You gotta get rid of all notions of beginning at the top, see? For years yet, you on’y got one thing to keep in mind, and that is to do what I tell you, see? I’ll break you in.”

God! what a fate! thought Dick. “Hadn’t we . . . hadn’t we better think it over a bit?” he faltered.

“Think it over!” cried Rulon with a black face. “It’s the chance of a lifetime I’m offering you! I’ll make you a man like me!”

Not if I know it, thought Dick. He dared say no more.

“I’ll get you a berth on the *Baratoria* on Wednesday,” said Rulon. “There’s plenty of room going back at this season.”

Dick saw an opening. “You can’t take me on the *Baratoria*,” he said. “I’ve got no passport. You can’t afford to take any chances, with what you’re carrying.”

“Hell!” said Rulon, rolling the cigar and chewing it, “you’ll have to follow me over, then. Have a coupla photographs taken here; I’ll carry ’em back with me. I’ve got influence enough to get you a passport over there. I’ll mail it to you. It’ll on’y mean about three weeks delay.”



Dick breathed more freely. A lot could happen in three weeks.

“But you needn’t think I’m going to keep you in this flossy joint,” Rulon went on harshly. “We’ll find you a quiet lodging somewheres. I’ll pay your board there for three weeks in advance, and I’ll arrange so you’ll only have to call at the steamship office to get your ticket.”

Dick made bread pellets on the table-cloth. He judged that silence was the wiser part.

“What might your name be now?” asked Rulon.

“It might be anything,” said Dick. “Call me Kid Murray Hill.”

“Sure, that’s your privilege,” said Rulon indifferently. “What are you registered under here?”

“Just that,” said Dick; “K. Murray Hill.”

A sort of rumbling chuckle issued from Rulon. “Sounds almost English, don’t it?” he said.

There was a long silence. Dick did not look up, but he was well aware that Rulon was studying him with that sneer fixed in his wooden face. At last he spoke.

“You got an entirely wrong notion of life, Kid. You think you can get what you want out of people by accommodating yourself to them. I been watching you trying to accommodate yourself to me. Kinda uphill work, eh?”

Dick laughed in a rueful sort of way.

“Maybe you can work people by accommodating yourself to them,” Rulon went on; “but I say it’s an unmanly part. Besides, it makes the other man feel that he’s a better man than you, and he’s likely to round on you any time. No accommodation is my motto. Stand absolutely pat on that, and you’ll find that everybody else will fall all over themselves accommodating *you*!

“The world has grown soft nowadays. Leastways, soft-spoken. All men palaver each other until it would turn your stomach. Sometimes they do it with a purpose, but mostly they can’t help themselves, because they’re naturally slavish. Sea captains are about the only ones who keep a rough side to their tongues. Well, in a world full of soapsuds, a man who won’t stand for soap enjoys a great advantage. In a soft world a hard man takes ’em by surprise. Make yourself hard I tell you. To hell with right and wrong.

Refuse to give way an inch under any circumstances, and you'll have the other man whimpering with eagerness to accommodate himself to you.

"Mind you, I don't mean to say that it ain't useful to be able to meet the soft-soapers on their own ground. It's a trick I ain't got, and I regret it. Feed 'em all the soap they'll take, and don't take none from them. While your tongue drips oil, let them see by your hard eye that you don't mean a word of it. That's what makes the miserable soft-soapers turn in loops. It's a hard eye that does the trick. Let men see that you don't give a damn, and they are yours! The hard men are the free men; they go out and take what they want."

Dick listened to this confession of faith with his mouth open, so to speak. At that moment Rulon's fascination was stronger than ever. In a queer way he was right; and yet . . . and yet . . . well, young Dick was hopelessly confused, there were so many rights.

"I'll give you an example of what I mean," Rulon went on; "I'll tell you what brought me over to England."

Dick pricked up his ears.

“We fellows has to dispose of our stuff to the Jews,” Rulon began, lighting his ragged cigar afresh. “Jews are the receivers the world over, and blast them for a lot of dirty bloodsuckers, I say. They live soft, and take the big end of the profits. Well, the big operators are connected the world over, so they can ship the stuff from place to place, and baffle the local police, see?”

“A month ago, a Jew that I do business with in New York come to me—I needn’t mention his name; you’ll meet him later; and he says to me: ‘Mike,’ says he, ‘how’d you like a trip to England right in the season?’ ‘Oh, my health’s good,’ I says, ‘I don’t require an ocean voyage.’ ‘There’s ten thousand dollars in it for you, *and* expenses,’ he says. ‘Then I bet the job is worth fifty,’ I comes back. ‘Oh, you will always have your joke, Mike,’ he says, laughing like a Jew does when it hurts him and twisting his body.

“Well, we sparred back and forth awhile, him tryin’ to make me bite at his proposition, and me holdin’ back. As a matter of fact I was just about stony at the time, but it don’t do to let anything on to a Jew. I satisfied myself that ten thousand was really the most he was able to offer. The circumstances were these: there was a valuable pearl necklace kept in a safe in a country house in England, that was just asking to be lifted. There was a certain gang of country house operators had got on to it; they had fixed up all the preliminaries, such as getting full information about the inmates of the house; making a plan of the interior; getting the combination of the safe, and a duplicate key to the front door, and so on. But there wasn’t a man amongst them, the Jew said, with nerve enough to enter the house, and lift the pearls.

“So his associate in London had written to him to ask if he could supply a nervy American for the job. ‘And of course I thought right away of you, Mike,’ the Jew says to me, ‘being as there isn’t a cooler hand in the world for such a job.’ Soft soap, of course, but I admit I was attracted by the idea of goin’ over to England to pull off a stunt that the best they had in England was stumped by. I would be associated with the most high-toned crowd in London, the Jew said, and would be furnished with every assistance beforehand, and protection afterwards.

“That was all I could get out of him. He said it was all he knew. It sounded fishy to me, but at that, he offered to advance me fifteen hundred for expenses then and there, so I wasn’t risking anything. And I like to travel abroad in good company as well as the next one. So I came over on the last trip of the *Baratoria*, three weeks ago.

“I was given the address of another Jew in London, name of Abrams. . . .”

Dick cast down his eyes to avoid giving anything away.

“. . . Same breed, but a different style,” Rulon went on. “In New York they live in a swell apartment and sport a bunch of ten-carat sparklers; in London they live in the slums, and act humble. But bloodsuckers just the same. This Abrams treated me like I was his long-lost brother. He introduced me to different members of the gang. They all laid themselves out to make me feel good. That don’t cut no ice with me. I knew they had an object.

“Well then I heard the story of the pearls; a real romantic story. Seems there was a King in one of the little countries in Europe—I needn’t mention its name; and a few years ago he got kicked out in a revolution, and came to England to live. Seems that all those discarded kings gen’ally beat it to England, ’cause England’s so strong for law ’n order, see? His Nibs carried the crown jewels with him, when he lit out, and the revolutionaries kicked up a hell of a stink, because they claimed the jewels wasn’t the property of the royal family, but of the State.

“They threatened to sue his Nibs in the English courts. I dunno how good a case they had, but anyhow, they threw a scare into him; he came across with the jewels, and the revolutionaries went back satisfied. But he had held out that pearl necklace on them, see? The revolutionaries wasn’t up on the jewels; they thought they had the lot; but fine jewels are always known to the experts; others knew about that pearl necklace. Abrams the Jew knew about it.

“Well, there was the situation. The mouths of Abrams and his gang watered bad for them pearls. You see, they was satisfied there couldn’t be no prosecution. To my mind the King had as good a right to the pearls as the revolutionaries; they on’y cashed in on what they did get, and spent it in riotous living. The State didn’t benefit any. Leastways, that was how it was told me. But just the same, the King couldn’t let it be known publicly that he had held out the pearls on them, without damaging his honor as a King and a gentleman. If they were stolen he would never dare prosecute. Moreover, for

obvious reasons, he kept them in his own house instead of a bank; and for these reasons they were not insured. It looked almost too good to be true.

“In telling me all this, Abrams and his gang touched real light on the difficulties of the job. I began to find them out for myself later. It is true they had obtained the combination of the safe through the maker, but that was only the beginning. The ex-King lived in a grand house on the river Thames, a short distance above a town called Maidenhead, a great boating resort. I went to Maidenhead and engaged a room in a swell little riverside hotel; just the place where an American gentleman might settle down for awhile. I got a room with French windows opening directly on the garden, that I could go in and out of at any hour, and I hired a rowing boat by the week, and kept it moored at the foot of the garden.

“I reconnoitred the scene from the river by day, and again at night. There was plenty of gossip about his Nibs, to be picked up too. The house was a magnificent affair of brick and stone, hundreds of years old. There was not much land about it, six or eight acres, maybe; a fine lawn between house and river, and big trees at either side. It was surrounded on three sides by a twelve foot wall; on the fourth side was the river.

“His Nibs made out to live here like a simple English gentleman, but I was told in the village that he still kept up a royal state, so far as he was able. With my own eyes I could see that he kept about half a company of his former bodyguard hanging about the place camouflaged as gardeners. You see the revolutionaries pretended that as long as the ex-King lived, the republic was in danger, and his Nibs wasn't takin' any chance of a pot shot from an ardent patriot.

“The more I looked into it the less I liked it. The fact that the grounds were patrolled at night, didn't bother me. I found a way in over the wall from the adjoining place, and I soon learned how to avoid those gentry. It was the precautions that were taken inside the house that stumped me. Lights were left burning in the principal corridors all night. Peeping through a window on the ground floor, I saw a regular guard-room, where three or four ex-soldiers sat all night, smoking and playing cards. In the main corridor overhead, where the principal rooms were—one of them the library with the safe, I could see the shadow of a sentry pacing to and fro. Oh, and I forgot to mention, that though I had a key to the door (it was not the front door but a scullery door) the whole house had lately been wired for a burglar alarm, so my key was damn little good to me.

“It was a regular man-trap, you see, and I was sore. Those wops would have filled you full of lead, without thinking twice about it, and there wouldn’t have been no inquest, neither. They would have planted you in the cellar while still warm. They didn’t want the English law nosing into their affairs. Yes, I was good and sore. Anybody but me would have turned around and sailed home at Abrams’ expense. But my patriotism was all het up. I was out to show them Britishers that a proper American could surmount even the impossible.

“Another handicap I laboured under was that the nights were so short. Finally a real bad night broke, with squalls of rain and wind that made the old trees rock and knock their branches together, and I set out to do my stuff. For nearly two weeks I had visited the place every night, and planned out every move. The damn scullery door was of oak about two inches thick, and I couldn’t cut a hole in it to reach in and snip the wires of the burglar alarm. But I found a little window near-by with leaded panes. I picked out the lead with my penknife and got a glass out.

“When I had cut the wires, I opened the scullery door with my key, and walked in. I had the plan of the house by heart. The door from the guard-room to the corridor was standing open, and I could hear the men talking in there. I flattened myself against the wall, and listened, until I got them placed just right. Then I flitted past the open door like a shadow. That was the worst moment.

“I lingered on the stairs until I heard the sentry overhead pass down to the far end of the corridor. Then I slipped up, and hid myself behind a curtain until he come back again. He turned right in front of me. I reached out and handed him one on the coco with a blackjack. I caught him as he dropped. If you hit ’em just right, they never let a peep out of ’em. I tied him up and gagged him, and carried him into one of the dark rooms.

“Then I went into the library, and opened the safe with the help of a flashlight, and took out the little flat box that had been described to me. Gosh! but those babies inside looked good to me, when I put the flash on ’em. I had been warned not to touch anything else that they could prosecute on. Unluckily that stiff in the next room came to, and began to knock his head against the panelling in a senseless kind of way. Sounded through that quiet house like beating a drum. So I beat it quick. I couldn’t go back the way I came. I went out through one of the big windows, and dropped to the ground from a kind of balustrade. Matter of fifteen feet.

“By the time I landed, the whole house was rousing up. Lights sprang up in different windows. I pictured his Nibs the King runnin’ out in his pajamas. I never did clap eyes on that guy. I guess in pajamas he looked much the same as any other guy. I had studied every inch of the ground, I got over the wall by means of the tree I used every night, and so through the next place to my boat. I sculled down the river past Maidenhead, as far as the first lock. There I took to the tow-path—there’s an elegant path for walking the whole way along the river Thames; but thinkin’ some of those wops might come after me on bicycles, I struck away from the river when the dawn broke. The next town I come to, I took train to London.

“Well you know how these English railway coaches are; all little compartments like. For awhile I had a compartment to myself, and I took the opportunity to examine my takings. I was astonished. Pearls are a sort of speciality of mine, and I could see at a glance that these were no ordinary pearls, but some of the finest in Europe. I got sore all over again, thinking of the nerve of that bunch offerin’ a man of my reputation a beggarly ten per cent. of the profits. And sending me to almost sure death at that. It was nothing to them if my career was cut short by a wop’s bullet. Inhuman, I call it.

“I got thinkin’ it over, and I made up my mind I’d dicker for the big end, see? What the blazes, didn’t I hold all the cards? His Nibs couldn’t prosecute; neither could Abrams and his gang tip me off to the police, because while they was showin’ me London, I had learned enough about them to put them all behind the bars. And these English guys are askeared of their jails, let me tell yeh.

“So instead of going to Abrams’ house, in Whitechapel, I come here to the Chester, and I wrote Abrams if he wanted to see me he could come to my hotel. He called me up then, but he found me suffering from an impediment in my speech, see? He said he wouldn’t be let into the hotel—that’s what a little self-respect these English crooks have; takin’ that from a hotel!—so I said I’d wait for him out in front. We argued it out on the sidewalk. I stood out for seventy-five per cent. Abrams cried and wrung his hands. That was all comedy, of course. He thought he had me. He hadn’t never tested the quality of American nerve before. When I’d had enough, I turned around and walked into the hotel. And now these babies” (here Rulon tapped his breast) “are going back to America with me. Abrams has written me, offering me seventy-five per cent., but the price has gone up to ninety now. The moral of this story is: It pays to be hard-boiled.”

Rulon looked at his watch. “Well, I got to go to the American Consulate,” he said. “Want to come?”

Dick shook his head. He felt a bit dazed. “I’d better stay away from that joint until I get a passport,” he said.

“Suit yourself,” said Rulon indifferently. “See you later.” He stalked away.



## 9

Still feeling rather dazed by the story which Rulon had nonchalantly spit out of the corner of his mouth, Dick went up to his own room where he could think things out by himself. He pulled his easy chair up to the window, and cocked his heels on the sill. What a story! What a story! One read of such things in the newspapers, but to be brought into direct contact with it made a fellow's head swim.

What was he to do? Without any volition of his own, he was being drawn deeper and deeper into this thing. It was no light thing for a man like Rulon to get his hooks into you. Dick seemed to feel the man's talons actually digging into his shoulder, and a cold shiver went through him. When he was not with Rulon, Dick was no longer susceptible to the terrible fascination of the man, and he could see things whole. Good heavens! what a scoundrel!—magnificent in a way, but a scoundrel!

Well, how was he to get clear of him—and keep a whole skin? One thing was certain; there must be an end of drifting. He had just drifted into this hole, and unless he exerted himself, he would drift in where there was no bottom. But the only thing he could think of was to allow Rulon to go back to America, and then simply not follow him. In that case he, Dick, would end just where he had started; a stranger and penniless in London. Moreover, he would have the British bunch to square. At the best, it seemed like a tame way out. This was an extraordinary situation that Rulon had laid out to him; a smart young fellow ought to be able to reap some advantage to himself from it.

A sort of joking solution occurred to Dick; suppose he stole the pearls from Rulon, and telling both the British and American varieties of crook to go to hell, negotiated himself with the rightful owner of the jewels for their return. He would certainly be able to find a rightful owner somewhere. Pearls like that would not go begging; a ten thousand dollar reward would not be out of the way. Besides the publicity he would get out of it.

Dick chuckled at the idea—and then he began to shiver. Oh Lord! I wish I'd never thought of that! he inwardly groaned. For now he knew he would never be able to stop thinking about it. To steal the pearls from that brutal braggart; what an act of poetic justice! It was like having a story come out

right in the end. It appealed to Dick's artistic sense. It ought not to be too difficult. Did not Rulon get drunk in his company every night? And once he, Dick, got hold of the pearls, there was nothing Rulon could do. Possession of the pearls was everything.

But *Rulon*! Safe in his own room though he was, Dick broke into a gentle sweat of fear. That figure of terror! that tiger of a man! Why you know you'd never be able to do it! Dick told himself. He's got you paralysed with a look before you begin. And as for getting drunk, you know perfectly well that drink only sharpens his senses, and makes him more dangerous. The idea is ridiculous. Forget it! Forget it!

And yet . . . ! And yet . . . ! The pearls *ought* to be lifted from Rulon. To have that cynical ruffian get away with them was too much. If I don't make a try for them, I'll regret it all my life long, Dick thought. I'll despise myself. . . . It could be done. Suppose he is able to take care of himself as long as he is awake; he has got to sleep some time. When he sleeps, the fumes of the alcohol are bound to have their effect. He will sleep like the dead. If I could get him then . . . !

A sort of dialogue went on inside Dick. I *can't* do it. I haven't the nerve. Nobody would have the nerve to go up against *him*!

Are you going to let him bluff you to a standstill, then? That's just what he does to everybody. He told you as much. A bluff can always be called. It's only your own thoughts you're scared of. He's only a man like yourself. Once you got the pearls, there is nothing he could do, except take a shot at you. Well, keep out of his way. He's only one man. If you wanted, you could go to the police for protection. Your conscience is clear. . . .

Oh, keep out of it! Keep out of it! Oh, for a quiet life . . . !

Well, what the hell else are you going to do then? There's no alternative. . . .

I *can't* do it! I'm willing to admit he's got me scared off. . . .

You *got* to do it. In your heart you know you got to do it. . . .

There was no end to this discussion. It went around in a circle. Dick determined to go down into the streets in order to distract his mind.

Yielding to a sudden impulse, he walked down the stairs, instead of ringing for the lift. He knew that Rulon's room was number 217, having heard him ask for his key, and he wished to locate the room. He knew it was on the third bedroom floor. There was no regularity in the room-plan of this

English hotel, as there would be in America. He found that it was the second room from the end of the left hand corridor at the back of the building. It was on the right-hand side of the corridor, therefore it must overlook the river like his own room higher up.

When he got down to the street, he walked around to the Embankment side of the building to study those windows. He immediately perceived that the windows of the floor below Rulon's room had ornamental projecting architraves over them, making it a perfectly simple matter to climb from any window on the third floor to the next window. At this season, of course, all the windows were wide open, and in England screens are unknown.

If I could only get one of the rooms next to Rulon's, thought Dick. . . . But what's the use of wishing! It's not likely either of them is vacant, full as the place is at this season. And if one was vacant, I couldn't have myself moved without exciting suspicion. . . .

Aah! you're only bluffing yourself! You know you haven't got nerve enough to try it on. . . .

Well, it's no harm to plan how it might be done.

# 10

Again that night, Dick and Michael Rulon sat until a late hour in the men's restaurant, while Rulon slowly tanked up. Rulon, practically speechless, sat lowering at Dick with a sneer fixed in his hard, handsome, yellow face, while Dick did the merry and bright act. Every now and then the thought of robbing that fear-inspiring figure would poke itself forward in Dick's mind, like a sheeted ghost with waving arms, and Dick would fall to sweating and trembling.

Aah! forget it! It can't be done! he would say to himself.

But the ghost refused to stay laid for long.

Rulon expressed no desire to leave the hotel to-night. As midnight approached, he suddenly announced that he was going to bed.

"Want me to go up with you?" Dick heard himself saying, very, very carelessly, and immediately began to shake again.

"What's the matter with you?" snarled Rulon. "A person would think I was incapable!"

Dick was secretly relieved. Not to-night, anyway, he whispered to himself. He walked with Rulon to the lift.

As the lift door closed behind Rulon, Dick thought: If I don't stall off those Britishers they'll be queering my game somehow. So he walked out to the entrance court, and hailed a taxi.

"Take me to the Racquets Court, number eleven, Pentland Mews," he said.

Dick learned in the course of his drive that "mews" is London for stables. The great terraces of tall dwellings in London have their rows of stables behind, opening on an alley; this is the mews. With the decline of the horse, his former stables have been turned into small dwellings, or have been let out for a variety of purposes. In the centre of Pentland Mews, several of the little buildings had been thrown into one, and the roof of the upper story raised to make a raquets court for some rich man. This had subsequently become a supper club. The situation was both secluded and very central.

After the dingy, cobbled alleyway, with the garages and small workshops opening off, the Racquets Court was supposed to take your breath away. It did Dick's. Anything less like a crooks' hangout you couldn't imagine. The effect had been carefully contrived. The original front of the stables had not been changed, and the soot of a century rested on it undisturbed. You entered through a dirty, common little door—and found yourself in a luxurious fairyland.

Two gorgeous lackeys with powdered hair relieved Dick of his hat. Evidently this lower floor was given up to dressing-rooms and so on. Those wonderful tall English girls moved to and fro. They don't know how to dress like our women, but they have a slow grace that our girls seldom acquire, and their voices are simply ravishing. Dick's heart began to beat right away. But he was intimidated by the appalling hauteur of these exquisite girls with their boyish heads. He had not been long enough in London to learn that that, too, was a bluff which could be called.

Behind the lackeys at the foot of the narrow stairway, stood an irreproachable gentleman of foreign extraction in evening dress. Dick, in his grey worsted, began to feel very much out of place. However, the elegant gentleman conveyed no intimation by his manner that Dick was not suitably dressed. He enquired with the most charming courtesy if Dick desired to see a member.

"Yes, Lord Greatorrex," said Dick.

"What is your name, if you please?"

"Mr. Murray Hill."

The foreign gentleman bent like a jack-knife. "Ah, Mr. Murray Hill. It is a pleasure to welcome you to the club. Lord Greatorrex is expecting you. You will find him upstairs."

Dick climbed the narrow stairway, brushing perforce against some of the lovely girls who were ceaselessly ascending and descending. When brushed against they exhaled a variety of intoxicating perfumes like different kinds of flowers.

The walls of the great room overhead were hung in unrelieved black. There were no windows, but a great skylight, dimly perceived, overhead. The floor was black, too, and highly polished. All this black made a wonderful background for the flowerlike girls. There was a line of tables all around the walls, and over each table was suspended a light with a black shade having a rosy lining, so that each table and its occupants was thrown

up in high relief against the black. When dancing was going on, spotlights were thrown on the floor. There were no other lights, and the lofty ceiling of the room was as shadowy as the night sky out-of-doors.

The company was slightly mixed. That is to say; in the fashionable throng there was a certain admixture of hard-looking characters. Camouflage, Dick decided; they are introduced to persuade the swell guys that they are seeing life. Evidently the Raquets Court traded on its shady reputation. As the evening wore on, Dick, using his eyes to good advantage, perceived that there were three elements in the crowd; the smart pleasure-seekers; the alleged hard characters; the real crooks. These were not to be distinguished outwardly from the denizens of the upper world. Not a bad idea, thought Dick; the real crooks use the dummy crooks as a blind for themselves.

Dick had known of similar places at home in the land of prohibition. If I had brought Mike along with me, he thought, somebody would have picked a quarrel with him, and in the resulting fracas, all the swell guys would beat it for safety, leaving the crooks to finish their man at their leisure. None of the swell crowd would dare to speak of it afterwards. . . . Well, the same thing might happen to me to-night, if I don't watch my step.

Greatorex was sitting at a table with a blonde girl in green. As soon as Dick spoke to Greatorex, the girl unobtrusively faded. Greatorex welcomed Dick with the greatest heartiness.

"How are you, old fellow! How are you! Sit down!"

But when the slight ripple of interest attendant on Dick's arrival had subsided, Greatorex bent a cold, black eye on him.

"Where's Rulon?" he asked under his breath.

"Nothing doin'," said Dick.

Greatorex swore softly. "How many nights do you expect us to sit around here waiting for you to bring him?" he demanded.

"No need for you to wait any longer," said Dick. "He's too wise a bird to be caught that way. He won't venture out-of-doors after dark."

"I thought you said you got him drunk every night," said Greatorex.

"He gets himself drunk," said Dick, chuckling. "Don't need any assistance from me. But the drunker he is, the more suspicious he gets."

"Where's your boasted American sharpness, then?" sneered Greatorex.

“As to that,” said Dick mildly, “I don’t remember boasting any. Anyhow, I hadn’t seen this guy then. He’s American, too.”

“You’ve mulled the business!” said Greateorex angrily.

“All right,” said Dick, getting hot in return. “Put an Englishman on the job. I’ll gladly resign in his favour.”

“How about the money we laid out on you?”

“You took your chance, just as I took mine. I told you I was broke.”

“By Gad!” said Greateorex, “you needn’t think we’re going to be had as easy as that!”

He had raised his voice a little, and people were beginning to look curiously at their table. Dick wondered how long before the signal would be given for a concerted rush to be made on him. He suddenly perceived that one of the waiters in the place was no other than the redoubtable Hawkins; him of the bad teeth and the cringing manner. Yet Dick was not afraid then; he was too busy watching. I wish I had a gun! he thought.

However, no attack was made on him. A diversion was created by the arrival of a quaint figure at their table; to wit: Abrams the Jew. He was suddenly there; Dick had not seen him coming. He was all spruced up for the occasion, but still an incongruous figure in that gathering. Strange to see the sparse grey beard falling over the white shirt front. Through the hairs of his beard you could see the little black bow all askew.

“’Evening, Lord Greateorex . . . ’Evening, Mr. Murray Hill,” he said in his oily fashion, and sat down at their table without waiting for an invitation. To a certain extent he still played the part of the fawning Jew in the presence of fine gentlemen, but it was observable that Greateorex instantly took a back seat at his coming. It was clear from whom Greateorex received his impetus.

Abrams spent several minutes in establishing his character by making fulsome inquiries as to Dick’s health, etc. He then said in that queer, thick, Yiddisher, Cockney jargon of his: “I may say, Bister Burray ’Ill, that I am familiar wiv dis unfort’nit affair of ’Is Lordzhib’s; ’Is Lordzhib ’avin’ done me the honor of askin’ my advice. You may zhpeag cuvvite vreeley before me.”

Dick described the situation to him. “I came here to discuss some new plan with Greateorex,” he said indignantly, “and he jumps down my throat, as if I had stolen the pearls.”

“Vell! Vell!” said Abrams soothingly. “You must make allowadzes, dear Bister Burray ’Ill! It is zuch a bainful affair!”

He proceeded to put Dick through a subtle cross-examination. Dick was able to answer his questions truthfully in the main, and this seeming openness convinced the Jew that Dick was still dealing squarely with the gang. Finally Abrams suggested plainly that Dick lift the pearls himself when Rulon was drunk.

“I thought of that,” said Dick. “The difficulty would be to make a getaway. He’s always unconsciously feeling of the pocket where he keeps them.”

Abrams offered to supply Dick with a seventy-two inch string of imitation pearls. Dick was instructed to call for them at Greatorex’s flat next morning. “And maybe ’Is Lordzhib vill gif you a lezzon,” added Abrams with an extraordinary fawning leer. “’Is Lordzhib amuses ’imself with sleight-of-’and dricks.”

Abrams then wished to order drinks. “If the zhentlemen vill so far honor me,” he said, sinking his head between his shoulders.

Presently he asked Greatorex if Mr. Murray Hill had met the Countess. Dick pricked up his ears. Greatorex shook his head.

“Vell, interdooce them, interdooce them! The Countess is ’ere to-night. She ought to ’ave an obbortunity to dank the young zhentleman who is servin ’er so faithful.”

Greatorex made no sign, but Abrams, for all his obsequiousness, had the air of one who knows that he will be obeyed.

“And now, zhentlemen, I must leab you,” he said rising. “This is no place for poor old Sab Abrabs. I only drobbed in on the chance of bein’ able to advise my dear young friend.”

He shuffled out, bobbing and side-stepping obsequiously to anybody who looked at him.



Greatorrex, having left Dick alone at the table for a moment or two, returned upstairs bringing a girl with him. At the first sight of her Dick's heart began to beat. It was the lady of the photograph. She was very tall and slender, and of all the boyish heads there, hers was the most haughtily borne. Her head moved slightly when she walked, like a swan's. Her short, straight hair which quaintly framed her face, was like a blackbird's wing, and she was dressed in unrelieved black. A black swan. She eschewed rouge; her face was tinted the palest shade of bistre in which her mouth bloomed like a crimson flower.

She acknowledged Dick with the slightest of bows, and sat down without looking at him. A silence fell on them all. Greatorrex was sulky, and for once Dick's ready tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. The girl's hoity-toity air overpowered him. She was no countess, but she gave herself more than the airs of one. Dick did not believe, either, that she was Greatorrex's sister. They sat side by side opposite him, and no resemblance was to be discovered. Moreover, Greatorrex was jealous.

Fortunately the tongue-tied Dick knew the language of the dance, and when the music started, he asked her. She stood up languidly, still pointedly avoiding a glance at him, and yielded herself to his embrace. She smelled of —ah! what was it? Dick thought of all the most delicious scents he knew; honeysuckle; linden blossoms; the flower of the grape.

When they became lost in the dancing throng she lifted her face with a slow smile that caused Dick's pulses to leap.

"So this is what you're like!" she drawled.

"What were you expecting?" he asked, grinning.

"When I came in everybody was looking at me," she murmured. "And so I couldn't let my real feelings show."

"What were your real feelings?"

"Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" she whispered, pressing his shoulder under her hand.

Dick drew her closer to him. She made no resistance.

“Ah! how wonderful it is to find a real man!” she breathed.

Dick had heard this sort of talk on the other side of the ocean. He knew quite well that it was all in the day’s work to her, yet it intoxicated him too. Under her airs, the essential woman was so sweet! While she made her eyes languorous for his benefit, he could see a little imp sitting in their depths who was sizing him up with a cool interest. These black eyes were not sharp and shallow like Greatorrex’s. It would have been more prudent for Dick to play the game with her, but his blood was carrying him away. He desired to quarrel with this girl in order to make her natural.

Thus later, when she said in that delicious English drawl of hers: “It’s one of the penalties of one’s position that one must wear a mask,” Dick answered rudely:

“Oh, come off!”

She drew her head back sharply. The delicately pencilled eyebrows went up into two points.

“You’re no more of a Countess than I am,” said Dick. “But you’re the sweetest girl I’ve ever seen.”

She held herself as far as possible away from him. “I think you’d better take me back to my brother,” she said stiffly.

“And he’s not your brother, either,” said Dick. “He’s sore because you’re dancing with me.”

She said no more. They danced on. She refused to look at Dick. Evidently her instructions did not cover this emergency, and she was at a loss how to handle the barbarian from the West.

Ah! but she was sweet! “Don’t misunderstand me,” Dick whispered warmly. “It’s because I like you so much, that I can’t keep up the comedy with you. I want things to be on the level between you and me. It’s your own self that I want to know.”

Her eyes flew up to his in a startled way, and were instantly covered again. How like a child’s eyes they were, when she was startled!

“Dance close again,” Dick pleaded.

She shook her bobbed head.

Dick thought of appealing to her generosity. “I was foolish to give so much away,” he said. “Are you going to tell the men? They don’t take any

pains to keep up the comedy of the wicked rascal who stole the family pearls, but they expect me to.”

“I shan’t tell them,” she whispered. “But . . . but who are you?”

“Oh, there’s no mystery about me. I’m exactly what I told Greatorex and Abrams I was . . . I don’t believe you’re married at all, baby. You haven’t a married look.”

“I’m not.”

“Well, if I had my way you would be.”

“Ah, you’re clever!” she whispered. “Turning the tables on me!”

“Look at me!” said Dick peremptorily. “Look long! There are no curtains on my eyes.”

She dragged her wistful eyes up to his, and they clung there. Then they went slowly down again.

“Now do you think so?” he demanded.

“No, I don’t think so,” she whispered. “But maybe you are.”

She came close to him again, and Dick pressed his warm cheek against her cool one, careless of how Greatorex might scowl. They danced on in a happy dream. Dick forgot pearls, Rulon, and all vexations. His spirits soared. He had found his tongue.

“Ah, you sweet English girl!” he whispered in her ear. “Isn’t it a funny thing? I’ve met hundreds of girls. You never know when you’re going to get yours, do you? There’s something about you—well, it’s impossible to explain, isn’t it? The idea of a kid like you setting up to be a Countess!”

“There are young Countesses,” she said.

“Oh, you got away with it, all right! But I’m not afraid of you! You’re only a kid. You’re a dear, *dear* kid! When you first came in you had me scared stiff!”

“I was scared, too,” she confessed. “I am always scared. I hide it by looking stupid.”

Dick laughed.

“Do you think I’m pretty?” she asked.

“What a question!” said Dick pulling down the corners of his mouth. “Do you think I’d be satisfied with anything less than the prettiest here?”

“Oh!” she said, a little hurt.

“That isn’t what I mean,” said Dick quickly. “My tongue has just got into the habit of joshing. You *are* the prettiest girl here, but that means nothing to me. It’s something else. When you’re really stirred up, this sort of thing sickens you. I’d like to have you somewhere else. I’d like to have you in the country, sunburned, in an old dress!”

She pressed herself close against him. “Ah, you’re a great dear!” she whispered. “You have such funny thoughts. How did a boy like you get into this?”

“God knows!” said Dick.

Another happy interlude of dancing.

“What do they call you, baby?” murmured Dick.

“Millicent. Silly name, isn’t it?”

“Not when you have it.”

“What’s yours?”

“Dick.”

“That’s just right . . . *Dear* Dick!”

This was said with such a world of sadness that Dick asked sharply: “What’s the matter?”

“Oh, nothing . . . I wish . . . Oh, never mind! You’re just the sort of boy I’ve dreamed about, Dick.”

“Well, here I am,” said Dick. “And that’s no dream.”

“No! No!” she said. “Confound you, Dick! I shall be unhappy now. You’ve got me all stirred up.”

“Well, give way to it!” said Dick. “It’s glorious! You don’t see me holding back.”

“No, Dick! We’re playing with gunpowder. I shan’t see you again. Don’t say any more, Dick. You must help me play the game. I’ve got to keep my face in this place . . .”

“But, Millicent . . .!”

Just then the music stopped. They were left standing at the opposite end of the room from Greatorex’s table.

“Walk slowly,” whispered Millicent. “There’s something I want to say. . . . May not have another chance. Don’t let it appear in your face that I’m saying anything out of the way. Everybody is watching us. You’re the handsomest man in the room, Dick. Can’t you get out of this? Can’t you take the next ship for home?”

“What, and leave you?” said Dick.

“Ah, be serious now! You have got to forget about me. I can’t speak plainly. I’m in deadly earnest. Whichever way this thing goes, don’t you see? there’s nothing in it for you . . . they would never . . . *you’re in danger!*”

They were approaching Greatorrex, who was regarding them viciously. The monocle hung unregarded against his shirt front.

“Poor Bertie!” she murmured. “He’s out of countenance, too. You’re an upsetting person, Dick.”

“Ah!” whispered Dick with a sudden anxiety; “you couldn’t fall for *him*! He’s a crook!”

“Well, what are you, Dick?”

She had him there.

She was once more the languid Countess—a Countess of the night clubs. “Thanks awf’ly,” she drawled. “You’re a frightfully good dahncah, Mr. Murray Hill.”

Next morning Dick went to Greatorrex's flat to receive the string of imitation pearls. He found the young Englishman looking glum; and their communications were brief. Nothing was said about giving Dick a lesson in pocket-picking. Dick could see that Greatorrex wanted him to fail, now. Millicent was more to the Englishman than his share of the pearls.

Upon awaking that morning, Dick's mind had snapped back to where it was before he had visited the night club. He still thought of Millicent occasionally, and a warm feeling stole around his heart; she was a darling! Some day perhaps! But in the meantime he was a young man in a hazardous situation, and it was up to him to save his skin.

On his way to and from the Victoria street flat his thoughts were of Rulon . . . Rulon! How to steal the pearls from Rulon. No feasible plan had yet occurred to him, and this was Tuesday, his last day. Early next morning Rulon would take the boat train from Waterloo. It was useless to think of entering Rulon's room direct, for all the rooms in the Chester were furnished with bolts on the inside. You cannot pick a bolt. A hundred times Dick told himself that the scheme was impossible; but he could not leave it alone.

Shortly after he had returned to the hotel, one of the apple-cheeked pages approached him. Was he Mr. Murray Hill? Dick confessed his identity.

"The gentleman in 217, Mr. Rulon, wants you to come up, sir."

Dick's heart gave a great bound. "Very well," he said with a casual air.

"Do you know the way, Sir?"

"Oh, quite," said Dick, who had already picked up this word from the English.

Dick lit a cigarette to give himself an air of nonchalance. He made his way upstairs with a tumultuously beating heart. Here was an unexpected opportunity! Rulon would scarcely be fully dressed in his own room. His coat would be hanging over the back of a chair. Well, Dick had the imitation pearls ready in his side pocket. He told himself that Rulon would not be facing him every moment he was in the room. . . . But you'll never be able

to do it! he thought with a sinking heart. . . . You *will* do it if you have half a chance, the other part of him replied.

As he came along the softly-carpeted corridor towards Rulon's room, he perceived that the door of the adjoining room stood open. The key was in the door. Dick peeped in and saw that the bed was tumbled, the room in disarray, as if the last tenant had but that moment given it up. In a flash his plan leaped into his head complete. He had no time to think. There was no one stirring in that part of the hotel. He slipped into the room, and thrusting his cigarette amongst the tumbled bedclothes, was outside again in three seconds. He locked the door and pocketed the key.

He was obliged to pause outside Rulon's door for a moment in order to steady his shaken nerves. He was terrified then at what he had done, but he would not go back and undo it. In a place as well organised as the Chester, he assured himself, it will be put out in a few minutes. Why, there's an extinguisher at every corner. If nobody comes, I'll put it out myself. What with the smell of the smoke and the chemicals, *they won't be able to let that room again to-day.*

He knocked on Rulon's door, and was harshly bidden to enter. He found Rulon clad in pyjamas, lying on top of his disordered bed. The man raised himself to a sitting position as Dick entered. He was sober, and in a villainous temper; his eyes glittered with a hateful contemptuousness, and he bared his strong yellow teeth. Dick had never seen him look so truly devilish. He ascribed it to his tremendous potations during the last few days. Even Rulon's iron frame was bound to show the strain. Another week of it, and he'll be seeing snakes, Dick thought. I wouldn't like to have the handling of him then.

"Good morning, Kid! Good morning!" cried Rulon with fleering sarcasm. "Fresh as a daisy, ain't yeh?"

"Same to you," said Dick. "You're a red-eyed daisy."

With half a glance Dick saw that Rulon's clothes were lying neatly folded on a chair beyond the fireplace. As he had expected, the coat was hung over the back of the chair. But maybe Rulon kept the pearls under his pillow at night.

"Never mind me," snarled Rulon; "sit you down and let me look at you. You're a sight for sore eyes!"

Dick obeyed. "One of the bell-hops said you wanted to see me," he remarked.

“Oh, nothing in particular, Kid. I just wanted the pleasure of a little talk in private with my young friend. My first waking thought was of you, Kid.” His voice suddenly turned hoarser. “Aah! you smooth-faced little cur!” he snarled. “You pretty college boy! Can you look me in the eye?”

This was so much in Rulon’s usual style that Dick perceived nothing amiss. In order to show that he was not afraid of the man, he took out a cigarette, and lighted it deliberately. While he watched Rulon, his ears were stretched for sounds from the next room. The suspense was fairly sickening. He swore to himself that if he ever got out of this he would live quiet for the rest of his days.

“Look me in the eye! Look me in the eye!” Rulon was snarling.

And Dick managed to do so, though it took all the force of his soul. He nerved himself up to it, by saying to himself: The man is just crazed; crazed. He can’t hurt me if I show no fear of him.

The fact that Dick could meet his eye seemed to infuriate Rulon. He broke out in a stream of oaths. “Aah! you have a sort of a nerve, haven’t you?” he cried. “So much the better! It’ll be a pleasure to me to break it! I’m gonna make you whine for mercy now!”

Rulon tossed the pillow aside. The necklace was *not* beneath it, Dick saw, but the gun was. Rulon picked it up.

“Your face is too smooth!” he snarled. “I gotta spoil it!”

Dick went cold inside, but he would not let the man see him flinch. “Put that gun up,” he said. “You ought to be sober this time of day.”

Rulon’s hand lay across his thigh with the gun hanging from it, ready for instant use. “I *am* sober,” said Rulon; “cold sober. That’s just it.”

“It’ll go off in a minute,” said Dick, “and you’ll have the whole hotel about your ears.”

“I want to spoil your face so bad I don’t care what they do to me,” snarled Rulon. But the next moment he did toss the gun aside on the bed. He swung his legs to the floor. “You’re right,” he said with a horrible smile. “Why should I shoot off a gun when I can kill you quiet with my hands?”

He came towards Dick half crouching. His sinewy bare feet seemed to grip the floor. Dick sat tight. Bringing his rage-distorted face close to that of the young man, Rulon muttered:

“Do you understand. . . . I’m going to kill you now?”



“What will you do with the body?” asked Dick, affecting a smile.

“Carry it across the corridor, and drop it down an airshaft. . . . Beg for mercy, damn you! beg!”

“Never!” said Dick.

The strong hands did then actually close about his throat. Dick forced himself not to struggle. That would have been fatal. He merely brought up his hands and laid them one on each of Rulon’s arms. He kept his eyes fixed on those other eyes as long as he could. It was Rulon’s eyes which bolted then. But Rulon’s searching thumbs found his windpipe, and pressed it. An excruciating agony tore at Dick’s breast. . . .

Then suddenly Rulon threw him on the floor. “Aah, you’re not worth killing!” he snarled, turning away. “I should worry about a kid like you. You can’t touch me.”

Dick picked himself up. He kept a wary eye on the door. It was not locked. But he felt that he had won this round. He did not want to go yet.

Then certain sounds of a smothered confusion reached them from the corridor; running feet on the soft carpets; excited whispering.

Rulon flung open the door. “What the hell’s the matter out here!” he said.

Like a flash Dick’s hand was in the inside breast pocket of the coat hanging over the back of the chair. My chance to get back at him! he thought. But the pocket was empty! Bitter disappointment made Dick grind his teeth. He dared not search further. He joined Rulon out in the corridor.

There was a knot of hotel servants at the door of the adjoining room. Smoke was sweeping through the cracks. Behind the men at the door, a chambermaid was wringing her hands, and a cooler-headed one was holding a hand over the first ones mouth to keep her from crying out. They were all more afraid of alarming the guests than they were of the fire.

One of the managers came running with an extinguisher. The man who was holding the door threw it open. Smoke billowed out. Dick, looking over their shoulders, saw that the bed was all afire. Part of the bedding had fallen to the floor, and the carpet was blazing also. The room was full of the soft busy whisper of flames. But it was all over in a few seconds. The extinguisher hissed, and the flames went out. The room filled with noxious-smelling fumes.

The harassed manager sought to shepherd the big figure of Rulon back into his room. "If you would be good enough to retire, Sir. It is out, as you see. Nobody has been disturbed but yourself. Pray do not mention it to the other guests. It would create such an unfortunate impression!"

"How did it start?" rumbled Rulon.

"The last occupant must have been smoking in bed. He has only just left. Most unfortunate! Such a thing never happened in this house before. Just when the room is needed, too!"

Rulon returned to his room. Dick followed as far as the door.

"Come on in," said Rulon, grinning evilly.

"No thanks," said Dick, grinning back. "I'll talk to you downstairs. It's safer."

"Come on in," Rulon repeated. "Want to show you something."

Dick, full of curiosity, took one step over the threshold, but kept his hand on the partly opened door behind him. Rulon, baring his muscular waist, showed Dick that he was wearing a sort of belt of unbleached cotton around his body. It was two inches wide, and fastened in front with a flat wire buckle. Through the cotton, the outline of the double string of pearls was visible.

"For travelling," said Rulon, grinning. "Pretty good gadget, eh? Made it myself. They was the exact right length to go round. Thirty-six inches."

"Pretty good," agreed Dick with an indifferent air.

His heart went down like lead. So that was over! All his thinking and planning had come to nothing. . . . Why was Rulon showing it to him now? And grinning that way. Was it possible that Rulon was on to him? He shivered at the thought. But that couldn't be. Oh, well, it was all over. . . .

He went down to the lounge.

He sat in one of the big chairs in the lounge, sunk in his bitter thoughts. All over! All over! All during the last three days Dick had submitted to the crude insults of the brute, borne up by the thought of the completeness of the revenge he was planning. And now it was snatched away from him. The idea of having that brutal ruffian get clean away with his ill-gotten gains was simply unendurable. Especially after the last hour.

He even debated going to the London police and telling the whole story. But he quickly discarded that plan. That was a sneak's revenge. That wouldn't give him any satisfaction. Besides, there would be no advantage to be gained by it. No, it was all over. Dick could almost have cried with balked rage.

*Was* it all over? Could not the belt be stolen from around Rulon's waist while he slept? Or better still, there was that string of phony pearls in Dick's pocket. Why not sew them up in a similar belt and exchange one for the other? Such buckles as that Rulon wore were to be had anywhere. The belt was just a straight piece of cotton four inches wide folded down the middle, and sewed up. He could certainly sew as well as Rulon. Ah! there were rich possibilities in the idea! For Rulon would scarcely open the belt until he got on shipboard, and most likely not until he landed in America. And when he *did* open it, and saw the fish-skin pearls! Oh, Gee! Oh, Gee! what a *lovely* thought!

Dick's timorous self intervened here. Do you actually think you can change one belt for another on Rulon's bare body? But the other part of him instantly replied: Why not, if he's dead drunk? . . . Anyhow, I'm going to try it!

He got up as if he had springs in his legs, and left the hotel. He lost a good deal of time inquiring for a place where they sold notions, until he learned that in England the proper word was haberdashery. In a tiny shop off the Strand he got what he wanted; a yard and a quarter of unbleached cotton; a flat buckle; spool of thread; needle; pair of scissors.

"That's funny, now," said the old woman who waited on him: "another gentleman who was in here yesterday, bought the identical things. He was an American gentleman too."

Dick devoutly hoped that Rulon would not come into the shop again. That was hardly likely, though. "That so?" he said indifferently. "I want them to make a money belt."

"So did he."

On his way back to the hotel, it occurred to Dick, that if he sewed up the artificial pearls in the belt, he would have to account for the loss of them later to the British crooks. He must seek about for something else.

He entered another shop where there were hundreds of bead necklaces of every sort hanging in the window. It appeared that seventy-two inches was a regular size, and he had no difficulty there. To match the size of the stones required more care, but he finally accomplished it to his satisfaction. These beads were of coloured glass, and cost him but a few shillings. So much the better when Rulon opens them up, he thought smiling to himself. It took almost the last money he had.

He got through the hotel and to his rooms without meeting Rulon. An hour later his task was completed. He tried the belt on his own body, but it did not fit very well, since Rulon could give him several inches around the waist.

When he went down for lunch, he saw Rulon in the lounge. His heart failed him a little; one can not be half strangled without remembering it in the blood; but Dick would not do anything to avoid a meeting. Rulon came sauntering over towards him.

"Where you been?" he demanded.

"Just bumming around," said Dick.

"C'mon and eat. I'll pay."

"You surprise me," said Dick.

"Oh hell, it amuses me to insult you," said Rulon.

All right, my man! He laughs best who laughs last, thought Dick, following him downstairs.

At midnight the two were again sitting in the men's restaurant. The place had filled, emptied and filled again since they had come there. Many had now come in from the theatres. But certainly there could have been no other such strangely-assorted couple there. Rulon had been cursing Dick all evening, but he would not let him go. Dick set his jaw; kept his end up as well as he could, and bided his time.

Dick's mind had been longingly coquetting with the idea of knock-out drops, but he had to relinquish it for two very good reasons; first he had no money; second he didn't know what to ask for. All he could do was to sit opposite Rulon silently willing the man to drink. Either that or something else was very effective, for during this evening Rulon had outdone all his previous exploits in that direction. Dick figured that he must be well along in the second bottle since dinner.

"My last night in a drinkin' country!" said Rulon, raising his glass. "I don't want to leave none of the stuff behind me."

"You're killing yourself," said Dick with a shrug.

This acted as a sort of fillip to Rulon, and he immediately ordered another. "Kill myself!" he said with a harsh croak of laughter. "It would take more than this watered whisky to do it. I'm tough, Kid; tough as seasoned oak. None of your bending woods like hickory in me."

"Oh, you're tough, all right," said Dick.

"And what's more," said Rulon, "when I leave this room you'll see me walk as straight as a ruled line. And by God! if any man was to cross me, I can shoot straight, too!"

"It's wonderful how you can carry it!" said Dick.

"Yah!" snarled Rulon. "What are yeh after now? Tryin' to flatter me! Do you think I can't see it?"

"You're hard to suit," said Dick evenly. "If I josh you, you get sore, and if I agree with you, you get sore. I only want to keep you quiet."

“Quiet!” said Rulon. “I’ll show yeh!” He held up his finger for another drink.

The fifteenth! Dick registered in silent satisfaction. Flesh and blood can’t stand much more.

“You’re too big for your shoes!” snarled Rulon. “Sittin’ there man to man with me; talkin’ up like you considered yourself my equal! *You!* I’ll put the fear of God into your smug face!”

“If you don’t like my face I’ll remove it,” said Dick, making as if to rise.

“Sit down!” barked Rulon. “. . . And take what I choose to give yeh!”

Dick shrugged.

“Call me ‘Sir,’ when you speak to me.”

But this was a bit too much. Dick remained silent.

Rulon went off on another track. “Why don’t you ast me what are the arrangements about your comin’ after me?” he asked.

“I’m waiting for you to bring it up,” said Dick.

“Aah! you know better than to ask me! . . . Are yeh expectin’ to join up with me?” he asked with a cunning air.

Something warned Dick to tell the truth. Whatever he said, would anger the man in his present state. What did it matter, so he could keep him drinking? “No!” he said boldly. “Not after this morning.”

“Yeh aint,” said Rulon; “because you damned well won’t get the chance, see? D’ye think I’m fool enough to leave you here livin’ off me?”

“You proposed it.”

“Aah! that was just a stall! I just wanted to see how far I could string yeh. Yeh fell for it beautifully! Why, do you think any smooth face college boy is gonna put anything over on Mike Rulon? It’s ridiculous.”

“Well, I’m not out much,” said Dick. “I never thought of it for myself.”

“I seen through yeh from the beginning,” sneered Rulon.

A disquieting anxiety attacked Dick. He had felt it before that day, but had put it aside. But it was obvious now, that this was something more than mere drunken irascibility. Rulon was sore because he believed that something *had* been put over him in the beginning. What could he have learned?

Finally it broke after these preliminary rumblings, like an electrical storm.

“Whatja gonna do this evenin’, Kid?” asked Rulon with an ugly sneer.

“Do?” said Dick, opening his eyes. “The evening’s over.”

“Whatja do last night?”

“I went to bed after I left you, of course.”

“*You lie!* . . . Soon’s you said good-night to me at the elevator, I seen you had something under your hat. Hah! you thought I was too drunk, didn’t yeh? So I didn’t go up neither. I went outside lookin’ for you. You had just gone. The starter told me you had gone to a night club in Pentland Mews, and I took another taxi and followed. I give him half a crown for speed, and we caught up with you. I seen you go in the place. I bummed up and down the alley, and I seen a place to climb up. I got on the roof of the house where you went in, and there was a big skylight there, and I looked down it. You was talkin’ to an English guy I never seen before. Then Abrams the Jew come along and sat down with you, and give you your instructions. That was enough for me. . . .”

Dick felt as if he was falling through space. He glanced covertly about the room. His first thought was: Well, he will hardly dare to shoot me down here! My God! if I had known in his room this morning that he knew this, I should have died of fright!

Rulon, seeing Dick’s flabbergasted face, broke into a roar of brutal laughter, that made everybody in the room look at them. But with the cautious habit of years, Rulon quickly lowered his voice. He spat his words out of one corner of his mouth, like poison.

“Yeh don’t feel quite so cocky now, do yeh? Yer ridin’ on four flat tires! Buster’s stubbed his toe on somepin real hard! Want a hanky, sonny? Gee! I would have missed this for somepin! If you could see your face!”

Dick wished that he could die.

With drunken suddenness Rulon’s mood changed. “Yah! yeh dirty little traitor!” he snarled, thrusting his head forward across the table. “Yeh weasel! yeh skunk!—I don’t know no name low enough to put to yeh! I might a known you’d rat with that pretty face. Never knew a pretty fella yet that wasn’t yella! So yeh guessed yeh’d sell me out, did yeh? Well, you’ve got another guess. How’d you get in with these Britishers? Thought you’d make a pretty good thing out of it, eh? selling out your own folks to them

foreigners! That's the dirtiest part I ever knew a man to play, and I've known some dirty ones!"

It was useless in Rulon's present temper for Dick to protest that he had saved his life. All Dick could do was to sit there and take it. It felt worse than being strangled.

"I despise yeh!" Rulon went on, softly punching the table. "Yes, you, and the whole gang you're in with. Not a man among 'em worth the powder and shot to blow him to hell. You did well to come over here, Kid. You'll find fit mates here. At home you'd on'y make a grease spot. But take my advice and keep off Americans, see? They're out of your class, Kid. And you wouldn't find others as easy as me.

"I let you go, Kid, because I despise yeh! I despise yeh so much, that even knowin' what I know, I let yeh stick around me all day, and watch me drink. What can you do to me? Why, if I was paralysed and blindfolded you ain't man enough to get ahead of me. Go on back to them that sent you now, and tell 'em what I said. I'm gonna bed."

Dick was left sitting alone, with his chin on his breast. Others in the place glanced at him. Just enough had been seen and overheard to make them wonder what it was all about. Dick's thoughts, to a young man who fancied himself, were bitterer than death. What! to have an utter scoundrel like Rulon put it all over him, and to have to take it in silence! Oh God! would he ever be able to hold up his head again! To think of that blackguard Rulon getting away with it! Patting himself on the back, and thinking what a hell of a fellow he was! Returning in style on the *Baratoria* to live like a prince on his ill-gotten gains, while he, Dick, starved on the Embankment! It was more than he could bear.

There was not much sense in Dick's thoughts. They ground like endlessly turning millstones in his head, without any fresh grist. He could not have told how long he sat there. He was roused from a sort of stupor by hearing the waiter's polite voice at his elbow:

"Closing-time, Sir."

Dick shuffled out of the restaurant. He felt as if his humiliation must be branded on his forehead. Getting his key at the desk upstairs, a bill was handed him. It was like the proverbial last straw. It brought him to a stand. It forced him to decide what he was going to do next.

And then like a trickle of sweet water in a desert waste, the thought stole into his mind: Well, why not do what you were going to do anyway? The



trickle quickly swelled to a torrent, and the roaring of it filled his ears. Why not? Why not? Why not? Nothing is changed, really, by Rulon's discovery. The room next to his is still there waiting for you; and he has certainly drunk enough to sleep like the dead. . . . By Heaven! what would he say *now* if he were to find that you had diddled him after all. . . . And now I *will* lift the pearls from him. Nothing can stop me! I'm *glad* this happened, it will make my revenge so much completer!

Dick had read somewhere that a man's first sleep is the soundest, and he did not intend to stay in his room more than a half hour or so. Meanwhile, there was an important question to be decided: what should he do afterwards? return to his own room and go to bed as if nothing had happened? He decided against it. The risk was too great; Rulon *might* take it into his head to peep into his belt before starting next morning. No, he must leave the hotel at once, and the things Greatorrex had brought him must go towards paying his bill. But he had no money. Well, walking the streets the rest of the night ought not to be too great a hardship if he had a hundred thousand dollar necklace in his pocket.

At the end of half an hour, Dick set out for Rulon's room. He was by this time so well known about the hotel that he had no anxiety about meeting anyone in the corridors. He was established as Rulon's companion; what more natural than that he should be seen going to or from his friend's room? But he met nobody. The hotel might have been a mausoleum, had it not been for the faint suggestion of snoring that reached him in different keys. It was a few minutes short of two o'clock.

His moment of keenest anxiety was outside Rulon's door. He listened with his ear to the crack. A great satisfaction filled his breast. Rulon was snoring all right; the hoarse sound of it suggested an alcoholic coma. Dick unlocked the door of the adjoining room, and let himself in. This room had been stripped ready for the decorators. The fumes of the chemicals were still on the air. The windows were open. The room was filled with a dim light, resulting from the reflection of the street lights against low-hanging clouds. Enough light to work by.

Oddly enough, he was no longer troubled by fear. His rancorous anger against Rulon had killed that; he didn't care what happened, so he got square. Besides, his mind was fully occupied with what was immediately before it. Letting himself over the window sill, he found the ledge below with his feet. Back of the hotel, the ground fell away to the river, and it was a good seventy-five feet drop. He had a brief, vivid impression of the wide panorama of the city hung with starry lights, the river making a ribbon of blackness through the middle.

It was but one long step across to the ledge under Rulon's window. The uncomfortable thought occurred to Dick: Suppose a policeman down on the Embankment happened to glance up at this particular window at this particular moment? But it was a remote chance. When he raised his head above the sill he was freshly reassured by the sound of Rulon's hoarse snoring. He drew himself up, and softly entered the room.

It was arranged in much the same manner as Dick's own room on the upper floor. The bed was in one of the corners farthest from the windows. The door was at the foot of the bed, with a wardrobe at right angles to it. The fireplace was on the right hand side, as you looked into the room, and a dressing table against the opposite wall. Near each window was a comfortable easy chair; and there was a table between the windows.

Dick's first act was to creep to the door, and ease the bolt back, so that if necessary, he could make a quick getaway. Then he stole to the bed, and stood looking down on his unconscious enemy. Rulon lay on his back snoring like a stern-wheeler. The whole room reeked with the fumes of his breath. As he looked at him Dick felt no more anger than fear. At that moment Rulon represented no more to him than a difficult task, whose accomplishment called for the fullest exercise of every faculty he possessed.

Suddenly Rulon said: "What the hell!" Dick's heart stopped. He dropped to the floor alongside the bed as softly as a leaf, and lay there holding his breath. He heard the man muttering and tossing in his bed. He realised that Rulon had spoken in his sleep, but he seemed to be waking now. Dick edged his body under the bed. He heard a sigh over his head, and the interrupted snoring recommenced. A long breath of relief escaped Dick. He came out from under the bed.

But he had not forgotten his fright. Kneeling on the floor, he slipped his hand ever so gently under Rulon's pillow, moving it a fraction of an inch at a time, until his fingers, exploring like antennae, touched the gun there. Meanwhile his eyes never left Rulon's face. He drew the gun out with the same care, and dropped it in his side pocket.

When he rose up he perceived that Rulon in his tossings had pushed the coverings part way down. So much the better. The man was lying on his back again. Taking hold of the edge of the sheet, Dick softly lifted the covers, and dropped them to one side. The shirt of Rulon's pyjamas had pulled up, and Dick could see the broad white belt encircling the man's body. His mouth watered. Now for the crux of his adventure! Was not Rulon bound to awaken when Dick first touched his body?

Let your touch be as delicate as rose leaves! Dick charged himself. With his finger-tips he felt for the buckle fastening. Rulon did indeed start when Dick touched him; snorted; gurgled; threshed on the bed. Dick dropped to the floor again. Finally the snoring recommenced. Dick went back to his task with a little more confidence.

He had to manipulate the buckle by sense of touch alone. His finger-tips were so highly charged they felt queerly, as if they were working independently of him. He got the belt unfastened. He had planned in advance what he was going to do. He fastened the strap end of Rulon's belt to the buckle end of the belt he had brought with him. Thus, as he pulled Rulon's belt out from under him, he was pulling the substitute belt into place. In order to do this, he had to climb over Rulon's body, and kneel on the bed between the sleeping man and the wall.

While Dick knelt there with both hands on the belt, slowly, slowly drawing it towards him, the comedy of the situation suddenly struck him, and he swallowed a chuckle. Yo-heave ho, my hearties! he thought. A long pull and a strong pull, and a pull all together!

When he had got the first belt about half way out, Rulon suddenly flopped over on his stomach. Dick had to flatten himself against the wall to keep out of his way. This was an awkward circumstance for Dick; by Rulon's rolling over he lost all he had gained; moreover it would be impossible for him to fasten the substitute belt while Rulon's stomach was pressed into the mattress. Dick scratched his head, and pondered what to do. Nothing for it, so far as he could see, but to wait until the man rolled back again.

So he waited, squatting on his heels on the bed, so close to Rulon he was all but touching the man; watching him like a lynx for his slightest move. Through the open windows came the low suggestive murmur of London, which never ceases, but is not so loud as the voice of New York in the small hours. From far off he heard the absurd piping whistle of an English locomotive. Cars were being shunted on Charing Cross bridge. A long time passed. Rulon seemed to be only too well satisfied with his new position. Suppose he chose to sleep the rest of the night that way?

Waiting is a bad business on the nerves. In less than an hour it would be growing light. Dick felt a tremor begin to creep along his limbs. This will never do! he told himself. It came to his mind how roughly he had seen drunken men pulled and shaken before they could be awakened. He determined to risk it.

Carefully stepping over Rulon, he got to the floor. Hooking one hand under Rulon's shoulder and one under his hip, he capsized him on his back with one sharp, strong pull. Rulon snorted; gurgled; protested inarticulately; but presently subsided into his regular snoring. Dick's lip curled scornfully. Ah! you poor souse! he silently apostrophised.

The rest was easy. He pulled the substitute belt through beneath Rulon's back, and buckled it in front of him. He stuffed the original belt in his pocket, and his task was done.

Before leaving the room, he softly shot the bolt on the door. His last act was to replace the gun under Rulon's pillow. This took a bit of nerve, for Dick had a lively sense of the excellent mark he would make for a bullet as he crouched on the window sill against the night sky—and the seventy-five-foot drop below. But it was essential to his plans that Rulon should not know he had been visited. Dick steeled himself to put the gun back.

He regained the adjoining room in safety, and stood there a moment to let his nerves quiet down. A mighty exultation filled him. It was the sweetest moment of his life. I've done it! I've done it! I've done it! he whispered to himself. I'm square with him now—Oh, a hundred times more than square!

A disquieting thought came to Dick. Suppose Rulon had been bluffing when he had showed him the belt the day before. Dick could feel stones within the belt he had taken from his body, but suppose after all they should not be the real ones? Before leaving the hotel, Dick returned to his own room, where he made haste to turn on the light, and rip the belt open.

It was all right! The blood coursed generously through his veins again. These were the veritable pearls that he held in his hands; the lovely, delicate, shimmering beauties; dusky and cool and slightly irregular like women's cheeks! And in his own hands he held them! he was the master of these beauties; their fate lay in his hands!

Dick burned the cotton in his fireplace. He snipped the string that held the pearls, and told off three of them. These were to provide him with the wherewithal to live, until he could discover the rightful owners. He had not slack enough to tie the ends of the string together; he bound them together with thread to keep the rest of the stones in place. Dropping the string in his inside pocket, he turned out the light, and set forth.

The watchman in the lounge of the hotel, looked at him dubiously. What the Deuce! thought Dick; he can't stop me.

"Shall I call a cab, Sir?"

"No thanks," said Dick carelessly. "I couldn't sleep, so I thought a bit of a walk would do me good. I suppose they're no footpads about."

"Oh, no, Sir. Nothing like that in Lunnon, Sir."

Dick still had a few pence in his pocket. He went to a coffee stall in Aldwich circle, and partook of the villainous decoction that was dispensed there. He tried to get into conversation with the queer characters that hung over the bar, but there were difficulties of comprehension on both sides.

He went for a long walk to Westminster, over the bridge; through the grubby streets on the other side, and back into the city by one of the lower bridges. He saw the sun rise behind the dome of St. Paul's.

Dick had a great need to know whether Rulon was really getting away that morning; and a couple of hours later found him in Waterloo station,

whence he knew the boat train departed. The sign was already up on the train gates: "Special boat express for Southampton. S.S. *Baratoria* 8-55 A.M." Dick looked about for some point of vantage where he could see; himself unseen.

It proved to be easy. You dropped a penny in a machine on the concourse, and received a "platform ticket." Across the platform from the boat train waited a train marked for Exeter to leave ten minutes later. As soon as the gates were opened, all Dick had to do was to conceal himself in the last car of the Exeter train, where, sitting back from the window, he could survey everybody who came through the gates.

Quarter of an hour before train time, Rulon came striding through the gates, with a porter bearing his bag behind him. The big man's face was yellower than usual as a result of his extraordinary potations, but he held his back stiffly, and walked with a leopard-like tread. He surveyed all mankind contemptuously. It was obvious that his mind was at ease; and that he had no suspicion of the real nature of that which he carried around his waist.

Dick exulted anew. I've done him! he whispered to himself.

In due course the boat train pulled out. Dick slipped out of the carriage he was in, and went back through the gates.

His next task was to raise the price of a breakfast. Bond Street was his objective. In the window of a certain jeweller he had seen loose pearls offered for sale. But on the way there, certain qualms of conscience attacked him. If I sell the stones outright, he thought, the owners might not be able to recover them later. So he went to a pawn-shop instead, where he obtained thirty pounds on his three stones, because he did not look as if he had stolen them. It was perhaps a quarter of their value.

Next, in a branch post-office, Dick purchased a stamped letter sheet and wrote to Greatorrex:

"Dear Greatorrex:

"I'm sorry, but M.R. proved to be too hard a nut for me to crack. He's gone on the boat train this morning. Under separate cover I am returning what you handed me yesterday. I'm jumping my bill at the hotel, because it amounts to more than the baggage, etc., which you gave me, is worth. So I thought you'd be just as well pleased. Of course if anybody wanted to go and pay the bill they could get the stuff. Sorry, I couldn't oblige.

“Yours,  
“K.M.H.”

Having posted his letter and packet, Dick went back to Waterloo—but in a taxicab, now. Ah! but it was good to feel real money in his pocket again! At the window in the booking-office of the station, he asked:

“What is the biggest seaside place on your lines?”

“Bournemouth. Next train, ten forty-five.”

“Give me a first-class ticket, please.”

Dick ate his belated breakfast in high content on the train. They did you very well on those trains. How charming the English fields and parks, seen from the window. He reached the sea-shore in time to see in the distance the mighty *Baratoria*, with her four red funnels, passing out by the Needles. He pictured Rulon in the smoking-room, drinking double Scotches, and hugged himself.

He bought himself what was needful, and engaged for the night a pleasant room looking out to sea. Next day he would be away to Scotland. Paris, unfortunately, was out of the question, owing to his lack of a passport. In the morning he went to the post-office.

“I want to send a wireless message to the *Baratoria* at sea.”

The frizzy-haired girl pushed a blank towards him. Dick bit the end of his pencil, and considered, grinning. Make it snappy, he thought; something subtle and teasing; not straight out. Something that will make that guy grind his yellow teeth with rage, and tear open the belt like a madman! . . . Golly! “I have it!”

He wrote:

“Michael Rulon,”

“s.s. *Baratoria*”

“Dear Mike: Who’s hard-boiled now? Fondest regards.”

“The Kid.”

“Thirteen shillings, please,” said the frizzy-haired one, scanning it in a businesslike way.

“Cheap at half the price,” said Dick.

“Eh?” she said, opening her china blue eyes.



“Keep the change, sister,” said Dick airily.

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*ANYBODY'S PEARLS*

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*PART II*

DICK SHEMWELL, better known in England as Kid Murray Hill, was sitting beside the window of his room in a small hotel in one of the largest of the English seaside towns. With something of the action of an old-time bartender he was engaged in pouring from one hand to the other a hundred thousand dollars worth of pearls, dreamily watching the play of light on their creamy, gleaming surfaces. When he held the string up between thumb and forefinger it was a full yard long. A break in the string which had been roughly mended showed where Dick had detached three of the stones to provide the wherewithal to meet expenses.

Dick was far from looking upon himself as a thief. He had stolen the pearls from a thief with the object of returning them to their rightful owner. Of course if a reward was offered he would not object to receiving it; for, besides what the necklace represented, he had not a penny in the world. However, it was not going to be easy to discover the rightful owner; that was what was making Dick thoughtful.

The republican government of the State of Bulomania had the best claim to the pearls, and that was not very good.

Dick, who had no political predilections, felt no eagerness to hand over the lovely gems to a band of red-handed revolutionaries to be wasted; but, thinking over all these things, he made up his mind that it must be done. If it was true that the King had yielded to threats of suit, the law must be on the side of the republicans. Dick decided to act accordingly. He did not know the name of the King or the place of his residence; but that ought not to be difficult to find out. Even in England there are not many ex-Kings hanging about.

He descended to the sitting-room and office of the little hotel, where, earlier that morning, he had observed a frizzy-haired blonde lady at the desk who looked as if she might prove a source of information. She was still there.

"I say," said Dick with the English style of address that he had picked up, and turned on his most engaging smile, "did you ever hear of a king

bloke from some jerkwater European country living down Maidenhead way?”

The lady clerk opened her eyes very wide. “I beg your pardon?” she enquired.

Oh these English who cannot understand English! thought Dick. He translated laboriously: “Did you ever hear of an ex-King of some small European country—Bulomania or something like that; who is now living in a big place near Maidenhead. Friend of mine was telling me about his place, but he didn’t know the King’s name.”

“Aoh!” drawled the blonde lady with a coquettish glance. “You American gentlemen use such strange expressions!” She immediately took fire. Royalty, ex-or otherwise was her passion. She was an assiduous reader of the illustrated papers. “Why, you must mean ex-King Miguel of Bulomania,” she said vivaciously. “Everybody knows about *him*!” She plunged into a detailed exposition of Miguel’s genealogy, to which she added the story of his numerous love affairs, etc., etc., all of which has nothing to do with this story.

When Dick could get a word in he asked: “What’s the capital of Bulomania? I seem to have forgotten.”

“Castadja,” said the lady clerk. “A lovely town, they say.”

As soon as Dick could decently do so, he shut off the flow of her information by returning upstairs to his room. There he set about the composition of a telegram. The completed result ran like this:

“President of the Republic of Bulomania,  
Castadja,  
Bulomania.

“If interested in a string of pearls lately in the possession of  
ex-King Miguel communicate with the undersigned.

K. Murray Hill,  
Hotel Southview.”

Dick carried this into the town, and despatched it.

On the way home he made the exceedingly unpleasant discovery that he was being followed.

The Southview Hotel stood in a very quiet situation, on the edge of a cliff overlooking the sea. To reach the town you turned inland, and went

down hill. The business part of the place lay in a hollow alongside a small stream which found its way down to the sea through a series of public gardens. On his way in, Dick was vaguely conscious of the nondescript male figure, neither man nor boy, behind him. Upon his return, when he saw the same shuffling figure still behind him in those deserted streets, he could no longer doubt.

Dick's room overlooked the street, not the sea. It was on the first floor as they say in England, meaning the first bedroom floor. Regaining it, Dick went to the window, and looked cautiously out from behind the lace curtains. The street was empty. But as he stood there, watching, Dick became aware that from the window across the street other eyes were watching him. This was a cheaper house, having no sea view, and with the familiar sign, "Apartments," in the window. Evidently the man, whoever he was, had engaged a room there to facilitate his watch upon Dick.

Dick sat down to consider the situation. After all the care he had taken to cover his tracks, it was a bitter disappointment to find that he was still dogged. It would be one of Abrams' men, of course. No doubt he had been under surveillance from the very beginning. It had been his first intention to fly to Scotland; but he had liked this seaside town so well, he had decided to stay there. And now his telegram to Castadja bound him there.

It was confoundedly awkward, but not especially dangerous, for, Dick argued, Abrams could not possibly know that he, Dick, had been successful in lifting the pearls from Rulon. The watch they kept on Dick was probably only in the nature of a general precaution. The fact of his having sent a telegram would be a suspicious circumstance in their eyes; but there was little danger that they could bribe the post-office clerk into showing them the contents of the telegram. In England the telegraph is a government affair.

Dick did not neglect to keep a watch on his watcher. Presently he saw a telegraph boy ride up to the house opposite, and leaving his bicycle at the curb, disappear inside. In a few minutes he reappeared bearing a telegram to be transmitted. As the watcher was away from the window during the boy's stay in the house, Dick had no difficulty in deducing that the telegram was his. He would have liked to see what was in it; but he still believed that it was no more than the usual report in the way of business from the spy to his chief.

Though he felt no alarm as yet, Dick quietly reconnoitred about the hotel with a view to discovering another way out, should it become necessary. The Southview had started in the end building of a short terrace or row of stone

dwellings. As the business grew one building after another had been taken in, and now the hotel occupied them all. Doors had been cut through the party walls, and the other entrances closed. The chief feature was a long veranda or deck behind, which commanded a fine view of the sea. The service rooms were underneath it. Back of the baggage room of the hotel Dick found a service door giving on a driveway which ran behind the whole row, and gained the street at the far end. This was what he wanted.

Seeing no reason for using it at present, he issued boldly out of the main entrance, and started for a walk. It was not long before he discovered that the furtive youngster was behind him. Dick was something of a walker, and it amused him to draw his follower for several miles down the cliffs, and back along the sands. The spy's conscience was bad; and it was obvious from his whole carriage and gait that it made him extremely uncomfortable to be forced out into the open like this. Dick chuckled.

Back in their rooms once more, they took up positions behind their respective window curtains. About five o'clock a taxi drew up before the house opposite. Upon catching sight of it, Dick's watcher instantly left his window. Dick's curiosity was keenly excited. The taxi-cab contained a passenger sitting back in the shadow; but he did not get out. He waited until the spy opened the door of the boarding-house, and stood holding it open. Then he made a dive for it. His back was towards Dick; he kept his head down and his shoulders up; nevertheless Dick recognised that bony back in connection with those big feet. It was Sam Abrams!

A great fear struck into Dick's breast. Sam Abrams! the head of the gang and one of the chief figures in the criminal life in London! Dick had good reason to remember the cringing, fawning little creature with the strange power that was capable of cowing a man twice his weight into sullen acquiescence. Certainly if Sam Abrams himself had come all this way after Dick, the situation was serious.

Dick resolved on instant flight. Leaving his few belongings where they lay, he snatched up his hat, and went downstairs with a casual air. Making his way back through the cloak room into the baggage room, as he was about to step through the open service door, his attention was attracted to a figure lounging against the wall under the veranda. He stepped quickly back into the shadow. There was something ominous in the look of the figure. In the mere presence of such a figure in that place.

It was a tall, muscular young lout dressed in dirty, ragged clothes. He lounged against the wall with his hands thrust deep in his pockets, his chin

buried in his dirty neckcloth, and his cap pulled over his eyes. A bit of unshaven cheek was all of his face that Dick could see. But he apprehended something familiar in the tall figure; it was a graceful figure in spite of the clothes. Then the lout glanced furtively towards the back doorway of the hotel, and Dick saw that it was none other than the man he had known as Lord Greatorrex. The difference in looks between this loafer and that exquisite young man about town was extreme; nevertheless they were one and the same. Dick stood biting his lips in chagrin. How vainly he regretted then that he had not used the back way out as soon as he had found it. He made his way slowly back to his own room. There was no hope of making a break for freedom now. In that respectable hotel he was safest; and if he could keep other persons around him, so much the better.

## 2

Dick was walking nervously up and down his room, chewing a cigar. It was very demoralising to be trapped; to be obliged to wait inactively for your enemies' next move. In the meantime Dick had dined, and darkness had fallen. After dinner all the other guests at the Southview had gone out to hear the band concert; and Dick, finding the empty public rooms intolerable, had come upstairs. He did not care to risk walking in the dark streets. The lights of the room across the street were on; but the curtains were drawn.

At the sound of a discreet tapping on his door, Dick turned eagerly. Any interruption was welcome. It might be the pretty chambermaid with fresh towels, or the rosy-cheeked "buttons" with whom Dick was already on friendly terms. It might even be Abrams sending up his name. Should he see him or not? All this on the way to the door. He opened the door, and beheld Abrams standing in the corridor, smiling in his oily way with his head slightly on one side, and giving his hands a dry wash.

"Good evenig, good evenig, Bister Burray 'Ill," he fawned, in that extraordinary mixed guttural and Cockney jargon of his.

In the actual presence of danger Dick's spirits rose. "Why, Mr. Abrams," he said, playing up to his visitor. "How the deuce did you know that I was here? Come in."

Abrams stepped within the door, grinning and twisting his shoulders obsequiously. His skinny little figure was well enough clothed; but the sparse, moth-eaten grey beard made him look common and insignificant. All this was a pose, of course. He chose to conceal his real power under this pretence of inviting every man to kick him. Under his heavy eyebrows his little eyes gleamed at Dick like those of a rat who knows that he is despised and feared, and exults in it.

"I seen you walkin' on the shtreed this arternoon," he purred.

"Why didn't you give me a hail?" asked Dick with pretended heartiness.

Abrams shrugged, and spread out his hands. "I didn't know if you would like me to shpeag to you in the shtreed. I never shpeags to my young zhentlemen friends in the shtreed."



“But what are you doing here?” asked Dick.

“Oh, I zhoost come down for a leetle holiday over the week-end. I seen you come into this place so I called to see if I could offer you a leetle assistance.”

“Assistance?”

“Well, you said you had no money.”

“Not a sou!” said Dick cheerfully.

“This is a nize place,” said Abrams looking around. “How will you pay?”

“I’ll just have to run a bill until I hear from my friends in America.”

“Anything I can do . . .” said Abrams, tapping his breast pocket.

“Much obliged,” said Dick. “But I’ll be all right.”

While they were exchanging these polite speeches, Dick was busy calculating his chances. He had left the door open when Abrams came in. Abrams had politely closed it. Dick would have been more comfortable with it open, but would not make any move in that direction for fear of giving Abrams the idea that he was afraid of him. In his own person the little man was a joke; Dick could have tossed him in the air with ease. But he was probably armed. Though the night was warm he was wearing a long overcoat with suspiciously big side-pockets. Dick was not armed. Abrams undoubtedly had his men posted around the hotel. Dick, with a careless air, drew the curtains across the windows. Abrams’ eyes glittered.

“Sit down. Sit down,” said Dick affably. “Have a cigar?”

Abrams perched himself on the edge of a chair. “Much obliged, Bister Burray ’Ill,” he said grinning and shaking his head. “I never indulge. My shtomach is not good.”

Dick lighted up, taking care to let Abrams see that his hand did not shake.

“Why did you leave your friends in London so abrupt?” the little man asked reproachfully.

“I wrote to Greatorex,” said Dick. “Naturally I thought you’d all be sore at me for having fallen down on my job.”

“Oh, Greatorex, maybe,” said Abrams spreading out his hands. “It was a family matter with him. But the pearls are nothing to me.”

“Of course not,” agreed Dick, trying not to let his voice sound ironical.

“You are such a handsome young man, and so shmart,” purred Abrams. “I am sure you did your best.”

“Oh, you flatter me,” said Dick.

Abrams wagged his hand. “No! No!” he said. “I like you. You are so shmart!”

Something in the man’s oily voice, in the hard glitter of his eyes warned Dick that the show-down was at hand, and his breast tightened.

“You are too shmart to let Rulon get away from you,” Abrams softly purred. “So hand ’em over. Bister Burray ’Ill!”

Dick arrested his cigar half-way to his lips, and stared. He made his face go innocently blank. “I don’t get you,” he said slowly. “I can’t hand over what I haven’t got.”

Abrams kept his eyes fixed on Dick’s face like two gimlet points. His obsequiousness had suddenly disappeared. The assurance of an accustomed master of men was revealed. There is no denying the fact that Dick was badly frightened; but he kept himself well in hand. Abrams, never ceasing to grin, thrust a hand in his breast pocket, and brought out a telegraph form. Handing it over, he said dryly:

“Get that.”

It was a wireless message from the *Baratoria* at sea. Dick’s heart sank; this contingency had not occurred to him. It read:

“The kid lifted the cream drops. Watch that they do not disagree with him. I’ll be back on the *Gigantic* next week.

“Rulon.”

“What a dirty trick!” cried Dick instantly. “He’s just trying to get me in wrong with you!”

“So?” said Abrams with a disagreeable grin. “Michael Rulon is a hard and cruel man; but I should not ’ave thought that he would play a shpiteful drick like this. . . . Why should he?”

Dick merely walked up and down the room repeatedly loudly in assumed indignation: “A dirty trick! A dirty trick!”

“It’s no good, Bister Burray ’Ill,” said Abrams softly. “I am in the jewellery bizness myself. Between nine and ten o’clock this morning you pawned three of the pearls with a friend of mine on Wardour Street.”

Dick saw that the game was up; but he had no intention of admitting it. “There’s some mistake,” he protested stoutly. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Now be reasonable, Bister Burray ’Ill,” said Abrams cajolingly. “I’m a quiet man. I don’t want no trouble with you. Hand over the pearls and I’ll say no more about it. Me and my friends will take the mail train back to London to-night. . . . I’ll do more. I’ll give you your fare back to America on any zhib you jooze. Could anything be fairer?”

“I haven’t got them,” said Dick.

Abrams remained sitting in his chair. Dick’s fascinated eyes watched his bony hand steal into the capacious side-pocket of his overcoat, and come out again clutching a six-chambered revolver with a long barrel—an old gun, but beautifully cleaned and polished. He played with it in his lap. Dick’s blood ran cold.

“Hand ’em over,” said Abrams softly.

“How can I hand over what I haven’t got?” cried Dick.

Abrams stood up. He snapped the gun into position, cocking it as he aimed. He was horribly expert. Dick could count the bullets in the four visible chambers. He was obliged to think quickly.

“Oh, well,” he said shrugging; and turned towards the bureau.

Abrams smiled hatefully; and kept him covered with the gun.

Dick pulled out the top bureau drawer, and went through the motions of gathering up a double handful of pearls. He turned towards Abrams with his two hands cupped together. It required a painful effort of the will to walk up to the pointing gun. Abrams began to think of the pearls, and an insane eagerness appeared in his eyes. As the young man came to him, his eyes dropped to see what was in Dick’s hands. At that moment Dick’s hands flew up, knocking the gun aside. It exploded with a deafening crash. Dick sprang, and bore Abrams down on his back.

The bony little man displayed a surprising strength. His sinews were like steel. Under the weight of Dick’s body he struggled like a maddened cat, clashing his teeth together in impotent rage. But Dick had him pinned fast.

He kept his gun arm extended and helpless. Several pairs of running feet were heard outside. They paused at the door without opening it.

“What’s the matter?” a voice quavered.

“I have him fast!” cried Dick. “Come in!”

The door opened; and the manager and buttons were revealed outside, both as pale as ghosts. The sound of wailing female voices were to be heard farther off. A brawny hotel porter joined the other two, who grinned when he took in the situation. It was just in his line.

“Help me to hold him while I get his gun,” said Dick.

Abrams was disarmed, and backed into a corner of the room, an ugly sight, panting and showing his teeth; his hair and beard wildly disordered, his red-rimmed eyes darting this way and that like those of a trapped rat.

“What happened?” gasped the hotel manager.

“This guy knocked at my door,” said Dick coolly. “I never saw him before. He tried to stick me up.”

“I . . . I don’t understand you!”

“Tried to rob me,” explained Dick patiently.

“Good Heavens!” cried the manager, all but wringing his hands. “I never heard of such a thing! What shall I do?”

“Send for the police,” said Dick.

Buttons was despatched on the run.

Meanwhile when Abrams was seen to be helpless under guard of the porter, a small crowd began to gather in the room; guests of the hotel, both men and women; other employees; and unclassifiable persons who had run in from the street. All could not get into the room. Dick caught glimpses of the loutish figure of Allington or Greatorrex lurking in the corridor; also the ugly mean face of the crook he had known as Hawkins in London and the lad who had been following him that day, whose name he did not know. Knowing that the sight of their master in the toils might rouse these men to an act of desperation, Dick felt far from comfortable.

When a gigantic British policemen in helmet and chin strap came clumping into the room, he felt better. Those big fellows carry reassurance with them wherever they go. At sight of the officer Abrams visibly wilted. Fear of the police was the old rat’s one weakness. Dick reflected how

different American crooks were in this respect. A second officer presently followed the first. Those who had no business in the room were politely shepherded out; and the furtive figures in the corridor were sent flying with a curt:

“Be off with you!”

Dick elaborated upon the story that he had already outlined to the hotel manager. According to this it was a simple, everyday hold-up. He had no fear that Abrams would say anything about the pearls. The first policeman made copious memoranda in his note-book. When Dick had finished, he said raspingly to Abrams:

“You come along with me, my man!”

“I am no dief,” whined Abrams. “It was a private quarrel between him and me.”

“Private quarrel be blowed!” said the policeman scornfully. To Dick he added politely: “Will you come along to the station, sir, and lay a charge against this fellow?”

Dick had no objection to going to the police station in company with the officers; but he did not relish the idea of returning to the hotel alone, with Abrams’ gang lurking about the dark streets. So, elegantly dusting his knees, he said in a bored voice:

“Oh, must I go to that trouble? I suppose I’ll have to appear in the morning anyway.”

The hotel manager spoke up: “I will lay a charge against him,” he said viciously.

“That will serve very well,” said the policeman. “Good-night, Sir,” he added to Dick. “I am sorry that this should have happened to a visitor in England. I assure you it is not customary with us. I think old clo’ here is balmy!” He tapped his forehead.

“Oh, that’s all right,” said Dick cheerfully. “I don’t bear England any grudge.”

When the last of them had filed out, he thankfully bolted the door. He automatically pressed his breast pocket against his ribs to reassure himself of the feel of the pearls. He had no intention of appearing against Abrams in the morning. As he turned away from the door, a hard object hit against his hip, reminding him that the police had neglected to collect Abrams’ revolver. He took it out and looked at it.

“Well, that’s so much to the good anyhow,” he said to himself.

### 3

Dick's heart had not had much more than enough time to settle into its usual rate of beating when there came another rap upon his door.

"Who is it?" he asked warily.

"Buttons, sir," came the answer. "Gentleman downstairs sending up his card."

Dick opened the door. Buttons offered him the card upon a salver. It was an imposing-looking card, much larger than ordinary. He read upon it this legend:

"H.S.H. Prince Boris Poniatévsky."  
"Chargé d'Affaires Bulomanian Legation."

Dick whistled noiselessly. "So!" he said. "What sort of looking guy is this Prince chap?"

"Oh, he's not a guy, sir," said Buttons. "He's a toff!" The boy planted an imaginary top hat on his head, and screwed a monocle into his eye.

"Is he alone?" asked Dick.

"No, he's got another toff along with him."

"I'll see him down in the parlour," said Dick warily.

On the ground floor the Hotel Southview still preserved the plan of the original dwelling out of which it had started. From the front door there was a narrow hall and stairway. The office was in what had once been the dining-room, back of the stairs. This arrangement explained how Abrams had gained the bedroom floor unnoticed. On the left as you came downstairs was a long, narrow parlour. In this room the two gentlemen were waiting.

He who came forward to meet Dick was a tall, heavily-built man, very elegantly dressed, but having a sort of theatrical aspect. His heavy moustache was too conspicuously waxed; his great dark, uneasy eyes were smudged around as if with grease paint; his lips and cheeks were too red to seem quite real. He had a villainous look in his eye. Hm! thought Dick; if it was home I would put him down as a ward politician, old-style. But of course I know nothing of the Bulomanian aristocracy.

The Prince clicked his heels together, and favoured Dick with a stiff little bow and an insulting stare. "Prince Boris Poniatévsky at your service," he said in excellent English. "You, I take it, are Mr. Murray Hill."

Dick was too busy watching the Prince to get a good view of the second man. He merely had the impression of a shadow in the background. Something about the pompous and highly-coloured Prince aroused his American dander, and he drawled in answer, intending to be offensive:

"That name will do as well as another."

The Prince looked around the parlour in strong distaste. "Hm! . . . er . . . is there any place where we can talk privately?" he asked.

Besides themselves, there was nobody in the long room but a young couple seated in the bay window overlooking the street, trying to make love under the usual difficulties encountered by hotel couples. Dick was thankful for the presence of that couple. A more out and out scoundrelly face than that of the swarthy Prince he had never seen. Some degenerate noble that the republicans have bribed over to their side, he thought.

"Oh, this is private enough," said Dick coolly. "We're not obliged to shout at each other."

He led the way to a settee which was placed just inside the door from the office. The Prince blew out his cheeks indignantly; but had no recourse other than to follow. As they seated themselves Dick got a good look at the second man, who seated himself near-by; a thin, grey ramrod of a man, who looked ill at ease in civilian's clothes. He had a sour and forbidding face. This one's a dyspeptic scoundrel, thought Dick.

"What can I do for you?" asked Dick bluntly.

The Prince inflated his chest; twirled his moustache; screwed the monocle into his eye; and favoured Dick with a horrific scowl.

It had not the slightest effect. Dick offered his box of cheap cigarettes to the Prince, who angrily waved it aside. Whereupon Dick took one himself; lighted it in an airy fashion, and blew a cloud of smoke.

Indignation almost suffocated the Prince. When he was able to speak he said: "Hm! . . . er . . . I am informed by my government that there are in your possession certain pearls which are the property of my country."

"I am flattered by your interest in the matter," said Dick. "I only telegraphed to Castadja this morning."



“Oh, I happened to be staying with a friend in the neighbourhood,” said the Prince with a wave of the hand; “and the answer to your telegram was relayed to me along with other business of the Legation.”

Liar! thought Dick.

The Prince continued stiffly: “You will therefore be good enough to hand them over to me. . .”

“Wait a minute! Wait a minute,” said Dick. “How do you know that these pearls belong to your country?”

“You said they did.”

“Pardon me,” said Dick, “I merely asked your government if it was interested. It appears that it is. The next step is for you to prove ownership of the pearls.”

“First I would have to see them,” said the Prince with a glint of cunning in his eyes.

Dick considered rapidly. The young couple was in plain view at the other end of the room; and beyond the door at his left hand could be heard the voices of several people in the office. Under these circumstances this pair could hardly attempt any rough work. So Dick arose; and turning his back on the pair of lovers, drew the string of pearls out of his breast pocket, and dangled them before the Prince. The lovely drops seemed to beam and smile with a thousand small reflections of the electric light.

The Prince drew a breath between his teeth; and his eyes fairly blazed. “I know them!” he cried; and stretched out his hand.

Dick drew back out of his reach. “How can you know them?” he demanded.

“By the tiny golden ornament between the two smallest pearls,” replied the other. “Upon that ornament you will find engraved a microscopic cipher which consists of two letter A’s intertwined within a circle. . . . Am I not right? Am I not right?” he demanded excitedly.

Upon examination, Dick admitted that it was just as the Prince described. But he dropped the pearls back in his inside pocket. The Prince pulled a long face.

“I see that you know the pearls,” Dick said. “But you have not proved to me that they belong to Bulomania.”

“Oh, that is not difficult,” said the Prince with an air of confidence. “The A.A. stands for Alla Anastasia, our reigning sovereign sixty years ago. They were presented to her by the Sultan of Turkey in exchange for an island that he coveted. Alla Anastasia left all her jewels to the State. These pearls were expressly named in her will.”

“Then why didn’t the republican government force Miguel to return them with the other crown jewels?” asked Dick.

“The republicans knew nothing about them then,” replied the Prince. “The circumstances had been forgotten by all except a few of the noble families. Naturally, we were not going to . . .” He shrugged. “Since then I have become reconciled to the republican form of government for my country; and I placed my information at their disposal.”

“I see,” said Dick dryly.

The Prince put out his hand again. “So you will be good enough to . . .”

“Hold on!” said Dick. “You can’t clean up a hundred thousand dollar deal with a mere tip of your high hat. What is there in this for me?”

The Prince drew himself up magnificently. “Are you trying to exact compensation from me, Sir?” he demanded toweringly.

“Why, naturally,” said Dick coolly.

“I presume you know how the law regards such a demand!”

“Possession is nine points of the law,” said Dick.

“I believe you are a thief, Sir! I shall hand you over to the police!”

“Go ahead,” said Dick. “There’s a telephone in the office.”

The Prince made no move towards using it. He puffed and blew, and twirled his moustache. Dick’s instinct told him that he would presently calm down; and he did. Indeed his voice became quite silky as he said:

“Perhaps I was a little hasty in my expressions, Sir. Pray overlook what I said.”

Dick bowed.

“What would you say to a thousand pounds?”

“I would accept a thousand pounds.”

“I have not such a sum upon me,” said the Prince, slapping his chest. “But if you will be good enough to accompany me in my motor to the house

of my friend . . .”

He did not quite meet Dick’s eyes as he spoke. Hm! he must think I’m a wide-eyed babe, Dick thought. “I’m sorry,” he said aloud; “I’m a sufferer from pharyngitis; and the night air is considered very bad for it.”

“But surely if I gave you my receipt for the pearls,” suggested the Prince. “I am well known . . .”

“I don’t know you,” said Dick bluntly.

The Prince clicked his heels together. “I had the honour to send you my card.”

“Anybody can have a card printed,” said Dick.

The Prince swelled up dangerously. “Do you dare to suggest, Sir, that I . . .”

“Keep your shirt on,” said Dick. “Only a crook gets sore at such a suggestion. Put yourself in my place. How do I know that the President of Bulomania ever received my telegram. It may have been intercepted by an office boy, who forwarded you a private tip.”

“Never have I been so insulted!” cried the Prince.

He *is* a crook! thought Dick. “Let’s be businesslike,” he said aloud. “We ought to have lawyers to handle this. Let your lawyers see my lawyers, and fix it up. . . .”

“I will have nothing to do with your lawyers! You have insulted me. I demand satisfaction!”

“Go ahead,” said Dick. “Demanding won’t cost you anything. What are you demanding, a duel? My hat! It takes two to make a duel!”

The lovers, despairing of getting any privacy, had left the room by now; and the Prince raised his voice a little. “Come outside, Sir! Come outside!” he demanded.

“Not on the great seal of Bulomania!” said Dick. “How many more men have you got outside?”

“You are ignorant of the principles of honour, Sir!”

“Of your kind, yes!”

It was perfectly evident that the Prince was using his outraged honour merely as a pretext to force a quarrel. He was not the kind to let his honour

stand in his light. Dick allowed his right hand to steal into his side pocket where it grasped the butt of Abrams' revolver. There was reassurance in the cool feel of it.

All this time Dick had been standing in the centre of the room, facing the pseudo-indignant Prince a few paces away. The second man remained seated near-by with a stiff, expressionless face. In his preoccupation with the Prince, Dick did not see the other one slip out of his chair. But a second later he noticed that he was no longer there. Whirling about, Dick discovered him in the act of springing upon him from behind. Quick as he was, Dick was quicker; the man's stomach collided with the muzzle of Dick's gun. He hung there a moment, his fingers fixed like claws, his features hardened in a mould of rage and fear—then he sullenly fell back.

Dick, holding the gun in front of him, backed against the wall. The big man's face was hideous with frustrated rage; the grey-faced man was flattened against the opposite wall, panting. Ugly customers, both of them; like a pair of wild beasts, cowed by the flash of powder and snarling. Dick thought: If I turn them down flat, they'll denounce me by telephone to the police; and the pearls will be taken from me. However it turns out, I'll get nothing out of it. Better string them along a little. He said in a mild voice:

"Don't get me wrong, gentlemen. I'm only looking after my own interests. I'm perfectly willing to treat with you in a fair and aboveboard manner. If you don't want the lawyers in it, all right. Make me your proposition, and I'll consider it. You'd better go now. There's a loss of confidence on both sides. We can't accomplish anything to-night."

The grey-faced man glanced at the Prince for instructions. The Prince puffed and blew; and tried to recover his dignified air, but with no success. Without another word, he started for the door into the hall, the other man following. As they neared the door, dignity collapsed altogether; they broke into a run; and the front door of the hotel slammed behind them.

Dick, with a sigh of relief, dropped the gun back in his pocket, and wiped his face. What a night! he thought. Feeling a great need of associating with his kind, he went back into the office lounge. How good to his eyes looked those nice, respectable Britishers, sitting around, reading and chatting, totally unaware of the violent scene that had just been enacted on the other side of the parlour door. Dick lit a cigarette. Gosh! I wish I had somebody to sit up all night with me, he thought.

Before the cigarette was finished, the hotel manager, returning from his trip to the police station, came in in a great state of fluster.

“He got away!” he cried.

The ladies were in consternation. They glanced towards the door with little cries of fright, as if they expected Abrams to burst in that moment and murder them all. The gentlemen looked brave; as much as to say: Just let him try it! Dick smiled to himself; he was not surprised; somehow it was what you might have expected of Abrams.

“I don’t know what we’re coming to!” the manager went on. “It is worse than America! As we walked through the streets to the police station, a small crowd gathered about us. Before we got down to the centre of the town, several men suddenly charged around a dark corner and collided with us, throwing everything into confusion. The policemen were knocked down with the rest. When they got to their feet the prisoner was gone. They are still searching for him.”

“Oh dear!” wailed one of the ladies. “There must have been a whole gang of them! Maybe they’ll come around the hotel later!”

Hm! thought Dick grimly; there’s more justification for your fears than you realise, my dear! . . . Not to speak of the Bulomanian Prince and *his* gang! This town is getting too hot for me. Let this be my cue for exit!

He went upstairs.

## 4

Reaching his room, Dick turned out the lights and went to the window. The windows of the room across the way were likewise dark. Bet a dollar someone is watching there, thought Dick. He looked up and down the pleasant little street. With its trees; and with the fences and gates in the English style it offered a dozen skulking places for watchers. Dick shivered. One half of him seemed to say: Put it off until daylight, and leave openly: but the other half replied: If you do they'll dog you night and day, and you'll never succeed in throwing them off. Your only chance is to give them the slip in the dark.

Taking his hat, Dick returned downstairs to the veranda behind the hotel. At this hour it was deserted. Leaning his elbows on the parapet as if to gaze over the dark sea, he let his eyes fall to the roadway below. After a moment or two he succeeded in making out the dark shadow leaning against the wall that he had half expected to find there. The watcher was still at his post. From his position it was evident that he was not aware of the presence of Dick almost immediately above his head. If I only had a hundred pound weight to drop on him! thought Dick.

He stole down to the further end of the veranda, around the corner from the watcher. Letting himself over, he dropped noiselessly to the service driveway where it led out into the street. He felt his way along by the rough masonry of the house, until he could peep around the front corner. By this time his eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness. It was a fair, cool night with no moon; but with stars shining like the lights on a Christmas tree. The quiet street was perfectly deserted; all the visible windows were dark.

As Dick was about to make a break for freedom, a roughness of outline in the trunk of a tree across the way suddenly resolved itself into the figure of a man leaning against the tree. Dick fell back with a sinking heart. This way was watched too. Cut off in the front and in the rear, what was he to do?

He was not given much time to think about it. The man suddenly detached himself from the tree trunk, and came walking smartly across the road. Evidently he had seen Dick too. Dick thought of the cliff behind him. He had taken stock of it while it was day. It was a gravel cliff, and therefore

not perfectly sheer. One could slide down without serious risk. There was a wide beach below. The man broke into a run behind him. Dick ran to the edge of the cliff, and sitting down, pushed off.

He went down in a tremendous swirl and rattle of dust and gravel. The instant his feet touched flat ground, he was up and running at the top of his speed—not towards the lights of the town pier that he might be expected to make for, but into the dark the other way. Immediately he heard a miniature avalanche come down the cliff behind him, then another one, and he knew that both the watchers were after him. He saw a place where a great piece of the cliff had fallen away bodily. He dived into the fissure behind it, and lay there fingering his gun. If they found his hiding place, well, he would have to use it, that was all.

For a moment he could hear nothing of his pursuers. Evidently they were listening for his footsteps. Hearing none, they divided. One set off towards the pier, and the other passed Dick, running at top speed. Dick waited a moment longer, then followed at a sedate pace the one who had run townwards. Smiling to himself, he lit a cigarette. So far, so good.

He had another moment of anxiety when he had to show himself under the lights of the esplanade on the town front. The band concert was over, and there were only a few people about. However he observed that an excursion steamboat was landing her passengers on the pier, and he hung about in the shadows below the promenade, until the people came streaming ashore. Mixing with the crowd, he made his way up through the public gardens to the centre of the town.

What to do then was the question. Abrams had spoken of a late train for London; but it was certain that they would watch that train. To take it would be like sticking his head in the lion's mouth. He thought: I've got a good pair of legs; I'll hoof it over the country roads until morning, and then take to cover.

As he reached the town centre he saw one of those queer, double-decker English trolley cars starting East, that is to say in the general direction of London. Running for it, he swung himself aboard, and climbed up to the roof where he sat down in comfortable darkness. By good luck, he had chosen a long route, and after an interminable ride through the suburbs along the edge of the cliffs, it descended into a valley, crossed a river, and dropped him in a village several miles on his way. This village showed not a single sign of life. At the cross-roads Dick found a sign reading: London 96 miles; and followed that.

He crossed an ancient stone bridge, and proceeded between sweet-smelling fields. Around a bend in the road he came upon a big touring car with the top down stalled at one side. The chauffeur was kneeling in the road struggling with one of the rear tyres, and cursing under his breath. A flashlight lay beside him on the ground. In the tonneau sat a single passenger.

“Can I help?” asked Dick.

“Hold up the light, will yeh?” growled the chauffeur. “I can’t see the damn thing.”

Dick recognised the accents of his beloved Manhattan. “You’re an American, aren’t you?” he asked quickly.

“Sure,” said the chauffeur.

“Same here,” said Dick. “Gee! it’s great to hear the old twang!”

The chauffeur was thoroughly out of temper, and merely grumbled in his throat.

“What’s the matter with your boss that he don’t lend a hand?” asked Dick.

“Aah! he’s not my boss, but just my fare for the day. He’s gone to sleep. You wouldn’t catch a gentlemen in this country dirtying his hands. I’ll be glad when I earn my fare back to God’s country.”

With Dick’s assistance the job was soon done.

“Where you bound for, fella?” grumbled the chauffeur.

“London,” said Dick. “I’m a bit down on my luck.”

“Hop in,” said the other. “We’re for London. I’ll carry you anyhow until his Nibs wakes up.”

They smoked companionably side by side on the front seat, while the big car purred swiftly along the empty roads. They did not speak often; there is never much conversation on the front seat. That narrow segment of the world illumined by the headlights which was continually rushing at them as it were, had a slightly hypnotising effect. Dick had been a driver too, and he could not take his eyes from the road. It was not like the old night that walkers know, but like something clever out of the theatre.

Occasionally they exchanged laconic bits of information.

“This your car?” asked Dick.



“Nope. I work for a London garage. The pay is rotten over here.”

“What part you come from?”

“The old Ninth ward.”

“Don’t I know it!”

The chauffeur asked in turn: “What’s your graft over here?”

“I haven’t got any,” said Dick. “I’m stranded.”

“Why don’t you go to the consul?”

“Got no passport.”

“You seem to be out of luck, fella.”

By and by as the miles rolled up, a rumbling voice was heard from the back seat: “Who is that you have beside you?”

Dick got a shock that knocked him endwise for a moment. His heart seemed to turn to water. It was the voice of Prince Boris Poniatévsky.

The American chauffeur was angered by his fare’s rough tone. “Aah!” he answered truculently. “It’s a fella I’m givin’ a lift to.”

“Put him out!” shouted the Prince. “I’m not paying you to carry tramps along the road!”

“Tramp nothin’!” retorted the chauffeur, now thoroughly roused. “He’s as good a man as you are. Don’t you ever give a neighbour a lift where you come from?”

“Put him out!” repeated the Prince. “I shall report you to your employers!”

Out of the corner of his mouth Dick whispered to the chauffeur: “For God’s sake pull up and let me out. Don’t argue with him!”

The chauffeur was too indignant to listen. “He comes from my country!” he said to the Prince. “He’s an American!”

“An American!” echoed the Prince with a queer change in his voice. There was a pause. Dick’s heart went down like a lump of lead. From somewhere about his clothing the Prince produced a little flashlight, and cast its rays on Dick.

“Why, Mr. Murray Hill!” he drawled. “What a delightful surprise.”

“Hey?” cried the chauffeur, confused by this sudden change of front. “Did you know this guy before?”

“You keep out of this, my man,” said the Prince briskly. “Just keep your mouth shut and don’t interfere, and it’s worth five hundred pounds to you.”

“What the hell . . .!” exclaimed the chauffeur. In his astonishment he brought the car to a stop.

Dick stole an anxious look in his face. It was a good hard American face that gave nothing away. He was a poor boy anxious to find the money to get back home, and after all Dick was nothing to him. Dick did not feel that he could count on him in this emergency.

“Turn around, Mr. Murray Hill,” said the Prince softly.

Dick did so to find himself looking down the barrel of an automatic.

“Hand over the pearls and I’ll be delighted to carry you to London or any place else that you please.”

“Hey, what’s this, puyls?” muttered the New York chauffeur.

“He has on him a valuable necklace belonging to me,” said the Prince.

“That’s a lie!” said Dick. “It’s no more his than mine.”

“Five hundred pounds if you keep out of this!” said the Prince.

“Sure!” said the chauffeur. “I can use it! Want me to search him boss, while you keep him covered?”

Dick gave up his last hope.

“The pearls are in his inside breast pocket,” said the Prince.

The chauffeur leaned against Dick and slipped a hand inside his coat. As he fumbled there, he whispered: “Got a gun, fella? I’m on your side.”

“Yes,” said Dick.

“Get it out then, and be ready to point it when I give the word.”

Dick obeyed.

“Cheese it, here comes a car!” said the chauffeur suddenly.

The Prince was unwise enough to glance over his shoulder.

“Now!” said the chauffeur, mysteriously producing a gun. At the same moment Dick’s gun arm went up. There was no car coming of course. When the Prince turned back his head, he found himself looking along the barrels

of two guns. He drew his breath with a startled sob; his own gun arm dropped nervelessly across his thigh.

“You —— —— ——!” said the chauffeur using the choicest New York profanity. “Did you think for a moment that I would go back on one of my own people for the sake of a dirty wop like you? . . . Throw that gun on the front seat! I’ve just been savin’ up for this! All day you’ve been makin’ me sore with your high and mighty airs, thinkin’ you could put it all over an American just because you hired him. Chauffeurs ain’t slaves in America, let me tell you. You come over there, and we’ll teach you manners. . . . Throw that gun on the front seat or you’ll get hurt.”

With a nervous movement the Prince obeyed.

“Now unload,” said the chauffeur.

“Wh . . . what?” stammered the Prince.

“Get out of the car! Do you understand that?”

“But surely . . . surely . . . not in a lonely spot like this! We are sixty miles from London . . . At least carry me to a village . . . I’ll pay . . .”

“Unload! Unload!” barked the chauffeur, affecting to sight his gun.

Still whimpering and protesting, the Prince scrambled out of the car.

“You keep him covered while I start her up,” the chauffeur said to Dick.

The car rolled away, leaving the fat Prince trotting along the road whimpering like a child.

“Say, boe, you’re a white man!” said Dick.

“Oh, that’s all right, fella,” said the chauffeur in great embarrassment. “Us Americans has got to stick together.”

“You’ll get into trouble with your boss over this.”

“Well, what’s a job more or less? I wouldn’t dast go back to the garage without my hire money, so we’ll just abandon the car in the streets and let the police return it. I can get another job. You and me’ll stick together, eh? We’ll be pals. My moniker is Plug Egan.”

“And mine’s Kid Murray Hill. Shake, Plug, old fella’!”

## 5

Dick did not get a good look at his new pal until the day broke. Plug proved to be a short fellow, but broad and husky. He had an ugly, sensible, good-humoured face that Dick took to at once. Like most chauffeurs he was excellent company with his dry, derisive manner. Plug never let anything on. The two lads got along like a house afire.

Dick was still well supplied with money; so they took a comfortable lodging in Bloomsbury; and supplied themselves with what they needed.

“There’s no call for us to stint ourselves,” said Dick. “The owners of the pearls, whoever they may be, certainly owe us a good living for keeping them out of the hands of those crooks.”

“You’ll need help guarding them,” said Plug. “I t’ink maybe I better not look for a job right away.”

“Suits me,” said Dick.

So Plug lived in glorious idleness for the time being.

A little quiet investigation satisfied them that Poniatévsky was in fact a Prince, and the chargé d’affaires of the Bulomanian legation, pending the appointment of a minister from that country. From his actions though, they were convinced that he was working to get the pearls for himself instead of for Bulomania. They resolved to have no more to do with him or his country.

“After all,” said Dick, “the pearls were stolen from ex-King Miguel. If I return them to him my conscience will be satisfied. Then he and Bulomania can fight it out together.”

From a social register Dick learned that ex-King Miguel was known officially in England as the Comte de Grandeville and that the post-office address of his big house was Straker, near Maidenhead. After a bit of cogitation Dick produced the following letter:

“DEAR SIR,” “The pearl necklace which was stolen from your house on the night of June —— has come into my possession. I will not go into all the circumstances as it would make too long a

story. I will only say that the most famous thieves of England, America and Bulomania have been struggling for possession of the pearls, and I have been in danger of my life half a dozen times over in trying to save them for their rightful owners. Every move I make is watched and I cannot therefore come to see you. I suggest that you communicate with me by means of a personal in the *Times*. Be careful how you word it, as our enemies may be watching the *Times*. Let me know what your wishes are, and I will write you again. Head your advertisement as this letter is signed:

“WELL-WISHER.”

“Very neat,” said Plug upon reading this; “there’s not a word said about a reward, but he can’t fail to get the idea.”

The letter was dispatched.

Now the mention of an advertisement in the *Times* had started another train of thought in Dick’s mind. During the last few days whenever he had not been actively engaged in extricating himself from one ticklish situation or another, his mind had reverted to the thought of the slim, lovely, boyish girl that he had clasped in his arms for one never-to-be-forgotten dance at the night club in Pentland Mews. The thought of never seeing her again was unbearable. He did not know her last name or where she lived. He began to play with the idea of inserting a personal in the *Times* on his own account.

“Millicent: Please let me see you. Dick.”

Dick showed this diffidently to Plug Egan.

“Who is she?” asked Plug.

“One of Abrams’ gang,” said Dick.

“But good God!” exclaimed Plug. “Think of the danger! How do you know she won’t sell you out to them?”

“I know she won’t,” said Dick slowly, “but I can’t tell you how I know. There was something special about this. We only exchanged a few words, but something told me she felt the same about it as I do. I feel differently towards her than to any other girl I ever knew.”

“Well, suppose she stood by you,” said Plug; “think of the danger that one of the men might spot this ad. The mere names: Millicent; Dick; are enough to give them a clue.”

Dick shook his head. "I never told any of them my real name but her," he said. "The others all know me as Kid Murray Hill. She told me her real name was Millicent, and I'm willing to bet it's not the name the others know her by."

"Can't you wait until you get the pearl business settled?" asked Plug.

"One of those crooks might get me any day," said Dick. "I want to see her once again first."

"Well go to it then," said Plug throwing up his hands.

The advertisement was inserted with the addition of a box number for answers.

Every morning after that, they spread out the *Times* in the keenest excitement. Five days later amongst the Personals they found this:

"Well-Wisher: Five hundred pounds reward."

Dick and Plug looked at each other. "The piker!" exclaimed the former, indignantly. "After all I have been through!"

"Write to him and tell him he can go to the devil!" said Plug.

Dick shook his head. "No," he said, "silence is best. He'll understand if he gets no answer that it's up to him to raise the ante."

Later, Dick went to the *Times* office where, to his astonishment he received a great sheaf of answers to his own personal. It appeared that there were at least twenty-five Millicents in London who wished to hear from a Dick.

In their lodging the two young men had considerable fun over the misspelled and more or less ardent letters. Dick allowed Plug to have them all to play with except one which was very much to the point. This Dick read over and over with a fast beating heart:

"If you are the lad that I danced with at the Raquets Club, write and tell me what we said to each other on that occasion. It would be useless for you to try to find me at this address."

Dick instantly sat down and wrote all that he had said to her; and she to him. Every word was fresh in his mind. Later, notwithstanding her behest, he made a reconnaissance of the address she had given in her letter. It was a little stationery shop in Warwick Street, Pimlico, where letter boxes were hired out. Useless for him to hang about on the chance of her turning up.

Very likely she had left instructions for her letter to be forwarded somewhere else.

On the following day he received another letter that filled him with delight. The slightly distracted tone that he detected in it raised his hopes to the highest pitch:

“MY DEAR: “I suppose you know the frightful risk you run in writing to me; in telling me where you live! Foolish, foolish lad! But it touches my heart to think that you should trust me! I have already torn your letter into a hundred pieces. I had hoped that you were safe out of the country before this. You must give up all idea of our meeting. The risk is too terrible! And you must not continue to write to me, or a discovery is certain to be made. No, I have not forgotten you; but I must do so; and you must forget me. You say you will do something reckless if I do not let you see me again, and I believe you are capable of it. Well, once more then, and that *must* be the last time. I shall walk across London Bridge tomorrow at half-past five when the crowd is thickest. I shall be on the Westerly sidewalk. If you do not run into me, stand in the middle, and look up-stream until I touch your arm.

“MILLICENT.”

In the thickest of the home-going crowd on London Bridge Dick picked out the slim figure swimming towards him with careless grace. She was dressed with the most severe plainness; but her close-fitting little brown hat had a jaunty, boyish tilt. With her height, her fineness, her cool assurance, she might have been a duke’s daughter. She had a look of divine recklessness that bespoke the woman who would dare anything for the man she loved.

Her smile at Dick was drawn. She was in a nervous state. “It is so dangerous for you,” she whispered. “Who can tell what may be under all these hats? Abrams has his agents scattered over all London.”

“A taxi-cab would be safest,” said Dick.

Presently a cab returning to London Bridge Station overtook them, and he bundled her in. “How long?” he asked her.

“An hour,” she breathed.

To the driver Dick said: "Drive anywhere you like for an hour, and come back here."

Dick took both her hands in his. "Let me look at you," he murmured. "You are more beautiful than I dreamed!"

Her eyes were hungrily fixed on Dick's face, too; but she did not speak her thoughts. Dick attempted to draw her to him; but she strained away.

"No! No!" she whispered. "You do not know me."

"I do know you!" he protested. "And you know me. It was like a lightning flash. . . . You said this was to be the last time."

"But wait," she said. "We must talk first. I cannot talk if you——"

"Kiss me once," he pleaded, "then I will be quiet and talk."

"The people on the street will see!"

"What matter? They're used to it. What are taxi-cabs for?"

"Ah, you won't let me keep anything back!" she murmured, half-ashamed, yet yielding too.

They kissed. Millicent sank back into her corner with closed eyes.

Presently she asked: "Why do you stay in London?"

"It is so big I feel safest here," said Dick.

"Abrams has sworn to kill you," she said. "Even if he got the pearls it wouldn't save you now. All his agents are furnished with your description. You cannot escape him if you remain here."

"I'll leave London if you'll come with me," said Dick.

"What are you saying!" she cried. "We have met once!"

"What does that matter? I know, and you know. What does anything matter beside this? I have the pearls in my pocket. Let's drive to a station and get on a train. I'll get a passport somehow. In the meantime we've got plenty to live on."

"No! No! No!" she protested. "Up until this minute it was your intention to return them to their owners."

"They haven't got any owners as far as I can find out," said Dick. "They're anybody's pearls."



“Just the same it was your instinct to return them,” she insisted. “You’re honest. I’m not going to be the reason for your taking the first step the other way.”

“Those pearls couldn’t do any more good than by saving you from that life,” he said.

“We couldn’t make a fresh start on stolen goods,” she answered sadly.

“What good will they do to the ex-King? or to the Bulomanian Prince? or to Michael Rulon? or to Sam Abrams?”

“That’s not the point. I’m only thinking about the harm they would do to you.”

“Are you satisfied with your life?” he demanded.

“Not now,” she whispered.

“Are you tied up to any man but me?”

“No,” she said quickly. “But you must face things. I’m a thief, and the associate of thieves. I’m not going to wreck your life.”

“Wreck nothing!” said Dick roughly. “How about mending the pieces of your own life?”

“I can’t argue with you any more,” she said helplessly. “But no! no! no!”

“What do I care what you are?” cried Dick. “I love you! You are the only one for me! Do you think I will ever let you go?”

“You will get over this.”

“Never! Don’t you love me?”

“No!”

“Millicent!” he cried.

“Oh, yes! yes! yes!” she cried flinging herself into his arms.

But she stood firm. “We must part,” she said with infinite sadness. “No good could come of it!”

Back and forth; back and forth they travelled over the same field of argument without getting anywhere. Now they became furiously angry with each other; now melted into each other’s arms.

“I *must* not see you again!” said Millicent. “It is disloyal to my crowd. I hate the idea of disloyalty.”

“Then leave that crowd,” said Dick.

“That’s not so easy,” she said sadly. “That is my life; I know no other. Besides, they would not let me leave them. I know too much.”

In a desperately short time as it seemed to Dick, the cab returned to London Bridge. “Time’s up,” the driver said, grinning at them sympathetically.

Dick pleaded hard for another quarter of an hour.

Millicent was firm in her refusals. “If I am not back at half-past six there will be the devil to pay,” she said.

“Where do you live?” cried Dick. “What are the circumstances? Whom do you live with? This mystery drives me wild!”

She stopped the torrent of questions by placing a hand over his mouth.

“I shall not let you go!” he cried.

The girl’s plucky lips began to tremble. “Ah, do not quarrel with me now!” she begged. “I cannot bear it! You have broken down all my defences. I love you so! Kiss me and let me go.”

They embraced for the last time.

“I shall never stop loving you!” murmured Dick.

“Nor I!” she whispered. “I adore you! . . . Now go, please! I can’t bear any more!”

Blindly he stepped out of the cab. “I shall write to you at the little shop,” he said.

Millicent waved her hand to him, unable to speak, and the cab drove away.

Dick made his way back to his lodging in a queer mixed state of misery and happiness. He could not be altogether miserable while his heart was thrilling with the consciousness that he was loved, and by such a woman!

## 6

Next day amongst the personals in the *Times* there appeared one of vital interest to Dick:

“Well-Wisher: A thousand pounds reward.”

Dick’s heart leaped with joy. By holding off he might have obtained even more; but he could not wait. A thousand pounds would save him and Millicent. He immediately sat down to compose a letter to the Compte de Grandeville, *alias* Miguel of Bulomania.

But no inspiration came to him. He could only bite his penholder. “How the devil will we be able to swing it!” he asked Plug.

“Why, tell him to leave the money in a certain place; and if it’s all right you’ll leave the pearls there,” said Plug.

“Is that the best you can hit out?” asked Dick scornfully. “No sane man is going to risk a thousand pounds on a chance like that. He doesn’t know that we’ve got the pearls.”

“Well, that’s the way you always read how they do it in the papers,” said Plug.

“Besides,” said Dick, “they’d watch the place, and when we went there we’d be seized. This guy has half an army in his pay. English law means nothing to them. They’d carry us back to his castle, and we’d never see the light of day again.”

Plug scratched his head, and wrinkled up his honest phiz in deep thought; but nothing better came to him.

“No, we must meet somewhere in the middle of a crowd,” Dick went on, thinking aloud. “That will protect both parties. He can examine the pearls to satisfy himself that they’re the real thing; and I can warn him that if he attempts to double-cross me, I’ll put the Bulomanians on to him.”

Dick wrote as follows:

“DEAR SIR: “I greatly appreciate the liberality of your offer in this morning’s *Times* of a thousand pounds reward for the return of

your pearls; and I thankfully accept the same. In order to convince you that I am no trifler, I may say that the string of pearls in my possession is thirty-six inches long doubled; it consists of 576 pearls of the finest quality, less three which I was obliged to detach in order to pay personal expenses. I enclose herewith the pawn-tickets for these. If you reclaim them, you will no doubt recognise your property. Between the two smallest pearls is a gold ornament bearing the monogram: A.A.

“I suggest that we meet in a public place in order to make the exchange. If you will think it over, the advantages of this plan to both sides will be apparent to you. I will meet you on the island in the middle of the open space in front of the Bank of England on Thursday at twelve-thirty. I will bring the pearls in a large manila envelope, and will give you full opportunity to examine them. You should bring the money in Bank of England notes in a similar envelope so that I can count them. Each party may bring one friend only. If there is any departure from this agreement, I shall retire without showing the pearls. And you of course are at liberty to do the same. If this arrangement is satisfactory to you, just advertise the letters O.K. in the *Times* to-morrow if you can make it; if not on the following day.

### “WELL-WISHER.

“P.S.—I am a young man twenty-three years of age, with light brown hair and blue eyes. I shall be wearing a grey worsted suit; and will stick a pansy in my buttonhole.”

“Gosh!” exclaimed Plug admiringly, when he had read this through. “Think of pulling off a deal like this in the heart of London at lunch time!”

“The islands in the traffic will only hold half a dozen people,” said Dick. “He can’t conceal his army there.”

“You’ve got imagination, boy!”

“Will you stand by me, Plug?”

“Will I? Just watch me, that’s all! ’Taint every day a feller has a chance to stand toe to toe with a King!”

“I’m mighty glad I met up with you, Plug, old boy. I’ll need a friend that day.”

“You’re dead right, fella,” said Plug, sententiously. “All them wops is crooked. And the high-toned ones are the crookedest!”

The letter was duly posted; and ex-King Miguel lost no time in replying to it. On the very next morning the *Times* carried this personal:

“Well-Wisher: O.K. Thursday 12.30.”

The two young men had three long, long days to put in before Thursday. Dick groaned and fidgeted at the delay. As it was obviously unwise for him to wander about town, they spent most of the time in their room. Plug procured a pack of cards and they played Demon from morning to night. Dick wrote a brief note to Millicent telling her that their fate would be put to the test on Thursday. He received no reply. Every time he thought about that day his heart rose slowly into his throat. A thousand pounds! Nearly five thousand dollars! He scarcely dared to believe that he might hold that sum in his hand.

Thursday came at last as every day must. Rain was falling; but Plug opined that if his Nibs was keen on the pearls he wouldn’t let that stop him. Dick shaved and dressed with care. He wished to appear his best before a King, even though that King was a rascal. Plug had been provided with a new suit to render him less conspicuous than the chauffeur’s uniform.

They were ready hours before it was time to set out; and sat around the room biting their fingers, and cursing the slowness of time. The smoky London sun came out, and they determined to walk down to the City in order to kill time.

That small irregular open space with the Bank of England on one side and the Royal Exchange on another is the very core and hub of London. Seven important streets converge there. From seven directions the roaring traffic of London bears down on that one spot. How an inextricable tangle is avoided is a never-ceasing wonder to the beholder. The policeman who holds that post, is in his way, the greatest man in London. At lunch time it is at its most crowded. Whenever the complicated lines of traffic permit, the black-coated pedestrians scurry across in their thousands.

The little island that Dick had appointed for a meeting-place, stands in the middle of the open space. The traffic up Cornhill sweeps along one side; and the traffic for London Bridge roars past the end. The island supports a bronze standard for electric lights; and several stout granite posts to keep the wheels off. The majestic generalissimo of the traffic stands a yard or two in front of it. When Dick and Plug arrived there, the island was deserted for the

moment; and they felt somewhat conspicuous lingering there. But the mighty policeman cast a pleased eye in their direction. He thought they had paused to admire the skill with which he directed his armies. The clock in King William Street pointed to half-past twelve precisely.

“See anything that looks like a King?” Dick whispered to Plug.

Plug shook his head. “Uh-Uh. Only stool warmers.”

At intervals a great wave of humanity would roll over the island; and sweep on, leaving it bare again. Sometimes the wave would be dammed on the island while the endless stream of wheeled vehicles rolled past. At one such moment Dick noticed a man beside him who was eyeing him curiously, and his heart gave a leap. This is he! he thought.

He was a little surprised to find that the ex-King was still a young man, not more than thirty; and quite good-looking, though somewhat soft in the face; large dark eyes and full, sensual lips. He was dressed in a marvellously fitting blue suit with fawn coloured soft hat and spats; and he had a gold mounted stick hung over his arm. He was very much the finished man of the world. Behind him stood an older man, likewise very elegantly dressed; with close-set sharp eyes, and a military bearing. Both of them appeared to be nervous. For that matter Dick was nervous too.

“How are you?” said Dick; and in his confusion put forth his hand. The King accepted it, not knowing what else to do and Dick had the satisfaction of grasping the flabby royal paw. Shaking hands with a King! he thought quite thrilled. Meanwhile the wheeled traffic roared past them in several directions; and the pedestrians scampered and darted to find ways through.

For a moment the quartette was left standing alone in some embarrassment on the island. Dick thrust a hand in his breast pocket, and brought out the heavy envelope containing the pearls.

“I guess this is what you want,” he said.

The King took it in a hand that trembled with eagerness. So far he had not said a word, but he smiled pleasantly. Plug was gazing at him open-mouthed. There were plenty of handsomer men in London, nevertheless this soft-looking young man had an unmistakable quality of distinction. Being a King even for a while sets a man apart from his fellows.

He lifted the flap and looked inside. His eyes seemed to flame up with satisfaction. A glance must have showed him that these were the genuine pearls; but with one hand inside the big envelope, he went over them pearl by pearl, careful not to reveal the contents of the envelope to passers-by.

“If you will give me the money,” suggested Dick politely, “I can be counting it.”

“Pardonn! One moment,” said the King with his pleasant smile, which Dick perceived that he was able to turn off and on at will like electric light. He went on counting the pearls.

This performance lasted so long that an ugly little suspicion struck into Dick’s breast. This man might be a King and a charming fellow *and* he might be meditating a dirty trick also. Apparently everybody who looked at those marvellous pearls went bad. There was something unnatural in remaining so long in that spot. The majestic policeman glanced at them curiously. Dick observed that the military looking gentleman was gazing anxiously off in the direction of Queen Victoria Street.

“The money, please,” said Dick more firmly.

“Pardonn!” said the King, smiling still.

Dick perceived a glint of steel in the smile now, and he was certain that a trick was intended. He realised that they had him at a disadvantage. He could not make a row there on the island.

The traffic out of Queen Victoria Street was released. It swept across the open space, and passed alongside them bound up Cornhill. A handsome private car passed very slowly, while a taxi behind tooted for more speed. With a movement as quick as a cat’s Miguel turned to swing himself into the seat beside the chauffeur; but Dick, anticipating some such move dug his fingers inside the royal collar, and yanked him back on the island.

“No you don’t!” he said.

Meanwhile the military gentleman had disappeared. Plug who was close at hand snatched the envelope of pearls from Miguel.

“Stop thief!” yelled Miguel once, involuntarily.

“Shut up, you fool! or we’ll both lose them!” Dick whispered in his ear.

Not another sound out of Miguel. As soon as Dick saw that Plug had recovered the pearls, he released the ex-King, but the latter was unable to escape then. All was confusion. Hundreds of people pushed and shoved around the two of them; and for once in history the traffic at the bank fell into confusion. Policemen came elbowing through in every direction. To Dick’s thankfulness, little Plug succeeded in fading away.

“What’s this? What’s this?” demanded the first policeman who reached the scene.

Miguel had recovered his *sang-froid*. “I am Miguel, former King of Bulomania,” he said coolly. “This man attacked me without provocation. I do not know him. I think he must be an anarchist.”

This story appealed to the romantic instincts of the crowd, and they murmured indignantly against Dick. After a moment of stupefaction, Dick’s faculties clicked into action. If he can lie, I can lie too, he thought. He was not any more anxious than Miguel to speak about the pearls. He said:

“Anarchist nothing! I am an American citizen. I saw this man as I thought about to throw himself in front of an automobile, and I pulled him back, that’s all.”

“Have you any papers to prove your identity?” asked the officer.

“Not on me,” said Dick with a sinking heart.

“Well, just come along with me,” he said soothingly.



Dick sat in his cell with his head in his hands. He had passed most of the night in that manner. Upon his failure to produce passport or identifying papers the worst was believed against him. That damnable lack of a passport spoiled everything. Since there was no plausible story that he could tell the police, beyond his first statement he had remained absolutely mum. The wreck of his hopes seemed to be complete. A well-meaning turnkey had just brought him a morning paper on which was displayed the black face caption:

### EX-KING MIGUEL ATTACKED IN THE CITY

Miguel's soft and pleasing features were displayed in various poses. Fortunately they had not got a photograph of Dick as yet. But Dick supposed that Miguel, whatever his private wishes might be, would now be forced by the publicity to go on with the ridiculous prosecution. Dick had heard awful tales of British gaols. He shuddered at the prospect.

They could not give him a long sentence merely for clutching Miguel by the collar. But even so, what chance would he have when he came out? For Abrams and his agents would certainly smell a rat in this newspaper story, and attend the trial. Dick would be marked for future reference. Then there was Plug. Plug had seemed like a good fellow; but Dick had only known him for a week. Could he be expected to remain staunch in the face of that awful temptation? A hundred thousand dollars worth of pearls? Dick had had several object lessons in the demoralising influence that those beautiful, gleaming baubles exercised on their beholders. If it were for a day or two only, one might depend upon Plug; but for him to have possession of the pearls all the time Dick would be in gaol, and then hand them over, well, it was too much to be expected of a poor, uneducated lad. Dick gave up hope of ever seeing the pearls again—or Millicent. That was the bitterest thought of all.

Dick had been informed that he would be taken before the magistrate at ten o'clock. Shortly after eight two visitors were brought to his cell. One was the high-shouldered military gentleman who had accompanied the King the day before; the other looked like a lawyer. The lawyer remained at the door, while the military person spoke to Dick in low tones.

"I am instructed to say to you by a personage who shall remain nameless, that if his property is brought to him at Claridge's hotel before you are arraigned, he will withdraw the charge against you."

Dick turned red with anger. It was on the tip of his tongue to consign both master and man to perdition. But he checked himself. One must be diplomatic. "It's not good enough," he said coolly. "They can't give me more than thirty days. I'll take it, and keep the pearls."

"They'll give you a year!" said the King's agent viciously. "I have ten witnesses to call. England prides herself upon offering a safe asylum to political refugees of all sorts. Popular opinion is aroused against you."

"Even so," said Dick. "I'm surprised that you should expect me to trust you again after yesterday. Let your master withdraw this silly charge *first*, then I'll treat with him about the pearls. Otherwise he'll never see them again."

"While you are in gaol, I shall treat with your confederate for their return," said the other with a disagreeable smile.

"You'll never find him!"

"I'll advertise for him. I assume that he knows the code word."

Plug did know the code word of course. Dick's heart sunk. Nevertheless he squared his jaw. "So be it!" he said. "I'd sooner trust him than you. Good morning."

The military gentleman retired with a discomfited air; and Dick was left to his gloomy reflections again.

When Dick was led into the magistrate's court he was conscious at first only of a wall of faces at the back. The benches were packed. It was evident from the eager attention of the spectators that Dick's case was a first-rate attraction. He heard a murmur such as that which greets an actor upon his first entrance. It was a sympathetic murmur. Evidently they were surprised to find the supposed anarchist so well-dressed and so good-looking. Dick was grateful for their sympathy; but it didn't do him much good. Like every other prisoner he was chiefly concerned with the magistrate. This was a middle-aged man who looked good-natured at heart but disillusioned by a long experience of petty criminals. He wore a black silk gown and an absurd little wig with curls which did not altogether cover his own hair.

Dick was led into a little square pen elevated above the crowd. He was told to stand against the front rail; and his warder sat down at the rear. The magistrate was interrupted by a request dealing with another case; and while this was discussed, Dick was forced to stand with his hands on the rail, the focus of interest in the court. He kept his back stiff and his head up; he had nothing to feel guilty about. But his breast was heavy with anxiety. He saw an English gaol looming close ahead.

The magistrate's bench was on his right. Below him were the lawyers and witnesses. The spectators were ranged in tiers at the back. When you looked at them in the mass you could pick out no individual face. So Dick began to look along the rows face by face. He found plenty to interest him—and to add to his anxiety. Every man in London that he wished to avoid was there. Down in the front corner were Poniatovsky and his elderly grey-faced aide. Scattered through the crowd he picked out first Abrams, the old rat, who looked both cringing and confident—he had the assurance to grin hatefully at Dick when their eyes met; then Hawkins mean and ugly; then Allington in his Greatorrex make-up, very elegant and distinguished-looking, scowling blackly at Dick. And beside Allington Dick saw the pale, plucky, beautiful face of Millicent like a clean cut boy.

Dick's heart swelled with love and pain. At whatever risk, she had come there to give him an assurance of her love. Dick read it in her eyes. Outwardly they dared not exchange the slightest sign, for, as soon as Dick's and the girl's eyes met, Allington's hot gaze fastened itself on the girl's face to discover if she should betray herself. It filled Dick with helpless jealousy to see her sitting beside Allington. Allington free and able to take her around, to make love to her during all the days when he, Dick, would be locked up. Dick knew that she did not care for Allington; but the gang had a very strong hold on her. Might she not succumb in the end?

Dick did not find Plug in the court-room. He reminded himself, though, that Plug might have stayed away through reasons of prudence.

Miguel of Bulomania entered the court-room attended by his military friend. A buzz of interest travelled over the benches, and every eye was turned on the former King. It was clear who was the star of this performance. Dick was nowhere then. Miguel was beautifully turned out in a grey suit to-day, with a natty black derby and chamois gloves. Perfectly well accustomed to the applause of crowds, he took it quite coolly. He and his friend joined their lawyer within the enclosure.

Upon Miguel's entrance, Prince Poniatévsky did not look at him directly, but fiercely twirled his moustache. When, a moment later, Miguel caught sight of Poniatévsky, he lost all his *savoir-faire* for a moment. His smooth olive face changed colour, and plain fright showed in his eyes. Because, of course, if Poniatévsky's party was interested in this case, it suggested that they must know something about the pearls; and if they knew anything about the pearls, Miguel's game was queered. Dick, taking all this in from his elevated situation, smiled somewhat bitterly. It was a pretty little situation, and he was the goat!

Miguel whispered agitatedly to his military friend. The two military gentlemen of opposite parties exchanged fierce and baleful glances.

At this moment Plug Egan sidled diffidently into the court-room, and Dick's thoughts took a new direction. His heart warmed towards his new friend. Good old Plug! He meant to stick by him! But while he was glad to see him, Dick blamed him very much for thus sticking his head in danger. Abrams and his gang knew nothing about Plug, but the two parties of Bulomanians spotted him instantly. Poniatévsky glared at him furiously; Miguel whispered to his military friend.

Plug took a seat on the highest tier; the only one he could see that was vacant. Miguel's military friend, leaving his master's side, climbed the steps, and sitting in the aisle alongside Plug, entered into an earnest whispered conversation with the ex-chauffeur. Dick watched the progress of this colloquy with the most intense interest; he believed that his fate rested on the outcome. Plug made his face like a mask, and Dick could not guess what it was all about. Miguel's friend talked persuasively.

Finally the judge rapped with his gavel, and the proceedings against Dick were opened. Miguel's friend was obliged to return to his seat. Plug looked obstinate, and Dick inferred that the other man had not succeeded in getting what he wanted out of him. Dick's heart swelled with gratitude towards his friend. The ex-King and his military aide conferred agitatedly with their lawyer; whisper; whisper; whisper. Finally a decision was reached. The lawyer rose.

"If your honour pleases," he said to the magistrate, "my client, the Comte de Grandeville, who is the complaining witness in this case, desires to make a statement to the court."

The magistrate bowed in acquiescence; and Miguel rose, hand on hip, perfectly at ease before the crowd.

"I am known as the Comte de Grandeville," he said in his pleasant manner, "but it is impossible for me to preserve my incognito in the face of your enterprising newspapers. Everybody knows I am the former King Miguel of Bulomania. Since I have been residing in England, my life has continually been threatened by emissaries of the present republican government of Bulomania." Here Miguel and Poniatévsky exchanged a poisonous glance. "It was therefore not unnatural when this young man seized hold of me in front of the Bank of England yesterday for me to suppose that he was another one of them. Since then my secretary, Colonel Lazarev, has questioned the young man, and we are now satisfied that he has no connection with my political enemies, and that he thought he was doing me a service in seizing hold of me. I therefore wish to withdraw my charge, adding my deepest apologies to the young man for having caused his arrest, and to the court for having unnecessarily taken its time."

With beautiful bows to Dick, and to the magistrate, Miguel sat down. A murmur of approbation ran around the benches, sharply silenced by the magistrate's gavel. A blessed relief filled Dick, as the prospect of liberty opened up before him. To be sure it was liberty with a very large string on it, with Abrams gloating there, and Poniatévsky glowering at him, and Miguel looking demurely down at his beautifully manicured hands. Dick could imagine them all saying: "Just wait till we get you outside!" Still, anything was better than gaol!

"I thank you for your generous acknowledgment of error, Sir," said the magistrate to Miguel. "The prisoner is discharged."

Dick was not released through the court-room as would have been the case in America; but was taken back into the prison where his money and other belongings were returned to him. He was then released by a side door. A small crowd was hanging about, amongst whom was Plug. The two young men clasped hands.

"Good old Plug!" said Dick warmly. "You stood by me!"

"Aah! what do you think I am!" said Plug.

Miguel's aide, Colonel Lazarev, stepped up. He was all smiles now. "Will you young gentlemen come to Claridge's to confer with his royal highness?" he asked smoothly.

Dick fixed him with a hard blue eye. "No!" he said coolly. "Your Royal Highness played a dirty trick on me yesterday, and I've no intention of putting myself in his hands a second time. You may make your offer to me

through the newspaper as before, and if I'm satisfied with it I'll communicate with you."

Colonel Lazarev drew himself up. "How dare you, Sir! Do you know the penalties attached to withholding stolen property?"

"Here's the police station," said Dick, half turning. "Go as far as you like."

But Colonel Lazarev strode stiffly away.

"It is your master that you should tell that to, not me," Dick called after him.

Dick took Plug's arm, and drew him in the other direction. "Have you got the pearls on you?" he whispered.

"No," said Plug.

"Good man!" said Dick. "Half the crooks in London are hot on our trail."

"I ripped a seam of the mattress on our bed," said Plug, "and stuffed 'em inside, and sewed it up again."

"That man loafing in the doorway across the street is Hawkins, one of Abrams' agents," said Dick. "Another one who calls himself Allington or Greatorrex is in the taxi behind us. That wop waiting on the corner was in the court-room. I never saw him before, but I suspect he's in Poniatévsky's pay. And the ex-King has half an army at his call. Besides all that, there's an American crook called Michael Rulon on his way over to get my scalp. He's the most dangerous customer of all. You'd better beat it, Kid, while the going's good. I wouldn't take it amiss."

Plug squeezed Dick's arm. "Aah, cut it out, fella," he said. "Or you'll make me sore. We agreed to stick together, didn't we? It's gonna to be fun!"

“First of all let’s eat,” said Dick. “Let’s go into one of these big Lyons’ places. Nobody could touch us in that crowd.”

“There’s a restaurant in Selfridge’s, the big American store,” said Plug. “That store has a dozen different entrances. We might be able to dodge our trailers there.”

“Lead on,” said Dick. “Let’s take a taxi.”

Ten minutes later they were seated in the handsome restaurant with an excellent lunch spread before them. It diverted them to see Hawkins come sneaking into the place, and take a seat at a table some little distance away. This was evidently a finer eating-place than Abrams’ man was accustomed to, and he looked very uncomfortable. At still another table sat the well-dressed young foreigner whom Plug termed the wop, and whom they supposed to be an agent of Poniatovsky’s.

“All here,” said Dick humorously. “Selfridge’s ought to pay us a commission on the business we bring.”

“We won’t be able to go home until we succeed in shaking our dogs,” said Plug.

“Well, we must discuss that,” said Dick. “How about the landlady? I hope she won’t disturb our room if we fail to turn up to-night.”

“I paid her a week’s rent in advance,” said Plug. “I told her we might be away awhile.”

“If it was only New York,” said Dick, “I’d suggest the subway. By hopping from train to train just as the doors are about to close, you can shake anybody. But over here the passengers open and close the doors themselves.”

“If we could only find some place where they wouldn’t dare follow,” said Plug. “Suppose we jumped off one of the bridges. Somebody would pick us up.”

“Too spectacular,” said Dick. “We’d find ourselves in the police station again. We must avoid too much publicity.”

“Have we got coin enough to hire an airplane?”

“Yes, but so have they. No, let us leave it to inspiration. We’ll just walk about the streets this afternoon. Something will turn up.”

When they finished eating Dick said with a grin: “Let’s have Hawkins over, and have a bit of fun with him.”

Dick beckoned to Abrams’ agent. Hawkins made out not to get it. Dick’s signal became more and more obvious; and everybody in the restaurant began to look at the uncomfortable Hawkins. Finally Dick called over to him:

“I say, Hawkins, come over and join us.”

Hawkins could no longer effect to ignore it. He came sidling over with an extraordinary sheepish, hangdog air. Dick jumped up as if he were greeting his dearest friend.

“How are you, old man! Sit down and have something with us. Meet my friend Mr. Egan.”

The mean, ugly little creature didn’t know which way to look. A fried fish shop would have been more in his line. To have all the well-dressed people looking at him made him writhe. Dick and Plug outvied each other in joshing him.

Finally Dick said to him in a lowered voice, “You’re wondering why I called you over. I just wanted to save you a bit of trouble. I’ve disposed of the pearls.”

Hawkins’ face sharpened. “Who to?” he said.

“Ex-King Miguel,” said Dick. “That’s why he withdrew his charge against me.”

“What did he give you for them?” asked Hawkins.

“A thousand pounds.”

Hawkins sneered incredulously. “Show me the money and I’ll believe it!” he said.

“Oh, we don’t carry it on us,” said Dick carelessly. “We’ve got it salted down.”

Hawkins’ lip continued to curl.



“Look here,” said Dick, “if you still believe I’ve got the pearls on me, I’m willing to let you search me. Egan too.”

“You know I can’t search you here,” said Hawkins.

“Why not? We’ll make out it’s all a joke.” Dick jumped up, laughing loudly. “Search me! Search me!” he said, slapping himself.

Plug threw back his head and laughed too. Hawkins accepted the challenge. Going to Dick his practised fingers flew all over his body in a trice. It was a strange scene to take place in a restaurant. The other diners regarded it as a bit of skylarking amongst the young men. Plug’s turn followed Dick’s. Hawkins sat down again still sneering incredulously.

“Are you satisfied?” asked Dick.

“I’m satisfied you haven’t got them on you,” he said. “But that don’t prove anything. I can see you’re tryin’ to fool me.”

“Some people are never satisfied,” said Dick. He got up. “Well, we’re off. Glad to have seen you. Come on, Plug.”

Hawkins made haste to leave money on the table to pay his own bill, and followed them. He accompanied them down in the elevator, looking the other way. The foreign-looking young man was also in the elevator. As Dick and Plug strolled through the corridors of the great store, looking at everything, Hawkins followed about twenty-five feet behind.

At a point where two aisles crossed, Dick and Plug perceived a well-dressed gentleman standing about without any visible reason for being there. His expression was at the same time wary and highly careless.

“Store detective,” whispered Dick to Plug. “I know the breed. I’ve got an inspiration. Watch me.”

Dick approached the well-dressed man. “H’ are you, friend,” he murmured out of the corner of his mouth. “Thought you’d be glad of a tip. Keep your eye on the young feller behind me. Mean-faced little guy with bad teeth. He’s actin’ suspicious.”

Dick and Plug turned into the side aisle. When they had gone a few paces Dick looked back. The store detective had Hawkins by the arm. Hawkins was protesting in a low voice.

“Beat it!” whispered Dick. “But don’t appear to hurry. Around the next corner, and the next. Once we can mix in the crowd on Oxford Street he’ll never be able to pick us up again.”

They issued into the street laughing. “We still have the wop at our heels,” said Plug.

“We’ll lose him next,” said Dick.

Their feeling of triumph was but short-lived. As they gained the crowded sidewalk, and turned East, a shrill whistle sounded behind them. All the passers-by looked about them startled; nobody could locate the source of the whistle.

“Damn the luck!” muttered Dick. “They must have had all the doors watched!”

As they crossed the first street, the whistle again sounded behind them. They could not locate the man who had blown it.

“What’s the idea?” said Plug, puzzled.

“The one who picked us up is signalling to the others to come on,” said Dick scowling. “Oh well,” he added more cheerfully, “we’re no worse off than we were before lunch.”

The pavement of Oxford Street was densely thronged. Dick and Plug loafed along arm in arm, dividing their attention between the shop windows and the pretty English girls. The latter were not so smart as the girls at home; but their cheeks were fresher.

“This is all right as long as the streets are crowded,” said Plug a little anxiously. “What’ll we do when night comes?”

“Go to an hotel and stay indoors,” said Dick. “They can’t raid an hotel.”

They paused at the curb to allow some traffic to pass down a side street, and Dick became aware that Greatorrex was close behind him, dressed in the very height of fashion as usual.

“How are you!” said Dick derisively.

Greatorrex ignored the greeting. The crowd moved on. Dick had an uncomfortable feeling that Greatorrex was not alone behind him. Still he was not greatly alarmed. They couldn’t do anything in that crowd, he told himself.

He underrated his man.

In the middle of the next block, loud laughing cries were suddenly raised behind Dick and Plug. “There they are, fellows! There they are! Seize them!”

Greatorex and three other well-dressed young fellows came pushing through the crowd, and circled round Dick and Plug. Their faces were all lighted up with laughter. "Ha! we've got you, you beggars! Thought you'd given us the slip, did you! We'll show you!"

The crowd instinctively fell back to give them room. There was a taxi standing at the curb with the door open; the chauffeur was grinning widely. So were all the bystanders. A great lark. "Into the cab with them!" Dick and Plug protested furiously, and struggled with all their might. The four young men drowned them out with their joyful cries and laughter. Under Greatorex's arm Dick caught a glimpse of Hawkins' face fixed in a triumphant sneer. This was taking a leaf out of Dick's book with a vengeance.

Dick and Plug were flung into the taxi, and the other four piled in on top, half suffocating them. The cab started, and turned out of Oxford Street at the first corner. Inside there was an apparently inextricable confusion of bodies and legs. But somebody had his wits about him; for Dick presently found his hands tied behind him, and a gag over his mouth.

The four men disentangled themselves from their prisoners, and squeezed into the seat of the taxi-cab. Dick and Plug were left lying on the floor at their feet. Plug endeavoured to kick open the door of the cab, and was stopped by a brutal kick from one of the men. Plug's hands were bound behind him like Dick's, and his mouth gagged. Plug and Dick exchanged eloquent looks. They drove for a considerable distance; but Dick, taking a mental note of every turn, figured that they had made two complete circles. He deduced from that they had not really gone very far from the point where they had been seized.

The cab stopped at last, and one of the men got out. He reported that the coast was clear, whereupon Dick and Plug were seized, and hustled across a sidewalk into a house. Hawkins was there; either he had been riding with the driver, or had got there first by another means. With the driver that made six against them; their struggles were in vain. In their brief passage across the sidewalk, Dick perceived that they were at the end of one of the little blind streets so common in London. There was a long row of tall London houses down one side; and on the other a high wall with a garden behind it. The street was entirely deserted. It was the end house that they were carried into. An admirably retired spot for nefarious dealings.

The house was of fine proportions—it was evidently in a good quarter of London, but was very bare. The door had been opened by a horrible old woman. Dick and Plug were carried down a flight of stairs to a basement; thence down another and a steeper flight, and dropped on a damp and filthy cellar floor. Their ankles were bound; they were searched again and their guns taken, then they were left. When the door at the head of the stairs slammed, they were in absolute darkness. The place smelled of damp and rottenness. When everything had quieted down they could hear the cautious creeping of rats. Dick located Plug by his breathing. Hunching his body in that direction a little at a time, he finally had the satisfaction of running into Plug's warm body. They lay there, unable to communicate, but supported by the sense of each other's nearness.

It is a devastating experience for a young man of strength and spirit to be tied up hand and foot and forced to feel his own helplessness. From rage

Dick graduated to despair. He sunk at last into a lethargy, thinking, feeling nothing. With Plug it must have been the same. A long time passed.

When at last the door at the head of the stairs was opened, and light streamed down, they could not have told whether five hours or ten had passed. When they were carried up, Dick saw that it was dark out of doors. They were taken on up to the street floor of the house, and carried into a large room at the back. People of quality must once have lived in this house. There was a fine carved fireplace, and the remains of handsome hangings on the walls. Everything was dusty and stained now. The room contained nothing but a few broken chairs of wood, and a cheap desk with the wood veneer peeling off.

The young men who had carried Dick and Plug upstairs, dropped them unceremoniously in two of the chairs, and lit cigarettes. Hawkins was among them, but not Greatorox. Presently a shuffling step was heard in the hall, and Sam Abrams sidled around the door. He was wearing a ragged brown dressing-gown; and his sparse beard and hair were untidier than ever. He grinned fawningly at Dick and Plug as he came, and rubbed his hands together. Dick knew that this seeming senility of Abrams' was all a pose. He could be strong and active enough when he chose.

"Evening, boys! Evening!" he purred in that extraordinary dialect which has been indicated. "Welcome to our happy little circle!" He pinched their cheeks, and squeezed their shoulders, exactly like an old cannibal feeling to see if they were plump enough to eat. Dick and Plug glared at him helplessly.

"Unbind our guests," commanded Abrams. "I wish them to think well of us. I wish them to feel at home amongst us!"

While he talked in this fulsome fashion, he glanced in a certain warning manner at his men, and while two of them were busy unfastening the handkerchiefs that bound Dick and Plug, the other two quietly took up a position in front of the curtained windows at the back, to forestall any rush in that direction. Dick's first act upon obtaining his freedom was to look at his watch. It was half-past nine.

"Handsome boys! Clever boys!" fawned Abrams. "You ought to be working for me. I'd make your fortunes!"

"Were the pearls on them?" he asked in quite a different voice.

"No, Sir," said Hawkins.

"Where are the pearls, boys?" purred the old man.

Dick and Plug merely exchanged a look. In that look they promised each other to die sooner than tell.

“Where did this one come from?” asked Abrams, pointing a clawlike forefinger at Plug.

“That’s neither here nor there,” said Dick. “He is my friend.”

“Well, come on, boys, where are the pearls?”

“Ex-King Miguel has them,” ventured Dick. “That was the price I paid for getting him to withdraw the charge against me.”

“Oh, shame!” said Abrams, grinning and wagging his finger at Dick in pretended reproof. “That’s a lie. Because I saw King Miguel’s secretary trying to get them out of you *after* the trial.”

Dick refused to speak further.

“Come on, boys,” purred Abrams. “You must know by this time that you cannot get ahead of me. Fork over the pearls and I’ll do handsomely by you, handsomely.”

Silence from Dick and Plug.

“I have such a nice cellar downstairs,” said Abrams pointing. “But I would hate to . . .” He shrugged and held it, hands outspread.

“Sticking us under your cellar won’t bring you any nearer the pearls,” said Dick.

“Now, boys! Now, boys!” wheedled Abrams. “Don’t drive me to extremes! I’m so soft-hearted!” He affected to wipe away a tear on a filthy handkerchief, while he grinned. He went to the desk, and from the top drawer produced a horrible pair of pincers with long handles. “Better tell! Better tell!” he murmured, turning them over in his hands.

Dick’s blood ran cold at the sight of that cruel implement, but he held his tongue.

“Tie them in their chairs!” said Abrams.

Other men had drifted into the room, and there were now six or eight present. It was in vain for Dick and Plug to struggle. Their legs were bound to the legs of the bent-wood chairs in which they sat, and their arms to the backs. A certain horrible, pleased look of anticipation showed in the faces of all the men present.

“Georgie, tell Henry to fetch the girl down,” said Abrams.

Georgie was evidently Hawkins. He left the room.

Dick's heart beat hard and painfully. The girl! Was she to be a witness to his ordeal? What a devilish refinement of cruelty! He could bear his own pain; but could he bear the pain that the sight of his suffering must inflict on her? A fine sweat broke out on his forehead.

Hawkins, Greatorrex and Millicent entered the room. It was Plug's first sight of the girl. His eyes widened. Millicent was as pale as paper, and her dark eyes looked enormous. She glanced at the two lads with seeming indifference, but deep in her eyes Dick read the message she was sending him, and it stiffened his courage. There was something of the stoic in this girl. Greatorrex's jealous eyes darted from Millicent to Dick and back again.

"Bare their chests!" commanded Abrams.

It was done.

Abrams, his face all lighted up with grinning cruelty, turned from one young man to the other, clicking the long pincers open and shut. "Well! Well!" he said humorously, "which one will we test out first? This bold lad (Dick) is full of defiance, let's try the other one!" He advanced towards Plug.

Dick could not stand the sight of the gaping pincers approaching Plug's flesh. "He doesn't know where the pearls are," he cried.

"Ho! bully boy!" said Abrams laughing silently.

"That's a lie!" cried Plug. "It was me hid them. But I'll never tell you, you damned bloody scoundrel, not if you tear me to shreds!"

"Ho! Ho! bully boys!" laughed Abrams. "This is the tender-hearted one." He went to Dick.

Millicent had been trying to send Dick some particular message which he did not get. As the pincers approached his flesh, her eyes were dreadful to see. Dick could not bear it.

"Oh, I'll tell! I'll tell!" he cried sharply.

Abrams shook with silent laughter. Plug looked at Dick reproachfully.

"We took a room at No. 19 Wardour Street, Soho," gabbled Dick, like a man in the last extremity of terror. (Hearing this false address, Plug's face cleared.) "We hid the pearls in a rathole in the right-hand front corner as you face the windows. You can hook them out with a buttonhook."

“By what names are you known there?” asked Abrams.

“Our right names; Kid Murray Hill and Plug Egan.”

Abrams dropped his instrument in the desk drawer. “Well, I’ll drive down to see whether you are lying,” he said. “Henry, you come with me. You, my dear,” this to the girl, “fetch me a buttonhook.”

She left the room. So she lives in this house! thought Dick.

Abrams went on: “Carry them up to the third story tied as they are, and let them wait there while I am gone. Lock the door and fetch me the key. . . . Oho! my handsome lads, if you are lying to me you’ll catch it when I get back!”

Dick and Plug were carried in their chairs up three flights of stairs, and set down in a back room, which was entirely bare of furniture. It had been long unused, for the air was heavy with the smell of dust and mould.

“Would you open the window?” asked Dick of one of their bearers.

The man only cursed him, and went out, slamming the door and locking it. A few moments later they heard the front door of the house close.

A faint light came through the windows, sufficient to reveal them to each other.

“What good sending the old man on that wild goose chase,” said Plug gloomily. “We’ll only get it worse when he gets back.”

“To gain a little time,” said Dick. “The girl was trying to put me wise to something, and I couldn’t get it.”

“Oh, what a girl!” murmured Plug. “I don’t wonder you’d go through hell for her!”

Dick’s heart warmed towards his friend.

“Maybe she’ll speak to us through the door,” said Plug.

They fell silent.

In a few minutes a dark shadow rose slowly and painfully into view outside one of the windows, and clung there, kneeling on the sill. A feeling of awe filled their breasts.

“It’s the girl!” whispered Dick. “Oh, God! if she should fall.”

They could see her working to raise the sash. Dick struggled frantically to free himself, but in vain. At last she succeeded in lifting the sash half an



inch. Getting her fingers under it, she raised it the whole way, and stepped into the room.

“Millicent!” Dick whispered.

“Dick!”

She flew to him. But even while she kissed his lips, and rubbed her cheek against his, her fingers were busy with the knots that bound his wrists and ankles.

“It will only take twenty minutes for Abrams to drive to Wardour Street,” she whispered. “I suppose that was a false address?”

“Yes,” said Dick.

“Then we have not a moment to lose!”

“What are we to do?”

“You must go up the same drain-pipe that I climbed by, to the roof. You must run over the roofs of all the houses to the last one in the row. That house I have noticed is vacant. Prise up the scuttle in the roof—I have brought you a piece of iron inside my dress for that purpose; and go down through the house. I suppose it will be locked up everywhere, but you must find your way out. Be careful you do not run into Abrams coming back.”

“Aren’t you coming with us?” asked Dick with a sinking heart.

“No! I must return to my room the same way I came. I am supposed to be locked up in there.”

“They will know that you helped us!”

“They may suspect it, but they cannot know. They already suspect me of having an interest in you. That is why they forced me to come downstairs when Abrams intended to torture you.”

“I cannot bear to leave you at their mercy.”

“They will not torture me,” said the girl with a bitter little laugh. “I am too valuable to them.”

Dick was free by now. He flung his arms around her. “Millicent, dearest, come with me!” he pleaded.

She strained away. “Oh, you mustn’t! You mustn’t!” she said sharply. “There is no time! We’ve been over all this before! You must leave the country now. I beg it of you. It would kill me if they caught you again.”

Dick released her. "Do you realise what you are asking of me?" he groaned.

Millicent flew to unfasten Plug's hands, while Dick tackled his ankles. "Be patient," she pleaded. "Some day, perhaps . . ."

When Plug was free they went to the open window. "Can you climb?" asked Millicent.

"If it's a case of life and death, you bet!" said Plug.

"Then out with you," she said.

"Will you shake hands with me?" asked Plug wistfully.

"Surely!" she cried. "And I will kiss you too! Because you were true to Dick!" She suited the action to the word. Plug hesitated, a little dazed. "Out with you!" she said again.

Plug went out on the sill, and gripping hold of the drain-pipe, drew himself slowly up. The lovers turned to each other.

"Millicent! When will I see you again?"

"Oh, don't talk of seeing me again! You must leave the country!"

"Millicent!"

"Dick! . . . Now go . . . go quickly, my darling!"

He dragged himself away from her, and followed Plug up the drain-pipe to the roof. Peeping over the edge, he refused to go on until he had seen Millicent safely descend and disappear within her window. They then ran along the flat roofs, climbing over the parapets that separated house from house. There were ten in the row. The last house was a corner house. Forcing up the scuttle with the implement Millicent had brought them, Dick let himself into the hole, and felt around with his feet until they met the ladder. Plug followed, pulling the scuttle into place.

It was an eerie experience descending through the unknown house, empty and dark. Clinging to the stair rails, they felt their way along with their feet. Upon reaching the ground floor they could see the street lamps shining through the dusty windows. A taxi-cab rolled by the house.

"Abrams returning," said Dick. "No time to lose."

It was a simple enough matter to get out. The kitchen door was fastened on the inside by a bolt. Drawing it, they found themselves in the garden. In the garden wall there was a door into the side street locked with a spring

lock which they had only to press back. They ran to the next corner which proved to be an important street with stores upon it, and lines of motor buses. A park ran down one side. From a street sign they learned that this was Bayswater Road. Hailing a passing taxi, they told the man to drive them to Bloomsbury Square. Leaning back on the seat, they gravely shook hands with each other.

“We fooled the old butcher!” said Plug.

“With her help,” said Dick dreamily.

Unfortunately they had not noticed a figure loitering in the shadows on the corner where they had emerged into the street. This was the young foreigner who had been following them all day. When Abrams’ gang had kidnapped them and carried them home, he had been close behind in another cab. He could not show himself in the blind street without risking detection, so all evening he had been waiting at the corner. He now hailed the next cab that came along Bayswater Road, pointed out the taxi ahead, and ordered his driver to follow. When Dick and Plug walked from Bloomsbury Square to their lodging (they had not thought it prudent to give their driver the exact address) he was behind them. He waited in the street until he saw the lights of their room go up; then, smiling to himself as at a day’s work well done, he went off to report to his employer.

# 10

Dick and Plug had been out to get their much delayed dinner. Returning to their room, they ripped open the mattress to make sure that the pearls were safe. Plug was now engaged in sewing up the mattress again, while Dick idly played with the beautiful, gleaming stones that had been the cause of so much trouble. They discussed their future plans.

Said Dick: "I think our best bet would be to make for one of the smaller English ports such as Bristol or Cardiff, and try to stow away aboard an American bound ship. Or perhaps we could sign on as stokers or deck-hands. If they were short of hands, maybe they wouldn't be too particular about my passport. . . ."

As this moment the front-door bell sounded through the house. Since it was past eleven o'clock, this was unusual enough to cause Dick and Plug to exchange a glance of alarm. Dick set open the door into the hall that they might hear better.

They heard the landlady go grumblingly to answer the bell. The door was opened, and an inquiry made in a voice too low for Dick to catch the words. But he heard the landlady say pettishly:

"A nice hour this is to ask for anybody. I suppose they are in bed."

A man's voice replied: "No, they're not in bed. We saw their lights from the street."

"Oh, well, if you are friends, I suppose you can go up," said the landlady. "Second floor front."

This was the young men's room! Dick quickly closed the door, and yielding to an unaccountable impulse, dropped the pearls into the pitcher of water on the washstand. Plug hastily turned the mattress down, and endeavoured to put the bed in order. Feet came running up the stairs. How bitterly Dick and Plug regretted their lost guns. Without the formality of any knock, the door was thrown open, and Poniatevsky strode in, pointing a gun. The young foreigner whom they had seen following them that day, followed at his heels. This one, too, was armed.

“Ha!” said Poniatevsky triumphantly. “I have run you to earth at last! I will trouble you to hand over my property, young man.”

As always, when the situation seemed to be desperate, Dick’s spirits perversely rose. There was a comic element in the theatrical prince that caused Dick to grin in his face. “Sorry,” he drawled, “but I have disposed of them.”

“Disposed of them!” cried Poniatevsky, with a falling face.

“Oh, I mean put them in a safe place,” said Dick. “They’re in a safe deposit box.”

“I don’t believe it!” cried Poniatevsky. “You thief!”

“Easy with that word,” said Dick mildly. “I still stand ready to turn over the jewels to you, when you satisfy my lawyers that you have a legal right to receive them.”

“Your lawyers!” said Poniatevsky scornfully. “This is mere quibbling. Put your hands above your head, and submit to be searched!”

“With pleasure,” said Dick, grinning.

The younger man, with his cool and wary eye, impressed Dick as more dangerous than his master. He kept the two of them covered while the prince searched first Dick and then Plug.

“Suppose I were to call for help?” said Dick.

“You wouldn’t dare!” cried Poniatevsky. “Because you’re a thief.”

“You’re another,” said Dick, dryly.

“If you don’t mind,” asked Dick presently, “how did you track us here? I’m curious.”

The prince merely grunted ill-temperedly; but the young man spoke up. There was a suspicion of a grin about his grave face too. He and Dick were adversaries, but they found something to like in each other. He said: “I was watching that house all the time you were inside. I followed you back here from Bayswater Road.”

“My lord, Plug, what a precious pair of boobs we’ve been!” said Dick to his partner.

Poniatevsky was put in a worse temper than ever by the failure of his search.

“Surely you didn’t expect that we could get away from Abrams’ house with the pearls on us,” said Dick.

“I know nothing about Abrams,” he said crossly. “Stand against the wall, and keep your hands over your heads. You watch them, Michele, while I search the room.”

Dick’s heart sank. If Poniatévsky looked he could not help but find them. They were almost in plain view. The end seemed to be at hand at last. After all their pains and dangers, it seemed too hard to bear that this princely ruffian should reap all the profit. Dick gauged the temper of the wary young man who was covering them. No sign of weakness there. The murder of an American or two would mean nothing in the life of this young soldier. They undoubtedly had a car waiting near-by, and counted on making a getaway long before the arrival of the police. Dick was forced to submit to bitter necessity.

Poniatévsky made straight for the mattress of the bed. Turning up the edge, he discovered the half-mended rip with the needle and thread still sticking in it. “Ha!” he cried, “the pearls have been taken out of here just a few minutes ago. They cannot be far away!”

But before the search had proceeded further, there came the sound of more running feet on the stairs, and once again the door was burst open. Colonel Lazarev was seen standing on the threshold, gun in hand. He had two men behind him, which gave him an advantage over the Poniatévsky party. Dick laughed. This was too rich. Who could tell what might happen now.

The two Bulomanians glared at each other.

“What are you doing here?” demanded Poniatévsky.

“I followed *you* here!” retorted Lazarev. “I take it you are bent on robbing the King.”

Poniatévsky’s face turned purple. “Robbing him!” he cried. “How could I rob him of what is not his!”

“You lie!” cried Lazarev.

“Royalist!” taunted Poniatévsky.

“Bolshevik!” retorted Lazarev.

They vituperated each other in some uncouth tongue, which Dick supposed to be Bulomanian. The landlady came running upstairs and

pounded on the door unheeded. She was afraid to open it. Poniatovsky dropped into English again.

“King!” he cried. “Thank God, we’re rid of him. He was damned well kicked out of my country for the worthless, good-for-nothing young libertine that he is!”

To the faithful royalist this was worse than sacrilege. Lazarev turned pale with horror. “You dog!” he cried. “You shall die for that!”

He fired. Poniatovsky dropped, half on the bed. “Oh, I’m shot!” he groaned, clapping a hand to his shoulder. Instantly pandemonium filled the little room. Another shot was fired. The air became thick with smoke. The three royalists clubbed their revolvers and went for the solitary remaining republican, who stood pale and desperate, with his back against the wall. Dick and Plug instinctively dropped to the floor. Dick crept around the foot of the bed to the washstand, and seized the pitcher.

“Fire! Fire!” he cried. “Get water!”

He got back to the door and got it open. The landlady was shrieking hysterically on the landing. The instant Dick got through the door, the Bulomanians seemed to realise by instinct that the booty was escaping them, and the fighting stopped. They charged after him, and wedged in the doorway. Dick flung the pitcher down the long, straight stair, and putting his hands on the rail, slid after it. The pearls lay among the wreckage at the foot of the stairs. Snatching them up as he passed, Dick thrust them in his pocket, and ran around to the last flight. Plug was close at his heels. The Bulomanians were charging down above. The sounds were as if all Hell had broken loose in that respectable lodging-house.

Dick and Plug went out the front door and down the steps. An instant later the Bulomanians came tumbling out. There was a car standing in front of the door, and Dick headed in the opposite direction, so that he might at least gain the time it would take to turn it around. He ran like a deer with Plug alongside. The quiet Bloomsbury Street was in an uproar. Windows were flung open; and quaint night-capped figures appeared.

The car got turned around, and overtook them. It was the driver’s aim to head them off. A block ahead, two policemen appeared, running towards them. At that, the brakes of the car screeched; it turned around again, and went back. As the policemen were drawing near, a seven-foot wall appeared at Dick’s left. Hooking his fingers over the top, he drew himself up and rolled over, Plug close behind him. As he went over Dick had a fleeting

glimpse of the Bulomanians turning and running in the other direction. How astonished the honest policemen must have been!

But without pausing to consider that, Dick and Plug charged blindly through the flower-beds and the shrubbery of the garden towards a similar wall at the back. Over they went, dropping into a sort of alleyway lined with stables. They ran on. Some steps led them up to a quiet little street at a slightly higher level. They zigzagged around every corner they came to, and finally turned into a principal street. It was a Bohemian quarter, and some of the little “arty” restaurants were still open. They turned into one, endeavouring to conceal their shortness of breath, and sought seats. Fortunately for them it was customary for many of the young men of the quarter to go hatless.

The restaurant was fairly well filled. It differed in no respect from its prototypes in New York. It would be hard to say which copied which. The walls were painted blue with innumerable yellow cockatoos sprawling upon it, and a young lady in blue smock and large yellow tie came to wait on them with that professional air of camaraderie which makes a well-behaved young man so uneasy. She said, turning on her smile:

“There’s music in the garden. Wouldn’t you like to go back?”

“Sure!” said Dick.

The farther they could get away from the door, the easier they felt. The young lady led them through a passage which was lined with hats on hooks. Dick looked at Plug and Plug looked at Dick, and each quietly helped himself to a hat at random.

“It only means twenty-five shillings to its owner,” whispered Dick, deprecatingly, “but to us it may mean life or death.”

There was a row of tables around the edge of the garden, each one with a candle burning in a saucer. So like Fourth Street, Manhattan! Having given their order, they quietly canvassed the chances of escape from the place. So far they had heard no sounds of pursuit behind them, but knowing the doggedness of the London police, it was not to be supposed that they would so easily give up investigating the causes of so surprising a racket. At the back of the little garden over a high wooden fence there was what appeared to be another garden, larger and quite dark.

Before they got any food, they heard a stir inside the restaurant. Everybody got up and began to crane their necks. Through the windows Dick and Plug caught glimpses of the unwelcome blue uniforms.



“Shall we brazen it out?” whispered Dick. “We’ve got hats now.”

“Not with all those pearls on you,” said Plug nervously. “These people will be obliged to point us out as the last to come.”

While everybody else in the garden was peering into the restaurant, Dick and Plug quietly shinned over the back wall. The garden in which they now found themselves was completely blocked on the street side by a wide, old-fashioned house. All the windows were dark. Creeping up to the house, they came to a door with glass let into the panels, which permitted them to look straight through a passage to a door in front with the light of the street lamps coming through.

This suggested an obvious course of action. Dick smashed the glass with his fist, and putting his hand inside, unlocked the door. They tore through the passage, and let themselves out through the front basement door, before the people of the house could have done more than spring out of bed. Running with all their might they gained the cover of the first corner, and doubling around the next one, slowed down. Presently they had the luck to meet an empty taxi.

“Where to?” asked the driver.

“Chester Hotel,” said Dick.

Plug whistled noiselessly.

“Safest place I know,” said Dick. “Who would think of looking for us there?”

They took another turn, and found themselves passing the Yellow Cockatoos. A curious crowd was gathered around the door. Two additional policemen came up, and pushed their way in.

At the Chester Dick was not recognised as a former guest. He mentioned casually that he and his friend had missed the last train home. In such cases, the clerk said deprecatingly, it was customary to . . . er . . .

“Certainly, certainly,” said Dick, producing his roll.

They thankfully closed the door of their room behind them. Surely they were secure here until morning. It came over them simultaneously that they were dead beat after the wild excitements of the day; and they undressed and went to bed.

“What’ll we do in the morning?” said Plug. “Haven’t even a comb to tidy our hair with.”

“But we’ve got hats,” said Dick. “We can put on our hats and go out and buy a comb before breakfast.”

Plug fell asleep almost immediately. Dick lay awake thinking of the dear girl that he had been forced to leave behind in that horrible house on the little blind street. The telephone in the adjoining room rang, and he heard a heavy tread across the floor. Suddenly he heard a harsh, grating voice that caused him to sit up in bed with his hair fairly standing on end.

“Have you got my number? All right; connect me, connect me. . . . That you, Abrams? I been tryin’ to get you for a couple of hours. This is Rulon, Michael Rulon of New York. Get that? . . . Yeah, they landed us at Southampton this evening, and I come up by train. . . . Aah, forget it! That’s ancient history. Have you got that damned kid, that’s all I’m interested in. . . . You had him this afternoon? Well, where is he now? . . . Oh, you can’t explain over the ’phone. A bunch of bunglers, that’s what you are! . . . Well, look here, if he’s still in England, I’ll get him! Meet me at the pub opposite Victoria Station at nine to-morrow and give me the dope. And say, are you having all the railway stations watched to-night? That’s right . . . Oh, good-bye and to Hell with you!”

Plug slept like the dead. Dick shook him and slapped his face in vain. He dared not speak aloud, for fear his voice might betray him to the occupant of the adjoining room. He finally got Plug to a sitting position, and then to his

feet. He led him to the wash basin, and stuck his head under the cold water faucet. Plug, spluttering and cursing, began to fight back.

“What the Hell . . .!”

“We got to get out of this quick!” whispered Dick.

“Got to get out of this!” echoed the astonished Plug.

Dick clapped a hand over his mouth. “Shut up! Michael Rulon is in the next room.”

Plug was wide awake then. He whistled noiselessly.

They dressed. Plug kissed his hand fondly to the soft warm bed, and they left the hotel.

“What’s the programme?” asked Plug.

“We’ll have to hoof it,” said Dick. “All the railway stations are watched.”

“Where to?”

“Southampton. The *Abraham Lincoln* sails at three to-morrow. That’s our Shipping Board’s biggest vessel. If we can stow ourselves on board until she gets to sea, they’d have to put us ashore in our own country. They couldn’t deport us anywhere.”

“Got any notion about how to begin stowing away?”

“Yes. We’ll creep under the canvas cover of one of the lifeboats, and lie there until she’s at sea. We’ll stuff sandwiches in our pockets to see us through.”

“Where is Southampton?”

“Search me. In the South somewhere. We’ll just cross the Thames, and keep on walking.”

Sunrise found them walking between green fields, with London a vast smudge across the horizon behind them. As soon as the world began to stir, they made enquiries, and a couple of hours later, succeeded in reaching a station on the Southampton line. They breakfasted in that seaport, and after filling their pockets with bread and meat, set out to find the *Abraham Lincoln*.

They were somewhat alarmed to find the dock gates guarded by an unsympathetic looking policeman. However, the two young men still

presented a very good appearance, and they walked by unchallenged. They saw the great vessel looming in the distance with her three funnels painted red, white and blue, and the stars and stripes at the taffrail.

“Looks good to me,” said Dick.

In all the hurry and bustle of sailing-day they hoped to find plenty of opportunities of getting aboard; but were disappointed. There were half a dozen gangways stretched from dock to vessel, but at the head of each one stood a sailor who never budged from his post, and whose invariable reply was: “Nobody allowed on board until one o’clock.” Dick and Plug tried them all.

“We’ll have to leave it until the last moment, that’s all,” said Dick.

A barge of stewards’ stores had been floated in between the ship and the dock; and baskets of vegetables, cans of cream and so on were being passed on board the great vessel through a wide port in her side. The two young men watched the operation gloomily. It happened that a dispute arose over the count, and the loading stopped for a moment while those engaged in it turned their backs to compare tallies. Dick and Plug simultaneously perceived their chance. They crossed the deck of the barge and stepped through the open port into the vessel’s hull.

“Look as if you were bound somewhere, and nobody will interfere with you,” Dick whispered out of the corner of his mouth.

Through a maze of holds, passages and stairways they finally gained the deck, and kept on going until they reached the boat deck. Walking up and down carelessly, they examined their proposed hiding-place out of the corners of their eyes. Each lifeboat had a canvas cover over it, which was fastened under the bottom of the boat by canvas straps.

“They’re not tied so tight but what we can creep under the edge,” said Dick.

A natty young officer appeared around the deckhouse. “Beg pardon, gentlemen, are you intending passengers?” he asked.

“No,” said Dick, “we came down to see some people off.”

“I’m sorry, Sir, but no one is allowed on board before one o’clock. I shall have to ask you to step ashore.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” said Dick affably. “Sorry we broke the rules.”

Dick and Plug descended to the deck below, made half a circuit of the ship, and ascended to the boat deck in a different place.

“The end boat on this side,” said Dick. “The cover is loose. You slip in first while I stand watch.”

Unfortunately when Plug was half in and half out of the lifeboat—a most undignified position, the same young officer stepped from behind another tier of boats wearing a most disagreeable smile. Plug climbed sheepishly out again.

“I thought so!” said the officer. “A hundred like you have tried that trick before. Why don’t you think of something new? Now march ashore with you!”

This time he accompanied them off the ship. At the foot of the gang-plank he handed them over to a detective with instructions to escort them off the dock. The bystanders looked on commiseratingly. You could see them saying to each other: “Such decent-looking young fellows, too!” The young men’s hearts were very bitter.

Half an hour later they were walking miserably along the edge of a waterfront park, discussing a dozen futile plans for getting aboard the *Abraham Lincoln*, none of which had the remotest chance of success.

“Why don’t you go?” said Dick. “You’ve got a passport and all. I’ll lend you what you need to make up the fare. My luck is out, I guess. There’s no use sticking to a sinking ship.”

“Aah! what’s the matter with yeh?” said Plug savagely. “Want to make out I’m a regular stinker, don’t yeh? Well, we stick together, see?”

They saw the Stars and Stripes again, this time hanging from the window of a house alongside the little park.

“United States Consulate!” said Dick disgustedly. “Gosh! you’d think they let us go home, anyway.”

As they drew closer, a small lettered sign in the window attracted their attention. “Stewards wanted for the *Abraham Lincoln*.” Dick and Plug looked at each other with widening eyes, and then dashed across the road.

In the front office of the consulate a worried looking man in uniform was pacing up and down. He consulted his watch.

“Will we do?” asked Dick breathlessly.

“U.S. citizens?” he asked.

“You bet!”

The officer sat down at a desk, and produced some forms. “Any experience?”

“No,” said Dick.

He asked a number of other questions to which the answers were not very reassuring. However, he was twenty men short, and he could not afford to be particular.

“Well, I’ll sign you on,” he said, taking up a pen. “Passports?”

Dick’s heart went down like a stone. “He’s got his all right,” he said, jerking his head in Plug’s direction, “but I lost mine.”

“I won’t go unless you take him too,” Plug said quickly.

The officer hesitated with his pen in air.

“Oh, for God’s sake don’t leave me ashore now that you’ve got my hopes raised,” said Dick.

“Well, I’ll sign you on,” said the officer, “but I can’t help you in New York. You’ll have to fight it out with the authorities.”

“I’ll take my chance,” said Dick.

They signed their names.

At two o’clock the special trains arrived from London, and the passengers streamed aboard the big ship in their hundreds. Dick and Plug who, after a hurried lesson in the lay-out of the vessel, had been provided with trim white uniforms, met the passengers at the train, carried their hand baggage aboard, and directed them to their cabins.

As Dick was returning along the promenade deck for a fresh load, he saw ahead of him a tall, broad-shouldered figure at the top of the gangway, scanning all who came aboard. Dick’s heart seemed to stop. He quietly turned in his tracks, and went back. He met Plug.

“Plug,” he said, desperately, “Rulon is aboard. You’ve got to find out if he’s going on this ship. Big man by the gangway with a hard, yellow face; derby hat. Ask him the number of his stateroom.”

Dick skulked in the saloon until Plug returned.

“He’s not going,” said Plug. “Said he was just looking for a friend.”

“I’m that friend,” said Dick grimly.

“Bury yourself in the hold,” said Plug.

Dick sought out the man who had engaged them, the third steward of the ship. “I say, old man,” he said, “there’s a fellow looking for me on deck. I had a little trouble with him. Do you mind if I keep under cover until we pull out?”

The harassed officer had no time to investigate the merits of this controversy then. He didn’t want to lose a man. “Oh, go and shut yourself up in your room,” he said ill-temperedly.

Dick lost no time in seeking out the dark little hole that he was to share with five other stewards during the voyage.

How thankfully he heard the hoarse, deep-toned whistle blow, and felt at last the slight throb of the mighty fabric, when the engines were started. In a moment Plug burst in.

“ ’S all right!” he cried. “We’re off, and Rulon is on the dock! He went to the officer guy that hired us—I saw him, and asked him if he had taken on a fellow answering to your description, and the officer was game; he said no!”

Dick was filled with joy and thankfulness.

They were too busy to celebrate then; later, when the *Abraham Lincoln* was passing out by the Isle of Wight, they happened to meet on deck, and paused for a moment to look back on the lovely panorama of Southampton Water.

“Well, I can’t say I’m sorry to see the last of that!” said Dick.

“What you gonna do about the pearls?” whispered Plug.

“Do about them!” said Dick. “All my troubles came from trying to hand them back to somebody. I’m going to keep them now!”

“Oh, boy!” said Plug.

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*ANYBODY'S PEARLS*

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*PART III*



UPON his return to America Dick Shemwell, sometime known as Kid Murray Hill, naturally gravitated to Wall Street. The high finish he had acquired in the fashionable set at Haleson University added to his uncommon good looks and natural grace of manner, produced an ornamental article that strongly appealed to stockbrokers, and he soon found himself installed as order clerk in the outer office of Messieurs Emory and Grassetto. This was a high-class firm with handsome offices opening off the main corridor of the International Express Building in lower Broadway.

The outer office was arranged somewhat in the manner of a theatre with rows upon rows of comfortable mahogany chairs; but instead of a stage it was a gigantic bulletin board that the chairs faced, covered with green tickets bearing hieroglyphics such as AmTob, MoPac, Up, with fractional figures attached which were frequently changed by a boy. These strange signs were perfectly understandable to the spectators in the chairs, who watched the changes with more excitement than they would have displayed at a real play. Dick, beautifully-dressed and barbered, watched the faces of the spectators, and soon became expert in perceiving when a man became ready to buy or to sell. It was nothing to Dick whether stocks went up or down. All he wanted was orders.

He was successful enough, but he hated his job. He found it very dull after the mad excitements of his sojourn in England. A dozen times a day he asked himself why he put up with this tiresome round when he possessed a hundred thousand dollars worth of pearls tied up in a handkerchief buried in his bureau drawer. But there was a difficulty; he had given up trying to find an owner for the pearls; they were anybody's pearls; yet he hardly liked to spend the proceeds on himself. The only satisfaction he got out of it was in looking at the beauties, and pouring them from hand to hand; and in the secret knowledge that he, the mere broker's clerk, possessed one of the famous pearl necklaces of the world, and had as good a claim to it as anybody.

Moreover Dick had left his heart in England. He who had boasted in his pride that no woman should ever get her hooks into him, had surrendered to the first glance of a pair of black eyes that were both scornful and wistful

too. They were part of a tall, slim, boyish maiden who had the hauteur of a Countess and the shyness of a schoolgirl. Once she had opened her heart to him, and then tried to close it again.

It was the real thing with Dick. Under his cool, smooth air he was hard hit. The pointed oval of Millicent's white face haunted him by day and night, and he suffered keenly. A dozen times he had been on the point of returning to England in spite of the deadly risk. He had even gone so far as to procure a passport for himself and had had it visaed. But in a very real sense, to go to England would be like sticking his head in the lion's mouth, and he had deferred it from day to day.

In the stockbrokers' office business had just started for the day. The market was active, consequently the chairs were well filled. It was a bull market, and nearly everybody was looking cheerful. The shorts had already covered and gone long on the market. Dick scribbled orders on his pad, and sending them to the telephones in the adjoining room, was kept too busy to dwell on his private troubles. He stood alongside the big board so that he could watch the faces of all customers, and get their signals. The glass doors leading to the main corridor were at the back of the room. They stood invitingly open; and a continuous shuffle of passing feet was heard from outside.

Suddenly a tall, lean, broad-shouldered figure sauntered in through the doors. Dick looked at him and he looked at Dick, and the young man's blood seemed to turn to ice. It was Michael Rulon, clad in the familiar well-cut suit and modish derby; his hard, handsome, yellow face wreathed in a malicious grin. He thought he had Dick cornered.

Good God! how did he succeed in tracking me here! thought Dick desperately.

However he wasted no time in speculating upon that. Immediately at his back was a door. He slipped through it as swiftly and noiselessly as a figure on the screen. It led into the room where the telephonists and accountants were at work. Dick went through it so fast he left a streak behind him. Next came a short corridor where he snatched his hat down in passing; then the office where the more favoured customers of the firm were received. Dick burst into the private office of the partners without ceremony. Mr. Grassette looked up with an astonished stare.

"Lovely morning!" said Dick with a silly grin, and bolted out through the partners' private door on to the main corridor.

That was the last Emory and Grassetto ever saw of him. There were in the few days wages they owed him. Dick snaked across Broadway through the traffic, and darted down Exchange Place. In Broad Street he had the luck to find a taxicab heading North, and jumped on the running-board.

“Anywhere away from here,” he said.

The chauffeur grinned, and stepped on it.

Dick reflected that he could get up-town quicker on a subway express, and had the man put him down at John Street. As he scurried into that hole in the earth he snatched a newspaper and threw down his pennies. He found a train in the station. For the moment he had given Rulon the slip, and his spirits suddenly soared. Gone were all the dull doubts and anxieties of the past weeks. He never hesitated an instant as to his course. If Rulon was in America it was London and Millicent for him. He hastily turned the pages of his paper to the shipping news. This was a Wednesday. Yes! the *Allomania* sailed at noon! Not so fast as the *Baratoria*, she was still a six-day ship. Dick looked at his watch. Half-past ten. It could be done! He had money enough in hand to pay his fare, and of course he could raise whatever he needed in London on the pearls.

Fifteen minutes later Dick was in his room. To save a minute or two he had taken a taxi from the subway station to his house, and had bidden the man to wait below. He threw all the clean linen he possessed into his kit-bag, thrust in a spare suit, and made a clean sweep of his dressing-table. The pearls and the passport were deposited in his breast pocket. His heart was singing with joy. To sea again, and to Millicent! When he was ready to leave the room an impulse of caution led him to glance out of the window. Alas! another taxicab had drawn up behind the waiting one, and as Dick looked, he saw Rulon’s yellowish face approach the window.

“Of course!” he thought with a sinking heart. “He only had to ask at the office for my address!”

For a moment he was utterly at a loss. He bitterly cursed the fact that New York houses never have a back way out. But that suggested back yards, and a ray of light broke through. Back fences had been scaled before this. But one could not take a bag that way. Leaving his bag without another thought, Dick scampered downstairs, and kept on going until he got to the basement.

The cook was a friend of his. He smiled at her, and making a bright remark or two, strolled out into the yard. The door-bell rang. Before the

cook realised what he was about, he sprang for the high fence, and drawing himself up, rolled over.

“Holy Saints in Heaven!” she gasped.

Dick was now in the back yard of a house facing on the next street. He was fronted by the windows of another kitchen, and another cook was to be seen within. Dick made haste to turn on his most ingratiating smile, and rapped on the kitchen door.

“I say,” he said, “I was playing hand ball in my yard, and the ball bounced over the fence. I got it all right, but I can’t get back over the fence. Seems to be higher on your side. Would you mind letting me out through the front. I’m awfully sorry to trouble you.”

The combination of the smile and the glib speech did the trick. Dick had been fingering a half dollar in his pocket, but decided that that might only rouse suspicion. Wiping her hands on her apron, the agreeable cook led the way to the front basement door. As soon as he was through it, Dick made a streak for Lexington Avenue. He boarded another taxicab. A sigh of relief escaped him as he dropped into the obscurity of the back seat. Still one jump ahead of the Avenger! he said to himself.

It was now necessary for him to take the time and money to procure a bag and a few clothes, since one could not board the *Allemania* with empty hands. When he issued from the emporium on Madison Avenue with these necessary articles, he still had forty-five minutes, and he determined that he must take the time to say good-bye to Plug Egan. When Dick had gone to the stockbrokers to work, Plug had secured a job as taxi-driver, and his stand was in front of an hotel in Forty-Sixth Street, just around the corner.

Dick had to wait a few minutes for him. When Plug buzzed up a broad grin overspread his honest phiz at the sight of his friend. Plug was as sound and solid as a young oak tree, and a feeling of regret passed through Dick. I wish I could have him with me again, he thought. He threw his bag into the back of Plug’s cab, and climbed in beside the driver.

“Brevard Line pier,” he said.

Plug’s face was a study. He manœuvred his car between a coal truck and a Pierce-Arrow limousine with about two inches to spare on either side before he spoke. “Don’t shock me like that when I’m in the traffic,” he said resentfully.

He succeeded in getting across Fifth Avenue just as the traffic cop put his whistle to his lips. “On the level,” he asked, “are you going back?”

“Surest thing you know,” said Dick.

“My God!” said Plug bitterly. “And it isn’t a month since you escaped from England at the peril of your life!”

“I can’t help it,” said Dick.

“It’s that girl!”

Dick allowed it to go at that.

“She’s turned you down once already,” said Plug in a spiteful tone.

“That’s all right,” said Dick. “I believe I could make her take me if I stuck to it!”

“How you gonna cut her out from Abrams and his gang? Then there’s Poniatévsky and *his* gang layin’ for you. And ex-King Miguel and *his* army. If you ast me, this ain’t no display of nerve you’re givin’; it’s suicidal mania. You must have it bad!”

“I have,” said Dick. “If they get me . . . all right. I’ve got to see her again anyway.”

“Oh, I knew you’d be doing it,” said Plug morosely.

“But at that,” said Dick, “I’m no better off in New York. Rulon is back here, and he has tracked me to my office and my room.”

Plug whistled. For a moment or two he said no more. They were still making their way westward. Finally he blurted out:

“Take me with you, old fella.”

“Then you’re just as big a fool as me,” said Dick.

“Aah!” growled Plug, “me and you had a good time ova dere. You need me wit’ yeh, fella.”

“Gosh! I’d like to have you,” said Dick. “But I haven’t got the money for two tickets, and there’s no time to raise any.”

“I got a hundred berries,” said Plug eagerly. “That’ll take me over, third.”

“Ship sails in half an hour. What’ll you do with your car?”

“Garage is over on Tenth Avenue. I’ll turn it in. Me good cloe’s is there, too. I change at the garage.”

“Passport?”

"In my pocket . . . Aw, come on, fella. Me and you makes a good team."

"All right," said Dick. "We'll put our money together, and both go second."

"Wow!" yelled Plug. Seeing an opening ahead, he made a good forty through the block to Ninth Avenue, sounding his horn the whole way to relieve his feelings.

The taxicab was turned in. Plug declined to discuss the matter with his employers. "Me gran'mutter's dead," he said with a derisive grin, "and I've come in for all her money." Another cab was just leaving the garage. Plug hailed it grandly. "Brevard Line, fella," he said "and step on it, see?"

They arrived at the pier with ten minutes to spare. All non-passengers had been ordered off the ship, and men stood ready to haul up the gangways. Dick and Plug bought two second-class tickets on the dock, and strolled on board as if it was an everyday matter. The gangways were hauled up, the thrilling hoarse-toned whistle blew, and the great ship started to back slowly out of her slip with her band playing on deck.

"Just as easy as takin' the ferry-boat to Hoboken," said Plug with a wave of the hand.

The crowd below ran out to the open pier-head to wave a last good-bye to their friends on board. As the two young men stood by the ship's rail idly watching, they saw a tall figure come elbowing through the crowd. He raised his head, and they recognised the grim, yellowish face of Michael Rulon. At the same moment Rulon perceived them. Plug blew a kiss in his direction, and put a hypocritical handkerchief to his eyes. Rulon stared at them without changing a muscle.

"Well at that we had somebody come to see us off," said Plug.

Dick was already looking into the future. "The *Gigantic* sails on Saturday," he said. "She's faster than this ship. He'll go direct to Abrams, of course. We'll only have two days start. It'll need quick work."

"Well, that's our speciality," said Plug.

## 2

After a good passage, the *Allemania* landed Dick and Plug at Southampton on the following Wednesday morning. The English papers greeted them with the news that the government of Nusylvania, despairing of seeing a stable government set up in the neighbouring state of Bulomania, had taken matters into its own hands and had marched its armies into that troubled state to establish law and order. The League of Nations was helpless to prevent fighting it was said. The young men discussed the bearing of this news upon their own fortunes.

“Perhaps Miguel will get his king job back,” suggested Plug.

“It doesn’t say so,” said Dick. “Apparently both parties regard Miguel as a washout.”

“Poniatevsky may be called back to his own country. At any rate that would make one less for us to go up against.”

“Well, I wouldn’t bank on it,” said Dick. “Poniatevsky didn’t strike me as the kind of man who would rush in where the fighting was thickest.”

In the train on the way up to London they talked over one plan and another.

“You have an address where you can write to the girl,” suggested Plug.

“There’s no time for that,” said Dick. “She’s not expecting to hear from me. She may never go to that little shop where she got her letters. I’ve got to get in touch with her to-day.”

“And how do you count on doing that?” asked Plug dryly.

“I’ve got to watch Abrams’ den until I see her coming in or going out.”

“Yeah!” said Plug. “That’s a nice healthy quarter for you to show yourself in! I’d give you about one minute waiting there before you got a nice little round hole through your liver.”

“I must disguise myself.”

“It would have to be a darn good disguise to stand the daylight.”

“When I went to college,” said Dick, “I used to walk on in female parts in the comedies we gave. I thought I’d get a smart woman’s outfit.”

“What! go into a store and order a lot of women’s clothes and try them on!” ejaculated Plug.

“Oh, I’ll tell them it’s for a masquerade,” said Dick. “But I’ll have to keep my mouth shut,” he went on. “They never would give me a speaking part in the plays because of my *basso profundo*. And when I spoke falsetto it was worse.”

“Make out you’re deaf and dumb,” said Plug.

When they stepped out of Waterloo station and the familiar faint London smell met Dick’s nostrils—a smell subtly compounded of smoke, river mud and gutters, it seemed to bring the whole thing back afresh to Dick; all the dangers, delights and griefs of his first stay there. He paused to look about him. There were the endless rows of grimy yellow brick houses; the scarlet buses threading their way through the black railway arches; the silly little locomotives rumbling overhead in their peculiarly British manner, and sounding their piping whistles.

“*Some* town!” said Dick impressively. “Somehow it gets you!” And she is here! he added to himself with a lift of the breast.

Their first job was to find themselves a lodging. Avoiding the Bloomsbury district, where their faces might perhaps be remembered, they took a room in Frith Street, Soho, right in the middle of things. Dick then separated half a dozen more pearls from the precious string, and by this means amply supplied them with funds. When he set off to buy his woman’s outfit in one of the big stores on Oxford Street, Plug declined to accompany him. He hadn’t the face for it, he said.

By mid-afternoon Dick, having got everything together, arrayed himself and paraded up and down their room for Plug’s inspection. He had purchased a neat tailor-made suit of tweed, such as English women effect, and a hat of the *cloche* variety which came close around his face. Inside the hat he had sewed two little bunches of curls to show at his temples. Pink stockings, pumps and a little bag to swing completed the ensemble. His face was heavily made up.

“They all do it nowadays,” said Dick.

“Damn good-looking girl,” said Plug judicially; “but awful husky.”

“That’s all right,” said Dick. “English girls come that way.”



“You’ll do,” said Plug, “if you’ve got gall enough to go out in the street like that.”

“I’ve got to do it,” said Dick.

“Well, for God’s sake don’t forget yourself and ask your way of a bobby.”

“Aren’t you coming along?” asked Dick.

“Nix! It ’ud make me self-conscious walking alongside one of these now, Amazons. Excuse me. I’d only queer the show. But I’ll follow you up behind a little ways to see if you get along all right.”

Dick walked through the streets in order to accustom himself to people. The tight skirt kept reminding him to shorten his stride. People stared at him a good bit, but that was nothing. Many perfectly ordinary people get stared at. He made a strikingly handsome woman in a somewhat theatrical style. It gave him a queer start of amusement when certain idle gentlemen in Oxford Street gave him the glad eye. I must look like the real thing, he said to himself with satisfaction. Occasionally he caught a glimpse of Plug strolling along in the rear with a grave face and a twinkling eye.

At the Marble Arch Plug turned back, not caring to show himself in the quieter streets further west. Dick had not much further to go now. As he walked along by Hyde Park he discovered, unfortunately, that one of the flirtatiously-inclined gentlemen who had passed him twice in Oxford Street was now following him. He was a tall, well-favoured man with hair beginning to grey at the temples; certainly old enough to have known better. Presently he caught up to Dick and raised his hat.

“Pleasant afternoon,” he said.

Dick looked stonily ahead. So this is what it is like to be a woman, he thought. He wanted to laugh and he wanted to swear. He was thankful that Plug was not there to witness the incident.

“Going far?” asked the gentleman.

Dick kept on walking.

Reaching the corner where he and Plug had picked up a taxi-cab on the momentous night when they escaped out of Sam Abrams’ clutches, he turned north into still quieter streets. His follower, taking his silence for a tacit consent, tagged alongside.

“Do you know, you’re a confoundedly handsome girl,” he said. “Just my style.”

At the next corner Dick came to a stop; for he had no desire to lead the man any further. He glared at the gallant, but that had no effect whatever. The lady-killer merely screwed a monocle into his eye and grinned. Dick pointed peremptorily back towards Bayswater Road.

“Oh, that doesn’t go down,” said the man, laughing. “Haven’t you got a word to fling to a fellow?”

Dick’s patience suddenly gave out. “Yes, I have!” he said in his deepest bass. “Get the hell out of here before I paste you one!”

The man’s monocle flew out of his eye like a cork out of a pop-gun. His mouth dropped open. His face turned a sickly greenish colour. Then, without a word, he turned and walked with great rapidity back in the direction they had come. Occasionally he cast a frightened look over his shoulder.

Dick walked on, half-exasperated, half-laughing. It was a bit of bad luck, but it couldn’t be helped. However, there was small chance that the discomfited gallant would be inclined to give him away to a policeman.

Abrams’ “den” was not a den in the ordinary sense of sordidness and squalor, but quite a pretentious dwelling that had seen better days. It was the end house of a long row in one of the little blind streets that are so common in London. On the other side of the street there was only a high, blank garden wall. Thus it was admirably secluded. It had no passers-by.

However good his disguise might be, Dick would have been too noticeable an object in that little *cul-de-sac*, and he had no intention of venturing into it. The corner offered him a good enough vantage point. Since the other end of the block was closed, no one could enter or leave it without passing by him.

In that quiet neighbourhood Dick felt as conspicuous as a sore finger. He walked back and forth in the cross street as far as he dared. Very few people passed. There was no suitable place of concealment. He was surrounded on every side by tall, solemn-looking houses. As far as he could tell nobody was observing him from the windows, but he could not tell what watchers might be concealed by curtains. If they still see me here after an hour or two they will want to send for the police, he thought uneasily.

From a little distance he saw his rival Allington, tall, debonair and beautifully dressed as usual, turn smartly into the blind street and run up the steps of Abrams’ house. He admitted himself with a key.

Well, at any rate they haven't shifted their headquarters, Dick thought with satisfaction. To-morrow, he decided, I'll have a car, and park that in the street somewhere so that I can watch from inside it.

However, luck was with him that day. Shortly before five o'clock Allington issued out of the house again, and with him came a slim and graceful figure that caused Dick's heart to beat tumultuously. He felt that he would have known her as far off as he could see; that small head held so proudly, which undulated a little with every step she took; the sweet pale oval of her face. She was even wearing a grey suit that he recognised, but the close-fitting red hat was new. It gave her quite a festive air. What does she want to dress up for to go out with that slick young scoundrel? Dick thought; and a pretty little fire of jealousy was lighted in his breast.

As they approached, he turned his back, and walked in the other direction. They turned into the cross street. He gave them a good start before following. Even at that distance he greedily seized on every detail of her appearance; the trim, flat back under the grey coat; the neat way she put her feet down. Sauntering along as if they were not going anywhere in particular, they turned into the street that led to Bayswater Road. Allington, with his face turned towards the girl, was talking animatedly; but she looked straight ahead, and Dick could not guess how she was receiving it. He quickened his pace; for he expected them to hail a taxi in the main road. But they did not do so. Turning west, they continued afoot.

They entered a smart tea-shop under a hotel near-by. Dick followed, and took an inconspicuous table in the corner, not too near them. He ordered tea and muffins which he had no appetite for. The place was crowded with women and Dick felt very ill at ease amongst them, forgetting that he looked much as they did. The other two lingered over their meal, and Dick was obliged to spin his out, watching them, and a prey to the sharpest torments of jealousy.

It was not that Millicent looked at all gay; she had drawn on her usual mask of hauteur in company, and Dick could not tell how it was with her. She said very little. It was Allington's manner that upset him. He appeared to be easy in his mind. He had recovered from *his* tormenting jealousy; he had an almost proprietary air towards Millicent, as if she had given him certain rights over her; or as if he expected her to do so shortly. This was almost more than Dick could bear.

For an interminable time he was obliged to sit there watching them, while he nibbled his food in a ladylike manner. They never looked in his

direction. The tea-shop was filled with the low gabble-gabble of women's voices and the soft crunching of forks through pastry. Though Millicent's face was perfectly composed, it seemed to Dick that it expressed the deepest sadness, and he took a little cheer from that. But then he told himself that he only imagined the sadness, because he wished her to feel sad when she was parted from himself. Allington was happy and talkative. From the bottom of his heart Dick cursed his good looks.

At last they got up to go, and though he had been in misery all this time, Dick's heart sank lower still. For he supposed that if this was merely a tea-party they would now return home, and he would be left no further advanced than when he started. However, Allington and Millicent parted for a moment. The girl made directly for the door, which was beside Dick's table; while her companion crossed the room to pay his shot to the lady cashier. Millicent paused to wait for him immediately alongside Dick. The opportunity was too good to be missed. Dick, with a painful attempt to smile in a merely polite manner, arose and murmured her name:

"Millicent!"

She looked at him sharply, and for an instant fear broke up the mask upon her face.

"You know me?" whispered Dick, with a side glance to make sure that Allington's back was turned. There was so little time!

She knew him! Her pale face turned paler still, and she put back a hand to support herself on the brass rail that ran along inside the shop window. "Oh, Dick!" she breathed. "This is madness . . . madness!"

"I had to see you!" whispered Dick.

"Oh . . . sit down again!" she faltered imploringly. "Let me go . . . I can't bear this!"

"We must meet," whispered Dick urgently.

"I cannot . . . I will not!"

"Then write to me to-night—15a Frith Street. I will write to you in care of the little shop. . . ."

Brief as this colloquy was it had lasted too long. Allington was approaching them. He glanced at Dick with unconcerned curiosity.

"So nice to have seen you!" said Millicent with a stiff smile. She turned as if to leave.

Dick could not trust his voice then. With a polite smile that felt as if it was breaking his face into pieces, he was preparing to resume his seat, when he saw that Allington, too, had recognised him, and he stiffened his back. A hateful grin overspread Allington's face, and he raised his hat ironically.

"What a delightful surprise!" he said.

Dick and Millicent stood frozen in their places.

Allington whispered to Millicent: "You go on home and leave me to deal with this . . . er . . . lady."

"I will not," whispered Millicent.

"Well, in any case let us step outside. People are beginning to stare."

"I have nothing to say to you," whispered Dick.

"How prudent!" remarked Allington with his hateful grin.

Dick flushed under his make-up. "Oh, in that case just wait until I pay my bill, and I'll go with you," he said.

A moment later all three of them found themselves standing outside the shop watching each other in an armed and wary constraint. Each man was waiting for the other to make the first move. The scarlet motor buses churned up and down Bayswater Road, while taxi-cabs and expensive private motors slipped around the heavier vehicles. On the sidewalk neatly bonneted nurses hurried homeward from Kensington Gardens trundling perambulators; or waited for a signal from the traffic policeman to cross the street.

Finally Allington said to the girl: "You'd better go home. I don't want to let you in for this mess."

"What are you going to do?" she asked in a barely audible voice.

"Turn this fellow over to the police for masquerading in women's clothes," said Allington with a short laugh. "The police will keep him for us until we can take further measures on our own."

Triggered out as he was, Dick was helpless. He could only stand there grinding his teeth. At Allington's words the recollection of a British gaol returned to his mind. He remembered it all too well.

Millicent was deathly pale, but her eyes met Allington's firmly. "If you do that," she said softly, "my answer to what you asked me is no. Do you understand?"

It shook him badly. His eyes seemed to draw closer together; his teeth showed. "Do you mean that?" he snarled.

"I always mean what I say," she said proudly.

Allington hesitated. "And if I let him go?" he asked.

A sort of sickness appeared in Millicent's face, but it was well hidden; only Dick saw it. "In that case . . . my answer is . . . yes!" she said.

"Give me your hand on it," said Allington.

Before the eyes of the infuriated and helpless Dick, she put her hand within that of Allington. The indifferent passers-by streamed back and forth in front of them. The little scene attracted no attention whatsoever. Allington laughed hatefully.

"This fellow can go to the devil then for what I care," he said without looking at Dick. "I've got what I want!"

He drew Millicent's hand within his arm, and they walked off leaving Dick standing there half mad with rage and despair—and forced to look like a lady still. Millicent turned to go without even looking at him. What faced him now was infinitely worse than going to gaol.

### 3

How Dick got home that day he could never rightly have told. His head seemed to be full of deafening noises. When he reached the little room in Soho, he tore off the hateful rig which had betrayed him, and cast it underfoot. In some sort of fashion he told his friend what had happened. Plug, as a man's best friend too often will, proved to be a Job's comforter.

"Then you might just as well have walked up the front steps and rung the bell," he said.

"Well, you needn't rub it in!" said Dick.

"Just think of all the money and time you spent on that make-up, and it only brought about the very thing you were afraid of!"

"For God's sake shut up!" cried Dick. "You hadn't a word to say against the scheme beforehand."

"You wouldn't have listened to me."

"Well, shut up, anyhow?"

Plug got sore at that, and a very pretty little quarrel resulted. But the real misery in his friend's eyes was too much for Plug. The quarrel suddenly broke down. Plug punched Dick affectionately, and everything was all right once more.

"At any rate," Plug began again—more cautiously this time. "It shows that the girl is really crazy about you. She was willing to do anything to save you."

"You fool!" cried Dick. "That only makes it worse!"

Plug scratched his head. "Every time I open me mouth I seem to pull a boner," he grumbled.

Dick strode up and down between window and door. "Before my very eyes she pledged herself to Allington!" he cried. "What can I do!"

"Well, I don't know much about the sex," said Plug very cautiously, "but something tells me that whatever she's going to do, she'll give herself the satisfaction of writing to you to-night. Wait until you get that."

“She may be married to him by that time!” cried Dick bitterly.

“I doubt it,” said Plug. “It can’t be done as quick as that in England. There are a lot of complications.”

“What does that matter?” said Dick, “if she’s going to marry him, anyhow? She would die sooner than break her word. That’s the sort of girl she is.”

“Then you got to find a way of breaking it for her.”

“Oh, talk sense! What can I do if she isn’t willing?”

“I won’t say another word,” said Plug.

He proceeded to fill his pipe. “Take a smoke,” he said soothingly, but was only sworn at for his pains.

After awhile he returned to the charge. “I’ve only got one suggestion to make. You better raise a good sum of money in order to be ready for anything.”

Dick pulled up in his endless pacing. “That’s the first sensible word I’ve heard out of you,” he said. “You do it for me.”

He immediately set about detaching enough pearls from the long string to produce a thousand pounds in hand. He gave them to Plug with careful instructions as to the different places where they were to be taken.

Dick then sat down to write his letter to Millicent. His pen tore across the paper; line after line, page after page, the warm, breathless sentences came tumbling out of him. In all his life Dick had never before been so moved to write. It was much too long to quote entire. Only one person in the world would have had the patience to read it all. A paragraph or two will suffice.

“. . . Your instinct ought to tell you that he’s crooked. I don’t care what people do. The only thing that matters is whether they’re square and decent by nature. This man’s nature is crooked through and through. He was born crooked. He is crooked by choice. He will never be any different. And if you think you’re going to change him you’re fooling yourself badly. You won’t do him any good by marrying him, and you’ll wreck your own life. Mine too, if you care anything about that. How can you do such a thing? Even now I can’t believe that you mean it. Over and over



you let me see that you cared about me. What kind of a way is this for you to act?

“I can’t write to you in poetical language. But you must know that you mean everything in the world to me. I’ll never change. If you do this thing all the rest of my life will be like a desert. And yours will be too. Oh, I haven’t any great conceit of myself, but such as I am, I know I’m the right one for you. The moment we came together something happened that will never happen for either of us again. Why, a great wave of joy rolled through me that swept me clean off my feet. Just to discover that somebody like you existed. If I had happened to miss meeting you I should never have known what it was to be really alive. And now you’re driving me out of my senses by acting in this way. What makes women do wrong things from good motives? That doesn’t make them right! Anyway, a promise given under such conditions isn’t binding. The law recognises that. . . .”

Plug came in having safely accomplished his purpose. The pearls had been distributed among half a dozen pawnshops, and he placed the money in Dick’s hands. It was all in crisp white Bank of England notes, with their graceful black lettering. After disposing of the pearls Plug had gone on to see a chauffeur friend of his.

“We ought to have a car,” he explained.

Dick agreed.

“I thought he might be able to put me on to something good,” Plug went on, “and he did. It’s a taxi-cab. Fellow who drove it has landed a job with his Grace the Duke of Something or Other, and he wants to sell his cab quick. Three hundred and fifty quid. That’s a snap for England. The top is badly worn, but the engine’s as sweet as a nut. I tried her out. Licence and everything goes with it, and I still have my driver’s licence for England. We can keep her for a small sum in an old stable in an alley that is shared by four fellows. If we shouldn’t need it we can always sell for as much as we paid. What do you say?”

“I say get it,” said Dick.

And so it was done.

In the first mail next morning Millicent’s letter arrived for Dick. It was far from being such a bulky package as that which he had posted to her. She said:

"Please, *please* leave England immediately. You are making me suffer unbearably. If it was on my account that you came back you will do no good by staying on. There can be nothing between us, ever. I have sworn it to myself. I will not drag you down. You see what happened yesterday. All you succeeded in doing was in pushing me over the brink where I have been hanging so long. I can save you from Allington, but not from the others. He has told Sam Abrams that you are back in London, and Abrams is already laying his plans. It is impossible that you should escape him if you remain here. And then what kind of a life would I have to drag out feeling always that your blood was on my head? Dick, I beg, I *beg* of you to go away. Understand I am preparing to marry Allington at the earliest possible moment. Nothing can change me now. You need not be anxious about my future. It is the best thing I can do. Whatever he may be, he is fond of me, and I can manage him. He has promised me that we shall both run straight when we are married. So I shall be all right. Please, Dick, write me one line to say that you are going, so that I may know a little peace. I am nearly crazy.

"MILLICENT."

Dick clutched his hair in despair upon reading this. What could one do with a woman so determinedly wrong-headed? He sat down and wrote a brief answer.

"Allington lies when he says he will run straight. He couldn't. He will only deceive you. If it's a question of running straight why not marry me? I will not leave England without you. You know where to find me. I have plenty of money now.

"DICK."

Later Plug came in with a heavy cloud on his brow. "That cur-dog of Abrams'," he began bitterly, "the snaggly-toothed one. . . ."

"Hawkins?" said Dick.

"He's sitting in the restaurant across the street. They've got us placed all right. It looks to me as if that girl of yours . . ."

It only needed this to set off an explosion in the highly-charged Dick. He sprang up raising a clenched fist. "By God!" he cried thickly. "If you say it

I'll . . ."

Plug instantly regretted what he had been about to say. "I'm sorry," he grumbled. "I didn't mean anything. Aw, forget it."

Dick dropped back in the chair. "You don't know her," he said. "And, anyhow, why should she save me yesterday only to blow on me to-day?"

Plug's sulky face was full of compassion for his friend. "Sure, you're right," he agreed. "There are a dozen ways they could have smelled us out."

"I came home like a crazy man yesterday," said Dick. "Never thought of looking behind me."

"Well, it's up to us to make a getaway from here," said Plug.

Dick roused himself. "Wait a minute," he said. "This isn't respectable Bloomsbury. There are queer doings in Soho. Behind this house there's a regular rabbit warren of outhouses and passages. If there's another way out it might be a good plan to stay where we are."

"I'll investigate," said Plug, "and incidentally square us with the landlady. You can depend on me for that."

He returned later to report that the yard of the house they lived in communicated with a small court which contained an ancient pump that had once supplied all the houses adjacent. From the court you could reach a passage which led out into Greek Street at the rear.

"So much to the good," said Dick. "As long as we have that way of retreat, we won't give up this room until we are driven out of it."

"Meanwhile," continued Plug grinning. "The landlady is all for us. Anybody who inquires at the door for us will get a cold welcome."

"What did you tell her?" asked Dick curiously.

"Oh," said Plug with an airy wave of the hand, "I told her there was an unscrupulous girl who was trying to trick you into marriage, and had sicked all her relations on you. She was very sympathetic."

"Why did it have to be me?" demanded Dick a little sorely.

"Well, you're the leading man of this troupe, ain't yeh?"

## 4

This brought them to about noon on Thursday. In their room Plug was perched on a chair tipped back against the wall, his heels on the rung, smoking his pipe, while Dick paced restlessly back and forth as they discussed their plans. No less an undertaking than a kidnapping was what they proposed carrying out, in fact a double kidnapping. Over and over all the details they went; a dozen possible contingencies had to be provided for.

“We’ll only have one chance,” said Dick grimly. “We can’t afford to slip up anywhere.”

“Suppose we make a clean getaway,” said Plug. “What’ll we do with the man?”

“Oh, carry him out into a lonely part of the country somewhere, and drop him out of the car,” said Dick.

“The worst of it is, we don’t know whether they aim to turn the trick this afternoon or a week from now,” Plug pointed out.

Dick scowled at the thought. “We must find out about the English marriage laws,” he said. “Maybe we can dope out their plans from that. You’ll have to go after that information, because you have acquaintances here in London.”

“There’s a cheap eating house in Great Compton Street not far from here, where I used to go when I was a chauffeur in London,” said Plug. “The guy who runs it is a white man. He’ll put me on to things.”

“Then go to it,” said Dick. “Ask him what a couple who wanted to get married in a hurry would have to do. Find out where a couple who lived near Bayswater Road would have to go to get a licence, and get somebody to go to that place for you and find out if they’ve got a licence.”

“I get you,” said Plug.

“While you’re out,” said Dick, “buy me a thick blanket; a small one will do; also a big needle like sailors use, and some strong linen thread for it; also a pair of scissors; also about fifteen yards of light strong cord. Something that will go in my pockets, you understand.”

Plug stood up, and reached for his hat.

Dick glanced out of the window thoughtfully. Their room in this house was on the first floor rear, and the view was of slatternly back premises and fuming chimney pots. He observed with satisfaction that the roof of a rear extension would afford them easy access to the ground in case of need. But it was a little awkward not to be able to keep an eye on the spies in the street.

“Go out by the front door,” he said to Plug. “If they never see either of us leave the house, they’ll soon begin to smell a rat. You’ll be safe enough in this busy street in the middle of the day if you keep clear of standing taxi-cabs. Above all, don’t lead anybody to the stable where our car is stored. Meanwhile I’ll sneak out the back way.”

“What you going to do?”

“Pawn some more pearls. The price of that car made too big a hole in our reserves. We’ve got to be ready for anything.”

“Right-o!” said Plug. “God be with you till we meet again!” he sang, lightly, little guessing how sorely Dick would stand in need of his prayer.

Dick hesitated a moment before following Plug out of the room. He couldn’t make up his mind what to do with the string of pearls. He had a natural repugnance to carrying all that wealth through the streets on his person; but on the other hand there was a possibility that their room might be entered during their absence. He finally decided to take the latter chance, since he had to take a chance one way or the other. After all the landlady was in their interest. Dick dropped the gems in the bureau drawer together with their money, and locking the drawer, put the key inside the clock.

On the chance that some of their enemies might have got wind of the pearls they had pawned the day before, Dick determined to go to quite other shops. He obtained addresses from a classified telephone directory, and utilized taxi-cabs to carry him hither and yon about London. He took care to patronise only the leading money-lenders, men big enough not to be startled by the sight of a dozen extraordinary fine loose pearls. When one of his addresses proved to be a small obscure shop, he drove on without entering it.

In his early visits he obtained what he wanted without any untoward incidents. As he approached the end of his list he had an odd experience. He was in a very good sort of shop in the Holborn district. The broker was a benevolent looking little man with a shining bald head and old-fashioned

gold-rimmed glasses. When he examined the pearls under his glass, his eyes widened, and he cast a quick glance at Dick. However, they all did this, the stones were of such an exceptional beauty.

“How much will you lend me on them,” asked Dick.

The pawnbroker hesitated. “I don’t know as I care to . . .” he began—then suddenly changed his mind. “Oh well, business is business!” He named a price which was a fair one.

“I accept,” said Dick.

As he was about to pay over the money, the pawnbroker hesitated again. “Did you come by these pearls honestly?” he asked suddenly.

Dick parried the question. “Nobody in the world has better any right to them than I have,” he said.

“I’m inclined to agree with you,” said the other; and paid over the money forthwith. A gleam of kindness shone through the polished glasses. “Young man,” he said, “here’s a bit of advice for you: Take that money and get out of the country as quick as you are able.”

“Well!” said the astonished Dick. He wondered if by some queer chain of circumstances, Millicent could have enlisted this little man on her side.

“You have powerful and unscrupulous enemies,” said the pawnbroker solemnly. He glance anxiously out into the street as if he expected them to appear.

“I know I have,” said Dick; “but how did you know it?”

The other wagged his hands. “I won’t say another word,” he protested. “I have already broken the first rule of my business; and that is never interfere in what does not concern me!”

Outside, Dick hesitated by the door of his cab to think this over. He could make nothing of it. He had an impulse to take what money he had already secured and returned home, but he hated to give in to a fear so formless. After all there was nothing new in the warning that he had received; he was already well aware that he possessed powerful and unscrupulous enemies. He had less than a dozen pearls remaining of those he had brought out; and he decided to visit one more shop. From his list he picked out a name at random:

“Absolom Harris, Batty Street off Shepherd’s Market, Mayfair.”

Shepherd's Market is an humble little neighbourhood set town in the midst of the most fashionable part of London. Harris' establishment was obviously one of the very highest class. It had quaint eighteenth century shop windows, divided into little oblongs of glass; and in one of the little oblongs was to be seen a tiny lettered sign:

Absolom Harris  
Pawnbroker  
Founded 1769

Inside there were none of the usual appurtenances of the business; no sign of any pawned goods on display: but a rank of neat, old-time walnut cupboards around three sides of the room, with closed wooden doors. More like an undertaker's than a pawnbroker's, Dick thought. There was no counter; but only a couple of chairs for visitors; and a pretty dark-haired girl tapping on a typewriter.

Dick looked at her somewhat dubiously. “. . . Er . . . Can I see Mr. Harris?” he asked.

At the sight of Dick's good looks she affected to bridle prettily. “Oh, there isn't any Mr. Harris now,” she said. “Mr. Izzard is the manager.”

“Well, he'll do,” said Dick good-humouredly.

“I'll see if he is at liberty,” she said; and disappeared through a door at the back.

Hm! thought Dick; this is something new in pawnbrokers.

She presently returned to say that Mr. Izzard would see him; and held the door open for him; turning her eyes alluringly sidewise as he passed close to her. But Dick had other things on his mind. She closed the door behind him with just a suspicion of acerbity.

The inner room looked more like a pawnbroker's shop but there were no goods to be seen. It had a counter with the usual strong light thrown down upon it; and cash desk alongside. Mr. Izzard was behind the counter, a tall, dark man dressed in an old-fashioned frock coat and flat black tie. He had a gaunt face so narrow and elongated it suggested that strong pressure must have been applied to the sides. On his bald forehead there was an attenuated lock of his last remaining hairs, that waved like a feather with every move of his head. The epitome of respectability, thought Dick—but you never can tell!

Dick preferred his usual formula: "How much will you lend me on these pearls?"

A glint appeared in Mr. Izzard's deep sunk eyes at the mention of the word pearls. He examined them under the light, and cast a startled glance on Dick. The latter was so accustomed to this now that he scarcely noticed it. He remembered afterwards that a furtive look was mixed with Mr. Izzard's surprise, a look which never quite left his face thereafter; but at the moment Dick gave it no thought. The pawnbroker, holding the pearls in a slightly trembling hand, examined them with fresh attention. Then, coming from behind the counter, he opened a door which led into a still further room.

"Step into my private office, Sir," he said with great courtesy.

This was an invitation which had been frequently given, since the transactions ran up towards of a hundred pounds, and Dick thought nothing of accepting it. The third room, while plain, had pretensions to both taste and luxury. It had no window, but was lighted by some sort of skylight in the ceiling. It was panelled all round in the same dark, rich wood; and in the centre of each main panel was hung a fine old print. A thick Turkey rug covered the floor; and there was a flat-topped desk for the proprietor and easy chairs for his visitors.

Mr. Izzard poured the pearls into a little black saucer that he evidently kept for such a purpose. He descanted on their beauty with a genuine enthusiasm. Dick was accustomed to this from experts. He asked Dick the usual questions as to how he had come by them, to which Dick made the usual replies, which need not be repeated here, since they were wholly untrue. Finally Mr. Izzard asked most courteously if Dick would drink a glass of wine with him.

Dick, while a little surprised, told himself that a man in so solid a way of business as this, would not dare to try any hocus pocus with a customer. He took care to watch Mr. Izzard's hands while he was producing the bottle of old Madiera and the two crystal glasses. Everything was open and aboveboard. It all seemed to go with the old-fashioned room. They toasted each other and drank. The generous wine warmed Dick's membranes like liquid sunshine. What an agreeable country England was where even the pawnbrokers were courteous and friendly; he thought.

Mr. Izzard's courtesies extended to such lengths that Dick began to feel a little anxious about getting home. "About the pearls . . ." he said.



“To be sure! To be sure!” said Mr. Izzard. He named an amount that was more than fair; and Dick quickly accepted it.

The pawnbroker arose, and going to the centre panel in the back wall of the room, fumbled with a concealed spring. The whole panel slid back out of sight revealing the tall steel door of a highly modern safe or vault. The combination was not on; he turned the handle and the heavy door swung slowly outward. Dick saw the complicated grid of bolts on the inside of the door.

“Nice place you have here,” said Dick, just to be saying something.

“Glad you like it,” said Mr. Izzard. “Are you interested in prints? Look at this dry-point by Kinnaird that I have here.”

Dick approached to examine the etching that he pointed out. The pawnbroker disappeared within the vault where he was to be heard pulling out a cash box. He presently reappeared with a handful of notes. Dick had turned away from the etching, but Mr. Izzard called him back to it. He was evidently an enthusiast. He darted around Dick to the other side, the better to exhibit his treasure.

“If you understand such things you will recognise from the sharpness of the burr” (Dick had no idea what he was talking about) “that this is a very early impression. After a few prints have been taken, a dry-point loses all its snap. Observe the richness of the black he has obtained in the shadows; and that wall, how it shimmers in the sunshine. I declare I cannot see how he got that effect; it seems to be just a blank space on the paper, yet it shimmers . . . !”

Dick suddenly realised that there was a very strange quality in the man’s voice. It was hoarse and halting; he enunciated with difficulty. He glanced at him, and was shocked by the change in his face. It was sweating and livid. Dick supposed that he had been taken with a sudden illness. Before Dick could speak, Izzard quick as a cat, lowered one shoulder, and gave him a tremendous shove that sent him teetering sideways into the yawning vault. Taken absolutely by surprise, Dick fell to his hand and knees inside. Before he could recover himself, the steel door slammed to and the thick round bolts shot home.

For an instant Dick was dazed by what had happened. Then, springing to his feet in the blackness, he shouted with all the force of his lungs, and beat with this fists on the steel door. . . . He soon desisted. The only effect was to bruise his hands cruelly on the sharp edges of the steel. The narrow walls of his prison beat the voice back into his throat. A feeling of utter despair swept over him; sweat ran down his face, he trembled as with an ague. That was the most dreadful moment of all; that moment when he lost his grip upon himself. He seemed to fly into pieces. He was unmanned by the thought of slow and hideous death.

At first he thought he had a madman to deal with. He could ascribe no reason for this horror. He snatched at the thought of the girl in the outer office. She knew he had come in; she had liked him; surely she would be the means of bringing him help. Then he recollected that it was almost closing time. She would take her hat of course, and go home, never suspecting but that Dick was still chatting courteously with her employer in the inner room. In the morning—but it would be too late then! He'd be dead long before morning. Already it seemed to him that the air of the shallow vault was growing foul. It oppressed his breast horribly. He undertook to breathe with the top of his lungs merely. But he was forced to take a long breath in the end, and a fresh wave of despair engulfed him. His reason seemed to totter; he could no longer think coherently.

However, something deep within him began to fight stubbornly against this animal terror. If I don't get a hold on myself I'll go clean off my head, he told himself. Grinding his teeth, he slowly fought his way back to sanity. As soon as his brain began to function again, he realised that Izzard was not mad. Everything pointed to the existence of a carefully laid plot. Dick immediately connected it with the warning he had received from the pawnbroker in Holborn. Why of course! he saw it all now. One of his enemies, Abrams probably, suspecting that he would try to pawn more of the pearls, had gone about to various pawnbrokers, trying to make a deal with them to sieze Dick when he called. The man in Holborn had rejected his advances, but Izzard had yielded. Oh, fool! fool! fool! not to have obeyed the inner voice that warned him to go home.

Still, if this was true, he would probably not be allowed to die in the vault. Abrams would want to make sure of the rest of the pearls first. Izzard would send for Abrams, and upon the arrival of the latter they would open the door. Dick plucked up heart at this thought; any fate however horrible; any form of torture seemed preferable to slow suffocation. He determined to last as long as possible. He put his nose to the crack of the steel door, hoping to get a faint scent of the outer air; but the closure was perfect.

Time passed. Waves of dizziness swept over him; for a little while his head ached consumedly; then he suddenly realised that the pain was gone. A heavy languour crept over him, and he squeezed himself into a sitting position on the floor between the door and the racks where Izzard presumably kept his valuables. Many thousands of pounds worth no doubt; but it was nothing to Dick. He leaned his heavy head against the wall. He ceased to be aware of the passage of time. He was grateful for the absense of pain. After all it was not such a hard way to die; it was just like sinking . . . sinking . . . He realised that he was only conscious at intervals now, but did not greatly care. Pictures of his childhood rose before him; then there were no more intervals of consciousness.

When the door of the vault was opened, he fell out on the floor of the room. Consciousness stirred faintly within him. He realised as from an immense distance that he was saved; but it did not seem to matter. He heard a frightened voice say:

“Oh, he’s dead!”

A heavier voice replied: “He couldn’t be in that little while. Only three hours. Lift him into a chair.”

As the sweet, sweet air filled his lungs a new strength filled Dick—and pain. A deep instinct of caution prompted him to conceal all signs of returning animation. He kept his eyes closed. He was lifted up and dropped in one of the easy chairs with his head hanging over the back. A glass of wine was put to his lips, and he allowed the reviving stuff to trickle down his throat. The heavy voice said:

“Search him!”

Izzard put in sharply: “Yes; and make sure that he didn’t help himself to any of my stuff while he was in there.”

Dick allowed himself to go perfectly limp while a pair of nimble hands went through his clothes. The bundle of notes that he had received for the pearls pawned that day was taken from him, and the pawn tickets. He had

nothing else on him of interest to his enemy. The thick, heavy voice broke out into a furious cursing. With its strong foreign accent the voice was familiar to Dick, but in his still bemused state he could not establish the connection. He shot a glance through his lashes in that direction.

It was no man of Abrams' gang; it was "Prince" Poniatévsky, the great burly figure with the bulging eyes and theatrical moustache. Strong surprise filled Dick. How could Poniatévsky have learned that he had returned to London? In that same swift glance Dick recognised the elderly vinegar-faced colonel attached to Poniatévsky's suite, and the good-looking young officer who had played such a bold part during the fracas in Bloomsbury. This one's face bore a look of compassion.

"He has stowed the rest of the pearls away!" cried Poniatévsky with a whole string of oaths.

From scraps of talk that passed between Poniatévsky and Izzard Dick gathered that these two were old acquaintances, and that the latter was familiar with the whole story of Queen Alla Anastasia's famous pearls. By and by Izzard asked the very question that was tormenting Dick.

"How did you know that he was back in England?"

"It's a very strange thing," said Poniatévsky. "An unknown friend sent me a wireless from the sea. Listen." There was a pause while he searched in his pocket apparently. He read out: "Kid Murray Hill is back in England with the stuff. (Signed) Rulon. . . . Who the devil is Rulon?"

"That's the American crook that Abrams brought over to steal the pearls from King Miguel," replied Izzard.

"So?" said Poniatévsky. "What's his game in sending me this?"

"This young man relieved *him* of the pearls," said Izzard. "I assume he is just trying to do him a bad turn."

"Well, it was a good turn to me!" said Poniatévsky with a thick laugh.

Izzard approached close to Dick's inanimate figure. "It's strange that he doesn't come to," he said in an anxious voice. "What will we do with him?"

"My car is at the door," said Poniatévsky carelessly. "Load him into it, and I'll carry him to my place. He'll be safe enough there, eh? Take a look first to see that there's nobody hanging about in the street."

Dick sent up a silent prayer for strength enough to put up a fight at the right moment. He still felt pretty shaky. But he could at least send up a lusty

cry for help. It was true that Batty Street was a secluded spot, but just around the corner was Shepherd's Market where there ought to be some stir of life at eight o'clock at night.

Poniatévsky counted off part of the money that had been taken from Dick, and handed it over to Izzard. It appeared that the latter's price for this pretty job was two hundred pounds.

Then Dick was picked up, the young officer taking his shoulders, and the elder his feet. Dick's arms hung slackly, his head rolled helplessly from side to side, his eyes were closed. They passed out through the middle room and into the shop. The girl had gone home, of course; it was quite dark out of doors. They halted a moment in the outer room to allow Izzard to take a survey up and down the street.

"All clear," he said softly.

As they passed through the outer door, Dick gathered himself up and sprang out of his bearers' arms. Taken completely by surprise, he gained five yards before they recovered sufficiently to take after him. Both pursued and pursuers knew that the issue would be decided as the corner was turned. His desperate need lent a fictitious strength to Dick's trembling limbs. Poniatévsky was too fat to run fast, the colonel too old; but the younger officer was in the flush of his youthful strength, and there was also a chauffeur outside. As Dick turned the corner these two were reaching for his collar.

The little market was closed, and the space before it deserted. But fifty yards away Dick perceived a policeman standing under an electric light talking to a girl, and the sight gave him the strength for a last spurt. If only the man would turn round! He did not, and Dick felt his strength ebbing away. The pearls were nothing to him then; life came first.

"Officer! Officer!" he called desperately.

With the first sound that escaped Dick's lips, his pursuers silently faded into adjacent doorways. Consequently when the policeman swung around he saw but one reeling figure in the street. Dick staggered on and half collapsed in his arms.

"What's the matter?" demanded the policeman.

The extremity of his danger being past, Dick thought of the pearls again. A fiction leaped unbidden into his mind. He heard himself gasping out: "Half suffocated . . . fell asleep in my room . . . when I woke up . . . gas turned on . . . nobody about . . ."

And then in the most realistic fashion, Dick did indeed faint in the officer's arms.

He came to to find himself being lifted into a taxi-cab. "Got no money on me," he murmured.

"That's all right," said the good-natured policeman. "I'll stand you the bob."

They were driven to a vast hospital where the groggy Dick was half led, half carried into a dispensary and placed in a chair. Somebody said "oxygen" and presently a sort of mask was pressed to his face. When it was removed he felt like his own man again. He surveyed with interest the nurse who had a noble face and looked as if she would stand no nonsense; and the doctor who was no older than himself. Suddenly it occurred to him that it must be nearly nine o'clock, and he thought of poor Plug's anxieties.

"I must get home," he said, making to get up.

The nurse pressed him into his seat with a capable hand. "Stay where you are," she said. "You are to have another go of oxygen in ten minutes."

With that they left him alone with the white-enamelled metal furniture, and glass shelves loaded with bottles. He stood up to try his legs, and finding that they served him as well as usual, he went to the door, and peeped out. Outside there was a sort of hall filled with many rows of benches on which were scattered a few poor wretches, awaiting their turns with the doctors, or awaiting news of desperately sick friends. At the back of this hall was the main entrance to the hospital outside of which Dick was very sure his enemies were waiting to pick him up.

On the other side of the hall a wide, high corridor traversed the whole length of the great building binding the different wings together. People were continually passing up and down in it, but Dick saw no face that was familiar to him. He quietly crossed the hall and made his way down the endless corridor trying to look as if he belonged there. Nobody offered to stop him. At the end of the hall was a glass door leading to a balcony. He went out. From the middle of the balcony a few steps led down to a garden. He proceeded through the garden. At the furthest end there was a little gate leading into the street a long way from the main entrance. Issuing through it, Dick went his way, hatless but rejoicing.

Since they had taken every penny from him he had to walk home. But the night air acted like a tonic, and there was no return of his weakness. Having made very sure that he was not followed, he turned into Greek Street

at last, and diving into the passage, crossed the pump yard and gained his own lodging-house from the rear. When he entered their room Plug sprang up with a face of joy, and then immediately started to abuse him.

## 6

There was a letter from Millicent waiting for Dick; she had lost no time in answering his of that morning. It contained but a single line—Dick expected nothing else:

“I am not coming.”

Plug had informed himself as to the English marriage laws, and had learned that Allington and the girl had secured a special licence to wed which obviated all delays. They were expected to appear before the registrar at three o’clock the following afternoon to have the ceremony performed.

“Did you bring in everything I asked for?” demanded Dick.

Plug exhibited the articles.

“Fine!” said Dick in grim satisfaction. “Then we’re all set and ready to go!”

“Wait a minute,” said Plug with a bothered look. “There’s something goin’ on in this house that I don’t like.”

“What’s that?” asked Dick sharply.

“A new lodger came this afternoon. He insisted on having the first floor front, and the landlady shifted the fellow in there to a room upstairs. I haven’t seen the new lodger, but she says he’s an elegant gentleman. I never thought much about him until to-night, but while I’ve been sitting here waiting for you, different visitors have been arriving to see him. He’s got four men in there now. I don’t like it.”

Dick whistled noiselessly, and became very thoughtful. Suddenly he slipped out into the hall, closing the door behind him, and noiselessly covering the few paces that separated him from the door of the adjoining room, he put his ear to the crack. All he could hear was a low rumble of men’s voices speaking in a foreign tongue. It confirmed his worst fears. Bulomanian! he thought, grimly setting his jaw.

Suddenly voices approached the door, and he realised that it was about to be opened. He had no time to regain his own room. Putting up his hand, he turned off the light and went on up the next flight of stairs on all fours



like a cat. He peeped around the upper turn. The door of the front room opened, and Colonel Lazarev, ex-King Miguel's equerry, came out with another man, and softly proceeded downstairs. As the door closed behind them, Dick had a glimpse of several other men within the room.

As soon as they had turned the stairs, he slipped back into his own room.

"Miguel's gang," he said succinctly to Plug.

"How the devil did they learn we were back in England?" said Plug in dismay.

"Same way that Poniatovsky did. Through Rulon. He has raised the whole nest of hornets about us. No time to explain now."

"What's our best bet?" asked Plug.

"A quick getaway over the scullery roof," said Dick nodding towards the windows.

Even as he spoke he heard the door open into the yard below. Instinctively his arm flew up to turn out the light. He and Plug kneeled on the floor inside one of the windows, and peeped over the sill. At first they could see nothing in the dark well of the yard below; but they heard the two men moving softly about, and whispering. A certain amount of light was reflected down from the cloudy sky; and after a moment they were able to make out the two shadowy figures. Apparently they were looking up at the windows. Dick and Plug ducked a little lower.

They heard a latch click, and the door in the fence opened, letting in a faint light from the pump yard behind. The two figures passed through the doorway. Dick groaned in chagrin.

"They have discovered our line of retreat!" he whispered.

"Hadn't we better make a break for the front door while they're out back?" suggested Plug.

"Abrams' outpost is in the street," said Dick gloomily. "No. Wait until these two return to the house, and then beat it out of the window."

Feeling his way in the dark, Dick made haste to get the pearls and the money out of the bureau drawer. He stowed them in his breast pocket. The two men returned through the door in the fence, and closed it after them. Dick's and Plug's eyes were now accustomed to the dark, and they could see fairly well. One man remained in the yard below, while the other,

presumably Lazarev, entered the house. A moment later the young men heard him mount the stairs and go into the front room.

“Trapped!” said Plug bitterly.

As the danger became more immanent, Dick felt his spirits rising. A grim chuckle escaped him in the dark. “The next thing in order is an attack from the front,” he said. He locked the door, taking care to leave the key turned sideways that it might not be pushed out from the other side. He signed to Plug to help him carry the bureau across the floor, and place it against the door. “At least they’ll have to make the devil of a racket to get in,” he said.

The two young men then braced themselves to await the next move of their enemies. This was the hardest time. The landlady and what other lodgers there were in the house had gone to bed long since and silence reigned within doors; a silence so complete that they could hear the scurry of mice behind the plaster. Through the open windows came the subdued rumble of the traffic in Shaftesbury Avenue, London’s never-stilled voice. It gave Dick a queer start to reflect that only a few hundred yards away people were walking up and down, staring in shop windows, going home to bed, doing all the ordinary things of life while he and his pal were trapped in this room in peril of their lives. Dick did not feel like laughing then; to wait in the silence and darkness was demoralising.

“Brhh!” he said, shaking himself. “Fill up your pipe and light it. It steadies the nerves!”

In order to have occupation for his hands he set about packing everything they possessed into their two bags. For each bag he made a sling of cord that it might be carried on the back leaving both hands free.

Finally out of the darkness came a discreet knocking at their door. All Dick’s faculties sharpened, and his tremors fled. He and Plug looked at each other and grinned, the sound was such a perfect imitation of their landlady’s deprecatory tapping. After a moment or two it was repeated—and a third time. Dick put a finger to his lips. They heard little mousy sounds at the lock as if somebody was very cautiously trying to push the key through, and Dick smiled again.

Then silence. They braced themselves for the rush that they expected to follow, but it did not come. Only silence; a long, long silence, very hard on the nerves. They imagined that they heard little sounds of creeping and creaking through the house, but it was the sort of ancient house where such

sounds might very well be heard at any time. Somewhere in the upper part of the house a lodger was snoring comfortably. Dick envied him.

Finally an intimation, the merest whisper of a sound from the yard below, caused Dick to hasten back to the window. Over the lower ledge of the sloping scullery roof he saw heads rising. Turning, he seized Plug, and whispered in his ear:

“They’re going to take us through the windows.”

“Oh, God!” said Plug nervously. “Let’s get out of the door.”

“Too late!” said Dick. “They’ll cut us off in the hall below . . . Listen! Flatten yourself against the wall alongside the window. When they’re in, over the sill with you, and roll down the roof. Follow me, and do what I do. I’m going to make for the parlour alongside the front door.”

“But the landlady sleeps there at night,” gasped Plug.

“I know it,” said Dick grimly. “We could have no better protection than a screeching woman. If they follow us into her room, creep under the bed. They can’t blackjack us under a bed.”

Each took up a position alongside a window. Presently a pair of legs swung across each sill, and a head ducked under the upper sash. A second man followed the first through each window. The first into the room held a flashlight, and cast its beams around. It revealed the barricaded door, but did not immediately pick up Dick and Plug who were both in the rear of the man who held it.

As soon as they saw a clear space, Dick and Plug flung themselves over the sills, and let all go down the roof, making a tremendous clatter. As soon as he touched the ground, Dick became aware that a man was still guarding the door in the fence. He made for the house door with Plug at his heels. The four men came scrabbling down the roof in a heap. The unexpectedness of Dick’s move kept them guessing for a moment, and the two young men gained a precious quarter minute’s start. Running through the lower hall of the house, they unlatched the front door, and threw it open with a bang. Letting it stand open, they slipped quietly through the parlour door alongside. The woman in bed, already awakened by the racket, heard them enter and moaned in an extremity of terror.

“Spare me! Spare me! Spare me!” she gabbled, with her head under the bedclothes.

Lazarev and his men came charging through the hall. Seeing the open door, they instinctively ran out into the street. At the same moment Dick and Plug, slipping out of the parlour, ran back into the yard. Dick drew his gun. If the man was still holding the door in the fence, he intended to wing him; there was no help for it. But as it proved, this fellow had followed the others, and the way was clear. Dick dropped his gun back in his pocket with a sigh of relief. They gained Greek Street without molestation, and made haste to hide themselves in the maze of little streets beyond. They got off the streets as soon as possible by engaging a room in an obscure bed and breakfast house.

Early on the following afternoon a somewhat battered taxicab was waiting alongside the curb in Queen's Road, a few yards from the corner of Bayswater Road. At the wheel sat Plug, very effectually disguised by a ragged chauffeur's overcoat with collar turned up, and an ancient cap with the visor pulled down low. A good deal of the space between collar and visor was filled up by a large and excessively hairy moustache of British cut—or lack of cut. Plug's flag was down to suggest that his fare was making purchases in one of the near-by shops; for cabs are not allowed to wait for fares in any but the appointed stands. His engine was running. Down Queen's Road Allington and Millicent must come to reach Bayswater Road, and it was supposed that they would be looking for a taxi.

On the corner of the two roads was a public-house, and in the saloon bar stood Dick in such a position that he could survey the cab outside over the window screen. Dick wore no disguise. Under one arm he held what appeared to be a rolled blanket; but in reality it was a stout bag made out of a blanket. The side pockets of his coat were full of cord. The hand that held his glass of "bitter" trembled slightly, and he was perspiring uncomfortably; there were so many ways in which their elaborate plan might miscarry!

In fact they had to be ready with three separate plans to be used according to the circumstances: (a) If Allington and Millicent approached alone, and Plug succeeded in getting them to engage him: (b) If they approached alone, but engaged some other taxi, or did not engage any: (c) If they were accompanied by others. In the last-named contingency Plug was to make no offer to be engaged by them, but was merely to follow. Dick did not think it likely they would be accompanied by others. If Allington had promised Millicent that they were to run straight hereafter, it would be necessary for them to conceal their marriage from the other inmates of the house in the blind street.

At the moment there was no other customer in the saloon bar. The golden-haired barmaid wiped the mahogany and tossed her curls resentfully. She could make nothing of Dick standing there with his back to her, staring into the street so attentively. It was not natural for a good-looking young fellow to be so oblivious to the attractions of pansy-coloured eyes and natural golden hair.

Dick could not see very far up Queen's Road, but he had arranged a system of signals with Plug. When, therefore, he saw Plug throw up the flag on his meter, and start his car moving, he knew that the quarry was approaching. He paid for his beer and went out. Half a block up the street Allington and Millicent were in the act of boarding Plug's cab. So far so good. Allington handed the girl in first, of course; that would bring him on the right-hand side. Dick was trying to think of everything.

Plug started to turn around in Queen's Road, and Dick crossed over to the other side to head him off. His heart was beating with sickening thuds. All of a sudden the scheme seemed perfectly preposterous. While it was not the heart of London, it was at the junction of two important roads, and there were plenty of people and cars about. What a crazy stunt to pull off in such a spot in the middle of the afternoon! Still, in sober London where such things do not happen perhaps its very craziness was in its favour. At any rate it was too late now to turn back.

As Plug drew abreast of Dick, driving very slowly, he put back his hand and turned the handle of the door. At the same moment Dick hopped on the running board, and flung himself inside, pulling the door to with a slam. It had been carefully rehearsed. From the sidewalk it looked like nothing more than a young man catching a taxi on the move. Plug stepped on his gas and they jerked into swift motion. Dick was thrown into Allington's lap.

Allington, with a savage oath, struck at Dick as well as he could within that narrow compass. Millicent, saucer-eyed, shrank as far as she could into her corner. The cry on her lips was checked when she recognised the intruder. Plug turned into Bayswater Road, and proceeded west as fast as he dared. The Gardens being on one side there was no cross traffic to hold him up until he should reach Notting Hill Gate.

Allington, meanwhile, defended himself manfully. At first he felt that he could handle the situation, and he made no outcry. He landed more than one vicious jab in Dick's face. It was no part of Dick's plan to guard himself. He got his bag unrolled, and watched his chance. Allington perceived his purpose too late. Like a flash the gaping mouth of the bag went over his head, and he was blinded. He then started to shout for help, but Dick, pressing the whole weight of his body against his head, strangled the cries. Allington still struggled like an animal in a snare; but the force of his kicks was all spent on the back of the driver's seat. Plug turned north into less frequented streets.

Throughout this savage struggle, Dick was electrically conscious of Millicent. She could at any moment have turned the scale against him by attacking him from that side, or by opening the door and crying for help. But whether from love of Dick or from pride or from fear, no sound escaped her. She remained pressed into her corner of the cab like a frozen woman.

Meanwhile, inch by inch, Dick was working the bag over Allington's shoulders; over his arms. Allington was struggling insanely to reach the handle of the door, but he was completely blinded. He was making a good bit of noise, and when Dick got his arms partly pinioned under the bag, he whipped a handkerchief out of his pocket, and got it tied around the bag over the other man's mouth. The cries were then stilled. Dick took turn after turn of the light cord around Allington's body, firmly binding his arms to his sides. He then tied his ankles together. The only movement that Allington was capable of making, was to lash out with his bound feet against the front of the cab.

The panting and dishevelled Dick turned around, and sat on Allington to hold him down. He looked at Millicent with a certain insolent triumph. In the fever of his blood all tenderness had been consumed; there was a good deal of the primeval brute in Dick then and he looked it. Behind his back hollow groans were issuing from under Allington's gag. With occasional swift glances over his shoulder Plug had assured himself that all was going well in the rear. He now slowed down a little.

"Well, how about it?" said Dick with a curling lip.

It was certainly not fear which had kept her quiet, for her eyes met Dick's squarely. She did not answer him. Something in the steadiness of her gaze caused a little unsureness to creep into Dick's feeling of triumph; whereat he began to bluster just a little. He said to himself: She's a pretty cool hand—well, others can be just as cool. Getting out a packet of cigarettes, he took one and lighted it. Letting down the widow on his side of the cab, he blew the smoke out.

Millicent was forced to speak first. "Where are you taking me?" she asked coldly.

"Oh, anywhere out in the country where we can drop Allington in an out of the way spot," said Dick carelessly.

"I could have prevented you," she said proudly.

"Why, sure!" said Dick grinning.

"I want you to understand," she went on in the same cold voice, "that the reason I did not interfere was because I knew that it would mean your death if you fell into the hands of the gang."

"All right," said Dick.

"This is not going to do you any good with me," she said.

"Ah!" Dick burst out hotly. "You gave me to understand that you loved me. Was I going to let another man marry you?"

"That's a long time ago," she said in an unrelenting voice. "And in any case after such a display of violence as you have made . . ."

"Aah!" snarled Dick unhappily: "Did you expect me to come and throw flowers at your wedding?"

"Don't try to be funny," she said stiffly. "You ought to have known that I was not the sort of woman who could be seized by force. I give myself freely or not at all!"

There was no doubt but that she meant what she said. Confusion seized upon Dick; he had a horrible feeling that he was no match for her. He was angry with her; he was afraid of her; he wanted her a thousand times more than ever. "How could I have acted any differently?" he cried. "If I hadn't acted as I did, you would have been married to him by now."

"Nothing is changed," she said. "I shall still marry him."

"Not if I know it!" cried Dick.

"I am bound to him just as much as ever."

Dick remembered something that Plug had said. "Sure, I knew that nothing would ever make you break your word," he said eagerly. "But I have broken it for you. *I* wasn't bound."

"That's merely silly," she said scornfully. "As long as he lives I shall consider myself bound to him."

Dick lost his temper completely. "Then by God! I'll kill him!" he cried. "A worthless scoundrel like that; it would be a good act; I could do it without feeling a moment's remorse!"

"And do you think I would marry you, red-handed?" she asked coldly.

She had him there. He had the feeling that he was butting his head against a stone wall. He had never imagined the possibility of a woman



opposing him successfully. He told himself bitterly that it was because he loved her so, that she had him at a disadvantage.

For a long time they rode in an unhappy silence. Plug, having made a wide circuit of North-west London, brought them back to the river at Kew Bridge. He was heading for the main road to the South-west of England. It was upon this road that he had picked up Dick on a night in the early summer. It was the only country road that Plug knew. At Kew they left the smoke and grime of London behind them; thenceforward one pleasant suburb succeeded to another, interspersed with green playing fields where cricket matches were in progress under the afternoon sun.

Millicent coldly called Dick's attention to the fact that Allington was likely to suffocate under the gag and the thick blanket. Dick realised with a start that for some time past the man had lain perfectly inert. Feeling of his pulse, he discovered that it was barely perceptible. He made haste to throw off the gag, and to loosen the blanket. After awhile he had the satisfaction of feeling his pulse grow stronger. However Dick might threaten Millicent, he had no desire to have Allington's death on his conscience.

He made another attempt to become reconciled with the girl. "We mustn't quarrel," he said almost humbly.

"I'm not quarrelling," she said stiffly.

Dick reached for her hand. She made no attempt to withdraw it, but allowed it to lie like a piece of ice in his. There was no satisfaction in that. "Try to forget my violence," he begged. "It wasn't aimed against you."

Millicent made a scornful sound in her throat as much as to say it had better not be! It was, of course, not his violence which had angered her, it was because he had thwarted her will.

"Sometimes a man is obliged to be violent," Dick went on, "in fighting for his own. Everything is so civilised nowadays people forget that. But underneath, nothing is changed. . . . I would be gentle enough with you," he continued lower. "You could do what you wanted with me."

"I'm sorry," she said stiffly—she didn't look sorry; "all this does no good. You shouldn't have attempted to carry me off by force. That arouses every bit of obstinacy there is in my nature. I *couldn't* give in to you now."

"You're just sore," said Dick, stung. "There's nothing very fine about getting sore. What does soreness and obstinacy matter anyhow between you and me. Do you love me, that's the question."

“No!” she said quickly.

He studied her face anxiously to see if she meant it. It was as cold and hard as a plaster cast; no hope there. He yielded up her hand with a scornful laugh, and felt for another cigarette. This parade of unconcern was a failure; his wounded and perplexed eyes betrayed him.

By this time the suburbs had given place to the real English countryside. They bowled along between rich fields, alongside great parks whose magnificent trees half concealed fine old houses, and through quaint, crooked village streets. It need hardly be said that none of the occupants of the taxicab were impressed by these beauties. Dick observed that in the villages the sight of a taxicab so far from London excited a good deal of interest. They were evidently speculating on how much the meter registered. Dick resolved to suggest to Plug that they take the meter off. Happening to look through the rear window as they passed through a village, Dick saw a man writing down their licence number, and a sharp anxiety attacked him.

In a deserted stretch between two villages, Plug stopped the car, and coming to the door beckoned to Dick to step out. “I’ll soon need gas,” he said. “I can’t drive up to a garage with you all in back.”

“Find some hidden spot where you can drop us out,” said Dick. “After you’ve got gas come back for us.”

Plug nodded. He looked at the limp, trussed-up figure of Allington in the cab. “You did a pretty good job there,” he said with a chuckle.

Dick shrugged.

“There was only one hitch,” Plug went on. “As we turned out of Bayswater Road there was a fellow standing beside the curb caught a glimpse of you and Allington struggling in the back. Gosh! he was surprised. I got away before he could do anything, but I’m pretty sure he got our licence number.”

“Oh well, we’re a long way from Bayswater Road,” said Dick.

“Oh sure,” said Plug. “Still, there are telephones in England.”

The same thought was in Dick’s mind.

A slight sound from the cab caused them to turn sharply. Millicent was just dropping off the other side. She darted across the road, and squeezing through a gap in the hedge, took off across a pasture field, running like a deer. Dick put down his head and went after her. Plug looked anxiously up and down the road. By good luck nobody was in sight at the moment.

Hampered as she was by her skirts Millicent had no chance at all. Dick overhauled her easily. Within two hundred yards he flung his arms around her, and held her fast regardless of her struggles. How delicious it was to him to feel her powerlessness in his arms. He was sorely tempted really to exert his strength then, but he restrained himself.

“Oh, you pretty, stubborn thing!” he groaned half laughing, half in despair.

“Let me go! Let me go! Let me go!” cried Millicent, beating his face.

Dick heard a car coming, and was forced to release her. They must not be seen struggling like that in the middle of the pasture. But as she turned to run again, he stopped her with a tone of voice she dared not ignore.

“Wait a minute!”

She looked at him in sullen inquiry.

“If you run away from me,” said Dick, “that will be the end of Allington. I swear I will throw him into the next pond we come to, all trussed up as he is!”

Dick did not mean a word of it, but he succeeded in bluffing her. She gave in with a sullen gesture, and started to walk back towards the cab. Dick followed at her heels secretly triumphing. It was so sweet to get the best of her! The car he had heard now came in sight, bowling along the road, and he had a moment of sharpest anxiety. She must have been sorely tempted to hail it. However, she did not do so, and it passed out of sight.

As she climbed into the car she said coldly: “I shan’t love you any better for this.”

“I’ll take my chance of that,” said Dick.

They drove on.

## 8

In a thickly settled country like England it was not so easy to find a spot where they could unload Allington from the car by daylight without risk of discovery. Plug left the main road, but in every likely spot there always seemed to be a farm wagon creaking along within sight, or labourers in the fields. Dick longed for the sun to go down. It was hanging low in the sky when Plug finally stopped before an untenanted house.

“Here’s a stroke of luck,” he said, opening the door of the cab; “this is a darn sight better than a patch of woods or a ditch.”

“Coast clear?” asked Dick.

“All clear.”

“Then drive around behind where the car will be hidden from the road.”

Plug obeyed. From signs affixed to the fence it was apparent that somebody had designed to build a villa community in this spot, but the scheme had fallen through. This house, though new, was already falling into disrepair, and no others had been started on the plot. The site was too forbidding for villa-dwellers. Extremely tall trees covered it whose branches, high aloft, made a moaning sound in the wind. They had passed through a village about a quarter of a mile back, but the tall trees seemed to have completely swallowed them. All the while they were whispering at the back of the house, no soul passed in front.

Plug put his shoulder to the scullery door, and with a couple of shoves, it yielded. There were no other bars to ingress. Allington was carried, a dead weight, into the central hall of the house, and laid on the floor. The others looked around them curiously. This little villa had a piteous look, for it had never been lived in; yet cracks were already gaping in the plaster, and the woodwork was sprung. As a human habitation it had failed.

Alongside the back door there was a small garage which was not even locked, and upon seeing this Plug had decided to put up the cab, and walk into the village to buy a can of petrol. A taxicab would arouse too many questions in the minds of the villagers, he said. When he came back he would take off the meter. Before starting out he divested himself of his

chauffeur's overcoat and false moustache. Dick instructed him to purchase food for all of them.

Dick removed the woollen bag from over Allington's head and shoulders. The young man was discovered to be fully conscious, but limp and exhausted. His eyes darted looks of poisonous hatred at Dick, but he said nothing. Dick gagged him again, and tied his wrists and ankles.

The old quarrel between Dick and Millicent broke out afresh. Neither would yield an inch. It was scarcely agreeable to either of them to have Allington overhear what they said, and they went into one of the front rooms and closed the door. The plan of the house was simple. In the front there were two long rooms lying side by side, each with a bay window looking out on the garden of weeds surrounded by tall trees, and the road beyond. The hall took up the middle of the house with a stairway winding up at one side; and back of the hall were pantry, kitchen, scullery, etc.

Dick and Millicent had come into what was intended to be the drawing-room. Beside door and window, the only break in the cube was made by a pretty fireplace of white enamel and steel in which a fire had never been lighted. There was no place to sit down. They walked around the room, or leaned against the walls. The quarrels of those who might have been lovers are always the bitterest. Their whole study was how to wound each other. Plug was gone a long time. Darkness stole around the little house, and crept into the bare room, and they scarcely noticed that they could no longer see each other. In the dark the bitter, derisive voices had no less power to wound.

"I've got you!" cried Dick. "Do you think I'll ever let you go?"

"You haven't 'got' me," she retorted, "unless I come to you of my own will. And I'll never do that now!"

"Who's the stronger, anyhow?" cried Dick, well-nigh beside himself.

"Well, why don't you use your strength?" she said defiantly. "I am helpless here."

He could not, of course. "You'll drive me mad!" he cried.

"No good can ever come of it now," said Millicent. "You might as well let Henry and me go."

"Never!" cried Dick.

At last a low cheerful whistle alongside the house warned them of the return of Plug. He came in through the back of the house, striking matches

to see his way. He had packages of food which he placed on the floor.

“I brought a candle,” he said, “but we’ll have to be careful how we show a light in the window. This house has only been built five years, but it’s got a reputation in the village of being haunted.”

“So much the better for us,” said Dick gloomily.

“Well, it’s just as well that I didn’t take the old taxi into the village,” said Plug cheerfully. “The alarm has already been spread for us.”

“Who has spread it?” asked Dick quickly.

“I don’t know. Somebody has been telephoning all around the county asking for information about a London taxicab, and giving our licence number. It can hardly be the police, for the local police have not been called up but only the shop-keeper. The shop-keeper of the village yonder, which is called Effingham, told his mysterious enquirer that we had passed through over an hour ago. The whole village is buzzing with it. Fortunately they didn’t connect me with the outfit. What beats me is how Abrams could have picked up our trail so soon.”

“Oh, if he’s picked it up what does it matter how he did it?” said Dick gloomily. “That fellow in Bayswater Road who saw us fighting in the cab. He probably made a big story of it, and collected a crowd around him. The story would spread through the neighbourhood like wildfire. Abrams, missing Millicent and Allington, and making cautious inquiries, would soon run into it. That’s my guess.”

“Where’s Allington?” asked Plug suddenly.

“Outside in the hall.”

“I didn’t see him. I struck a match as I came through.”

They ran into the hall. It was only too true. Allington was gone. Dick had scarcely given him a thought all the time. He was gone, leaving only the cords which had bound him as mementoes. The girl laughed. Dick was maddened by the sound. He savagely cursed his own folly.

“The car!” cried Plug with dismay in his voice.

He ran out. Dick remained standing in the doorway of the drawing-room to block any attempt that Millicent might make to get out. He knew very well that he had lost all hold over her now that Allington had escaped out of his power. He felt about ready to give up. This adventure, ill-starred from the first, was apparently about to end in complete disaster.

Plug came slowly back.

“The car, is it there?” asked Dick sharply.

“Oh, it’s there all right,” said Plug heavily, “but he’s wrecked it.”

“Wrecked it in so short a time!” cried Dick.

“He evidently understands all about cars,” said Plug. “He just jerked the top off the distributor, and carried it away with him, wires and all. The car’s as much good to us now as a load of junk.”

Dick was silent. What was there to say? He pictured to himself how Millicent must be smiling to herself in the dark, and it was almost more than he could bear.

After awhile Plug said: “Well, whatever comes I suppose we’ve got to eat. Come into the back of the house where the light won’t give us away to anybody who passes.”

They carried the food into the larder which had a shuttered window. Here they could safely light their candle. They sat down on the floor to discuss the bread and cheese and ginger-beer that Plug had brought. They ate in silence. Dick felt grateful to Plug for forbearing to abuse him before the girl. He studied Millicent out of the corners of his eyes. Her slightly defiant air suggested that he needn’t bank on the fact that she was willing to eat the food he provided; food was a prisoner’s right.

Finally Plug said with the manner of one determined to put the best face on a bad job: “Oh, well, since they’ve broadcasted the description of the car and the licence number, it would be of very little further use to us. We can get another car, or take to the railway.”

Dick was not cheered by this. He foresaw the impossibility of controlling Millicent in any public conveyance.

“How about remaining quietly here until they’ve gone by?” suggested Plug.

Dick shook his head. “The danger that they may pick up Allington is too great. He would bring them right here.”

“Well, we had better beat it then,” said Plug. “Luckily for us at night a car gives warning of its coming a long way off.”

Dick glanced at Millicent. He said to Plug: “Wait outside for us a moment.”

Plug went out.

Dick gazed at Millicent wistfully, wondering what he could say that might move her from that stony air. In the end the words came of themselves.

“Millicent, are you going to stand by me?”

She flushed angrily. “I won’t make any promises,” she said. “I must be free to do whatever seemes best to me.”

“That’s not good enough,” said Dick harshly.

“Well, I’d like to know how you think you’re going to get anything better out of me,” she said, sticking up her chin.

“Not going to try,” said Dick sullenly. He took his pipe out, and started to fill it.

She watched him through her lashes. After awhile she said stiffly: “If we’re going we’d better go.”

“We’re not going,” said Dick.

“What!”

“They can come and get me for all I care.”

“Don’t be a fool!” said Millicent sharply. “Why make a bad matter worse? You can’t have me in any case. Why not save your own skin?”

“If I can’t have you, I don’t value my skin,” said Dick.

“You’re just trying to be theatrical,” she said with curling lip.

“All right,” said Dick. “Call it anything you like. I’ve said my say, and I stick by it. If I can’t get anything out of you but stubbornness I’ll be stubborn too. I’ll be more stubborn than you. I’ll die stubborn.”

There was another long silence.

Finally Millicent asked with a boyish toss of the head: “Well, what is it you want me to say?”

“I want you to stand by me,” said Dick all eagerness. “To promise me that you won’t try to run away when we leave this house.”

Millicent looked down at her hands. A silent struggle was going on within her. Finally she said in a tormented voice: “I *can’t* knuckle under to you. I can’t! I can’t. I would despise myself!”



“Oh, all right,” said Dick harshly; “then here we stay.”

Plug came in to ask if they couldn’t start. “I don’t like this hanging about here,” he said uneasily.

Dick merely shook his head.

Glancing from one to another, Plug took in the situation. He went out again.

Millicent was sitting with her knees partly folded under her, supporting herself with one hand resting on the floor. She kept her head averted from Dick. The steady flame of the candle illumined her clean boyish profile. The grace of that picture made Dick’s heart ache. What hellish messes human beings can get themselves into through pride and stubbornness? he thought; but thinking it didn’t help him any.

Neither had changed position when Plug came in again, more quickly this time. “Blow out the candle!” he whispered. “Somebody is coming around the house.”

Dick obeyed. A soft little cry escaped from Millicent. They all ran into the kitchen. The outer scullery door had been broken in, but there was a bolt on the kitchen door, also a lock with a key in it. Plug had shot the bolt and turned the key behind him when he came in. Dick quietly took possession of the key.

## 9

Dick and Plug felt their way restlessly around the empty house, listening at the apertures. The air had the flatness of a long closed place. It smelt of dust and plaster. There is no denying the fact that the breasts of both young men were heavily oppressed by fear. They suspected that this refuge of theirs was more likely to prove a trap than a fortress; they would have given a good deal to be out under the stars. They could hear nothing. Millicent remained leaning against the wall in the kitchen.

In the doorway between hall and pantry the two young men collided with each other. Each recoiled with a sharp gasp; then they laughed weakly.

“This will never do,” whispered Dick. “We’ll be fighting with our shadows directly. Stand still until you hear something.”

“They must have left their car in the village,” said Plug. “They came on foot.”

“How many?” asked Dick.

“I don’t know. More than three.”

“I wish there weren’t so many windows to the house,” grumbled Dick.

Upon investigation they discovered that there were keys in the doors of both drawing-room and dining-room. They locked these doors with satisfaction. That narrowed down the area to be defended to hall and kitchen. The main door was in the side of the house. It had been locked, and the key carried away. It was a stout affair of oak, capable of resisting any ordinary attempt to force it. The kitchen window was set in at the top of the wall. Their enemies could not enter that way unless they found a ladder to reach it from the outside.

At length they heard cautious steps enter the scullery. Their hearts rose slowly in their throats. The kitchen door was tried; a silence succeeded; then a deep voice said softly:

“Kid Murray Hill! Kid Murray Hill! Let me in.”

A cold shiver travelled up Dick’s spine at the sound of that voice. He made no answer.

“Kid Murray Hill!” the voice repeated. “This is Rulon.”

Dick knew only too well that it was Rulon.

“I want to parley with you. I’m alone here. Let me in.”

Dick made no sound, and after a moment or two the steps retreated.

Another heart-breaking period of inaction followed. Their nerves were stretched like violin strings. Finally they heard the glass of the drawing-room window crash in. It was almost a relief to hear it. Dick and Plug went into the hall. Steps approached from the other side, and the drawing-room door was tried. Rulon muttered under his breath.

“Kid Murray Hill,” he said aloud. “I know damn well you’re in there. Let me in. I want to parley with you.”

Dick saw that it would be child’s play for Rulon to break down this door, and was taking his measures accordingly. He lit the candle, and placed it on the floor alongside the stairs. He motioned to Plug to stand on one side of the drawing-room door, gun in hand, while he went up three steps on the other. His last words to Plug were:

“No killing unless we can’t avoid it. Don’t shoot unless you see that he is going to.”

Rulon put his shoulder to the door. It groaned like a person in pain, then suddenly yielded with a crack. Rulon walked in blinking a little, barehanded. He looked exactly as before; lean and massive; beautifully tailored; the fashionable derby placed just so, and his yellow face wreathed in a sinister grin.

“Put up your guns, young fellows,” he said. “We don’t none of us want any shooting round here.”

His devilish aplomb put both young men a little out of countenance. They lowered their guns, but did not put them up. Dick came down the three stairs. Rulon closed the smashed door as well as he could.

“I don’t want any of them——outside to interfere on us till I’ve finished my spiel,” he remarked.

He sat down on the stairs, and took out a cigar. “I just landed in London this afternoon in time to join in this chase,” he went on with his sinister affability—he clearly thought that he had everything in his hands. “You seem to be in a pretty ticklish situation here, my lads. Abrams is outside with a half dozen of his men. Why the hell didn’t you beat it out of the

house while you had a chance? We never could have nabbed you in the woods or fields.”

“Never mind that,” said Dick, “but say your say.”

“Well, I’m the bearer of a proposition from Sam Abrams,” said Rulon, with an infernal twinkle in his eye.

“What is it?” demanded Dick.

“Abrams says if you’ll hand over the pearls and the girl—by the by, where is that girl? I’m curious to have a look at her. She seems to have caused a lot of excitement.”

“Finish your proposition,” said Dick.

“Hand over the pearls and the girl, and he’s willing to let bygones be bygones. You and your friend are free to go where you will.”

“I can’t hand over the pearls,” said Dick, “because I left them in London.” (This was a lie; they were in his pocket.)

Rulon looked at him shrewdly. “Well, you’ll have to settle that with the old man.”

Dick saw that he did not believe him.

“Well, what do you say?” asked Rulon.

“That would be giving everything up,” said Dick, sparring for time.

“I don’t see that you got much choice,” said Rulon.

“What kind of a guarantee have I that Abrams would keep his word?”

“A damn poor guarantee if you ask me,” said Rulon with a cynical grin.

“That’s just how I look at it,” said Dick. “So I refuse.”

“So!” said Rulon, standing up. There was a glint of almost approval in his hard eye. “I expected that of you. A lad of spirit could hardly say less. . . . So much for Abrams!” He opened the drawing-room door and took a look inside. “I must rig up some way of fastening that,” he said, *sotto-voce*. To Dick he went on: “And now for my own personal proposition.”

“So there’s another,” said Dick with a curling lip.

“Yes, this is worth listening to,” said Rulon. “You hand over the pearls to me, and you can keep the girl. What’s more, I’ll stay here in the house with you until morning, and help you to defend yourselves from that gang out yonder.”

Dick stared at him, amazed at his utter shamelessness. In truth this man feared neither God nor Devil; even the honour which is supposed to exist among thieves had no meaning for him. "Do you mean that you would double-cross Abrams?" asked Dick.

"Surest thing you know," said Rulon coolly. "What do I care for them Britishers? Didn't they send me into that man-trap at Maidenhead to get the pearls for them? What did they care if I got plugged by a wop? And to-night again, the whole gang of them hadn't nerve enough to bust in here and face a couple of kids. It was: 'You go, Mike; you can talk them over.' 'Sure I'll go,' says I, and I adds to myself, and I'll damned well make what I can out of it for myself, too."

Dick, staring at the floor, considered this offer. In his desperate situation he was half inclined to accept it. True, he could not trust Rulon; the big man would as lief double-cross him as Abrams. On the other hand it was clear that Rulon was longing to turn a trick on Abrams. Might not self-interest be depended on to hold him to his bargain. The pearls were not too great a price to pay for Millicent, Dick thought—yes, but there was the rub; unless she were willing to stick to him, he would lose both pearls and girl. However way you argued the question, it all came back to her.

"Even if you stayed with us it would still be six or seven of them against three of us," said Dick, still playing for time.

"Aah!" said Rulon, with his scornful grin, "with the three of us in here, all armed"—he tapped his pocket significantly; "neither one of them nor all of them would dare set foot within door or window. *They know me!*"

"In the morning we'd be no better off," said Dick.

"In the morning," said Rulon, "we'll march out by the front door with our guns in our hands and the girl in the middle. We'll march into the village, and on to the railroad, and they wouldn't dare molest us by daylight if they was twice as many. They wouldn't even dare to draw our fire, they're so much afraid of their blooming police."

Dick knew that this was true.

"I'll take you under my protection," said Rulon. "Me and you and the girl and your friend here'll all sail back to America together. Could I say more?"

Dick smiled grimly at this odd mixture of childishness and devilish malignity. "Suppose I refuse?" he said.

“Oh, I ain’t afraid of their police,” said Rulon swaggering. “I’ll find a way of getting you before morning, if I have to burn you out.”

Dick’s blood ran cold.

“But I want to get back at Abrams,” Rulon went on. “I want to keep the pearls for myself, and tell him to go to hell after them. So I make you this offer. Can you do any better?”

“I’ll put it up to the girl,” said Dick. He called her. “Millicent!”

She was standing just within the door to the pantry, listening, and had only to make one step to show herself in the candle-light. Her face was like a mask. An exclamation of astonishment broke from Rulon.

“By God! she’s a beauty!”

Dick flushed with anger at the freedom of his tone. Rulon’s hard, insolent eyes took in the girl up and down, appraising every point. Dick ground his teeth, but held his tongue.

“I suppose you have heard this offer,” he said to Millicent. “What do you say?”

“What have I got to do with it?” she asked bitterly.

“Everything,” said Dick. “I must know whether there’s anything in it or not. Suppose we can win clear of the crowd outside with this man’s help, will you take me? I’d be penniless then.”

“I have already said all I’m going to say,” Millicent coldly replied. “Whether you are penniless has got nothing to do with it.”

“All right, I’m answered,” Dick said with extreme bitterness. “There’s nothing in it,” he said to Rulon.

“Hey?” said the big man, looking from one to another in perplexity.

“She won’t have me, pearls or no pearls,” said Dick with a harsh laugh. “So I’d be giving them up for nothing.”

Rulon was unable to make anything of this situation. His eyes dwelt on Millicent with an evil light in them. He was reluctant to accept his dismissal. “You better think twice . . .” he began.

“Oh, what do I care what happens now!” said Dick with a reckless gesture. “Get out!”

Rulon looked slyly at Plug, and observed that he was still holding his gun in his hand. "Oh well, to hell with it!" he said with a shrug, and turned to go through the drawing-room.

"Wait a minute," said Dick, yielding to a sudden reckless impulse. "You'd better take her with you."

"Hey?" said Rulon turning around.

Millicent stared at Dick with wide eyes and open mouth, as if she thought he had suddenly gone mad.

"I mean it," Dick said to her with a bitter smile. "He says he's going to burn us out, and I don't know what not. There's no use in your being let in for that, if there's nothing for me in it anyhow. I give up, see? You're free to go."

She pressed her hands to her breast. She was breathing fast. Clearly she could not believe in the evidence of her own senses.

"Go!" cried Dick in a passion of eagerness to get this painful scene over with. His face was tormented. "Your Henry is waiting outside."

"To hell with Henry," rumbled Rulon. "He's a slack-twisted piece of rope. There's better men than Henry would be glad to take care of you, my girl."

Millicent glanced at him gravely. Apparently she was not much attracted by his veiled offer.

"Will you go?" cried Dick desperately.

"No!" she said suddenly, as if the words were surprised out of her. Then the hard face broke up. She turned yearningly towards Dick. "Oh, Dick! . . . Oh, Dick . . .!" she faltered, running to him with uneven steps. Careless of the other men, she wreathed her arms about his neck. "Oh, Dick, I love you!" she murmured. "I can't hide it any longer."

The suddenness of the disclosure almost unmanned Dick. For a moment he looked terrified out of his wits. But that soon passed. Happiness irradiated him like sunshine. A laugh of pure joy broke from him. "Well, that's all right then!" he cried, hugging her with a right good-will.

"Ah, be good to me!" whispered Millicent, too low for the others to hear. "I have broken all my promises to myself. My pride is in the dust! I have nothing left!"

Dick bent his head to whisper back: "I have no pride with you. What good is pride between you and me?"

Rulon surveyed this scene with an ugly sneer. Nevertheless he instantly prepared to turn it to his advantage. "Well, that's all to the good," he said, returning into the hall. "Now you've got something worth fighting for."

Dick turned Millicent around within his arms. He looked like a man made over. "Sure," he said with a hard smile, "but not with your help, thanks. I feel strong enough now to fight for both my girl and my fortune. I need that for her."

Rulon snarled. "You fool . . ." he began.

"Am I right?" Dick asked Millicent quickly. "You shall decide."

"Oh yes!" she said instantly. "Not that I care about the money. But let's not have anything to do with them!"

"My idea exactly!" said Dick. "You've got your answer," he said to Rulon. "Beat it!"

Rulon, with a laugh of bravado, turned into the dark drawing-room. They heard him climb out of the window.



# 10

Dick's and Millicent's lips met involuntarily. That kiss threatened to be endless, and poor Plug was in a comical state of embarrassment and distress.

"Oh, for God's sake," he said, averting his head from the sight. "There's no time for that now. They may rush the house!"

Dick, raised a dreamy and ecstatic face from Millicent's. Thoughts of fighting were far from him then.

"I wish I had some way of fastening this broken door!" said Plug anxiously.

Dick, with an effort, recalled himself to earth. "It doesn't matter about that," he said, "we'll take to the stairs. Two of us ought to be able to hold the stairs against any number. And they can't take us in the rear."

"Suppose they set the place afire?"

"They won't do that except as a last resort. It would arouse the countryside. However, we'll be prepared for it."

"Shall I put out the light?" asked Plug.

"No. We want to be able to see them if they get in here. We'll be hidden around the bend of the stairs."

They went upstairs. Dick and Plug sat on the top step, with Millicent on the landing behind them. By craning their necks, and peeping between the banisters, they could survey almost the whole of the lighted hall below. In whispers they endlessly discussed what move their enemies would be likely to make.

"After all there are only about seven of them," said Dick. "They haven't got any cinch. They've got to watch the drawing-room window and the scullery door to make sure we don't give them the slip. There is also a window under the stairs here which would give us a way out. They may not have discovered that."

"Do you think they will come in after us?"

"I'm sure of it. It's their game to drive us out of the house, and it's our game to refuse to be driven out if we can avoid it."

They fell silent. After awhile Millicent's hand came timidly stealing inside Dick's for comfort. He closed on it warmly.

"What must you think of me?" she breathed, close to his ear.

"All that's fine!" he whispered back.

"I promised myself I'd keep myself from you," she whispered sadly, "and when the test came I collapsed. I have no strength at all!"

"Are you sorry now?" Dick asked quickly.

"No! I'm glad I collapsed."

He rubbed his cheek softly against hers. "It's for ever and ever now, isn't it?" he asked.

"For ever and ever!" she breathed.

Plug became very uneasy again. "You'd better cut out that whispering," he said. "I can't hear a thing."

They spoke no more.

A queer, oppressive silence filled the empty house; a silence that suggested bodies snaking their way inch by inch over the floors. How grateful they were to the steady flame of the candle below. At least nothing could happen in that part of the house without their being aware of it. Millicent's position, with all the unexplored blackness of the second story at her back, was the hardest. The skin between her shoulders crawled in the expectation of feeling a hand come out of the darkness. From afar off they heard the faint shrill whistle of a train.

"I wish we were on board it," said Dick grimly.

Somewhere on the second story there was a faint recurrent sound that they could not explain. It drove Millicent nearly beside herself with apprehension. Plug went to investigate.

"It's nothing at all," he explained on his return. "Just a twig scraping against the roof, outside the bathroom window. That window is in a little gable by itself, and there's a bit of sloping roof outside it. A tree grows close to the house on that side. The branches on the side of the house have been lopped off, but the stumps grow so close that you can step from the roof right into the tree. It might be useful later. I left the bathroom window open."

"Right," said Dick.

A very long time passed—or so it seemed to them.

“Could they have gone?” breathed Millicent.

“No such luck!” said Dick grimly.

“I wish they’d *do* something!” groaned Plug.

Almost as he spoke they heard a recognisable sound from below.

“Coming through the drawing-room window,” whispered Dick.

Plug’s hand went towards the side pocket of his coat where his gun was.

“Steady!” whispered Dick. “No shooting except as a last resort. If they all come in, we’ll go out through the bathroom window.”

Alas! they heard the unmistakable sound of two feet landing on the bathroom floor.

“Oh, damn!” groaned Plug. “I only opened a way for them!”

“Quick!” whispered Dick. “Down the stairs or we’ll be trapped between two fires!”

They hastened down on tip-toe. Dick trod out the candle as they passed, and pulled his two friends into the recess under the stairs. He fumbled at the fastening of the casement window there, but it resisted him. Then they heard two breathing figures come into the hall from the drawing-room, and became as still as mice.

An electric flashlight clicked on, and the dazzling little circle of light danced nervously around the walls of the hall. The man who held it was slowly advancing. In another moment it would have revealed them trapped, with the shut window behind them, when Dick, drawing his gun, fired it in the air. The explosion was deafening. The light vanished, and they heard two pairs of frightened feet run back into the drawing-room. Under cover of the momentary confusion, Dick got the window open.

“Out with you!” he whispered to Plug.

Over their heads Rulon’s voice roared from the stairs: “Outside, with you! They’re getting out the stair window!” At the same moment he smashed a pane of the upper window with his fist, and called through the hole: “Here they are! This side!”

It was too late to turn back. Dick followed Plug over the sill, and held up his arms to Millicent.

“Oh, he’s got me!” she cried in dismay.

Seizing hold of the sill, Dick hauled himself up again, and struck out blindly at the whitish patch that suggested Rulon’s face. His fist sank into something soft. There was a ripping sound as Millicent’s dress tore, and she fell to the ground. Dick fell beside her. Springing up, they joined hands, and started to run blindly.

“Plug!” yelled Dick.

“Go on!” answered a sorely tried voice. “They’ve got me!”

Dick hesitated in a kind of desperation. How could he leave Plug? There was the sound of a confused struggle in the dark near-by. Then more figures seemed to rise out of the ground on every side. A man flung his arms against Dick. He had to let go Millicent’s hand in order to fight him off. The untilled garden was rough; matted grasses caught at the feet. The two men went down heavily; Dick undermost. With a tremendous heave, he flung his assailant off, and scrambled to his feet, looking round for his girl. He heard her terrified voice:

“Dick! Oh, Dick!”

He plunged in the direction of the sound. Two men were dragging her away. Dick felt nerved with the strength of half a dozen. A blow on the side of the head, sent one man reeling; Dick gripped the other round the throat and flung him heavily on the ground. The first man rushed back at him to be met with blows from right and left fair in the face that stretched him on his back. Dick got hold of Millicent’s hand again, and started in the direction of the garden gate. They crashed through the flimsy structure before they knew they had reached it.

Then Dick stopped. He *could not* leave Plug behind. Putting his hand in his side pocket he drew out the little packet of pearls, and thrust them into Millicent’s hand. “Beat it down the road!” he said breathlessly. As far as he could tell, she obeyed him. He turned back.

Avoiding the two men who were searching for him blindly in the front garden, Dick headed for the spot at the side of the house where Plug, from the sounds, was still struggling manfully. Three men were hanging on him, under the impression perhaps that they had Dick. Dick was unable to use his gun for fear of hitting his partner. He bored in with his fists. He managed to separate two of the leeches that were fastened to Plug, but the contest was too unequal. All the men ran up; seven against two. A pair of strong arms was flung around Dick from behind and locked in front; and a knee was

pressed into the small of his back rendering him helpless. Plug was quickly secured in the same manner.

For a moment or two nothing was to be heard but the laboured panting of nine pairs of lungs. Then somebody said:

“The girl is gone!”

Abrams’ sly, whining voice replied: “She won’t go far without him.”

And as a matter of fact, Dick presently saw Millicent come drifting through the darkness.

“Which is the one we want?” asked Abrams, and the flashlight was brought into play. “Here he is!” he said with devilish, malignant satisfaction, sticking his ugly face close into Dick’s. “Hold him, Bill, while I search him.”

As Bill was already nearly breaking Dick’s back, the caution seemed to be hardly necessary. Abrams’ nimble fingers threaded Dick’s clothes. “They’re not on him,” he said in a disappointed voice. “Maybe he gave them to her.”

Millicent was seized and searched: the pearls were not found on her. To Dick in that black moment it hardly seemed to matter. He was filled with a sickening sense of futility. He had failed; after all his striving and fighting, failure! They had done him! Everything was over!

“We’ll make them tell later,” said Abrams with a horrible giggle. “We got to get away from here now. Henry, can you make that car go?”

“Yes,” came a mumbled reply out of the dark. “I’ve got the parts in my pocket.”

“Then bring it round! Bring it round! God knows how soon we may have the constables upon us with all the noise that has been made here.”

Allington went off around the house. The others remained standing about, half apprehended shapes in the darkness. The sky was completely overcast, and it was one of the darkest nights that Dick could remember.

Rulon’s big figure loomed up in front of him. He had lighted a cigar of excellent aroma. “Well, Kid,” he drawled tauntingly. “Hard lines! Hard lines! You had ought to have accepted Mr. Abrams’ offer in the beginning.”

Dick gritted his teeth, and held his tongue.

“Mr. Abrams is a kind-hearted man,” Rulon continued mockingly, “but you sure have put him to a lot of trouble. He’ll take a lot of smoothing down.”

Rulon had brought his body close to Dick’s, and the young man found his revolting physical presence harder to bear than the mocking words. It required all his self-command to keep from flinging out at him.

And then Dick felt something significantly cold touch his fingers. They grasped it eagerly. A gun! There was magic in the feel of it. A renewed hope surged up in Dick’s breast. Rulon, chuckling drifted away in the direction of Plug, where, assumably, a similar scene took place. Dick looked around for Millicent. She was standing a yard or so away like one at a loss. As if in response to Dick’s look, she moved closer to him.

A complete silence fell upon the waiting party. Dick could not tell what had become of Rulon then. Abrams raised his voice querulously:

“Why doesn’t he bring that car?” He despatched another man around the house to help Allington.

Then suddenly from the direction of the road, Rulon’s voice roared out, urgent with terror. “Cheese it, the police! Run fellows, run!” A shot crashed out.

Dick did not need to be told that this was his cue. He fired his gun into the ground and shouted: “Police! Police!” Plug instantly followed suit. The effect was electrical. Abrams and his men simply faded into the darkness. The man who held Dick, dropped to all fours and scuttled away through the herbage as swiftly as an animal.

Seizing Millicent’s hand, Dick ran for the gate. Rulon was ahead of him, Plug close at his heels. Gaining the road, they all turned in the direction away from the village. Rulon was chuckling away to himself: “Oh, Gee! Oh, Gee!” When Dick came abreast of him he whispered: “Got the pearls all right?” Dick thought it more polite to lie at the moment. “Yes,” he said.

However, the lie was instantly made good. They ran across a culvert, and Millicent, jerking her hand out of Dick’s, knelt down beside the road, and thrust an arm in. Rejoining Dick in a breath’s space, she pressed the little packet of pearls into his hand. He dropped in his pocket.

The panic amongst Abrams men was only momentary. They could now be heard charging out of the yard. “Come on! Come on!” Abrams was crying in a voice sharp with rage.

“Take to the woods!” whispered Rulon. “We’ll baffle ’em!”

They turned off amongst the trees on the left, and each keeping a hand on the one in front, proceeded as fast as they were able, lightfooted through the leaf mould. Abrams heard them leave the road, and stopped when he came up. “They’ve gone in here!” he squalled; and the luminous disk of the flashlight danced wildly amongst the trees. It did not reach them. Abrams ran on a few yards. “Here’s a path!” he cried. “Follow me and we’ll head them off!”

They could be heard running through. Rulon spread out his arms to stop the progress of his little party. “Much obliged for the information!” he whispered, chuckling. “We’ll go back to the road, now.”

They found the road deserted. Crossing it, they struck into the trees on the other side. Rulon led the way slowly and cautiously into the depths of the woods. It appeared that he had a pocket compass with a luminous needle. It was hard going in the dark with many a collision and a stumble, but they had the satisfaction of losing all sound and sign of Abrams’ party.

Dick put an arm around Plug’s shoulder, and whispered in his ear: “Watch Rulon close! He means to play us a dirty trick!”

“I get yeh!” said Plug grimly.

When Rulon considered that they had got far enough from the road, he changed his course. He was still heading away from the village of Effingham. "There's been too much comin' and goin' there," he remarked. Since nothing in the English countryside is on a very big scale, they presently issued out from among the trees into a field. Crossing it, they stumbled into one of the hard-beaten footpaths which are among the oldest things in old England. Since it led generally in the direction they wished to go, they followed it. After carrying them over several stiles, it deposited them in a road. Whether or not it was the same road they had left they had no means of knowing. It was not the main road.

Four abreast, they walked along the road cheerfully enough. Rulon was in great spirits, and Dick, while relinquishing none of his watchfulness, was perfectly willing to joke with him. Rulon was a remarkable man, Dick conceded to himself. There was something magnificent about his villainies; in a way it was a privilege to have known him. Millicent had an instinctive dread of the big man, and was always careful to keep Dick between her and Rulon.

"Like rabbits!" cried Rulon, bursting into laughter for the dozenth time as he remembered the scene. "What a footless bunch! I can't understand how they got were they are! Now us four would make the nucleus of a first-rate organisation. Millicent with her looks and class could get in anywhere."

The freedom of his style caused Dick's gorge to rise again; but as he was aware of the absurdity of insisting under these circumstances that Rulon should address Millicent as Miss Starr, he kept his mouth shut.

"You've got looks and class, too," Rulon said to Dick, "and a sort of a Y.M.C.A. expression that would take anybody in. Nobody would ever believe you was such a slick young feller. You could go far with proper direction."

"Thanks," said Dick dryly.

"And Plug here," Rulon went on, "with his ugly Plug mug. Honest Plug! I tell you it would be an unbeatable combination. What do you say, boys and girls? Shall we stick together for good?"



“We’ll talk it over,” said Dick good-humouredly. “Plenty of time on the way home.”

“Where are the pearls?” asked Rulon a little later.

“In my pocket,” said Dick coolly.

“How did you get by Abrams with them?”

“Oh, we worked a variety of the shell game on him.”

“Hand them over,” said Rulon.

Now Dick was not as much in awe of Rulon as he had once been. With his girl hanging to his arm, his fortune in his pocket, and his friend to support him, he felt strong. “Nothing doing,” he said in an unconcerned voice.

“What the hell . . .!” Rulon said angrily.

“Be yourself! Be yourself!” said Dick. “I turned down your offer, remember. If you wanted to help us anyhow, that was your lookout. I want to do the square thing by you, but that doesn’t mean forking over all I’ve got. Not by a damned sight!”

Rulon swallowed his anger. “Hm!” he said. And let the subject drop.

After several hours walking they came to a large village on the railway. The station was closed, indicating that no more trains might be expected that night. Indeed in the whole rambling, pleasant village no light showed in any window. Only the cats were wakeful. They debated whether or not to rouse up the people of the inn.

“We could say that our car broke down a few miles out,” suggested Dick.

Millicent was dead against it. “Too many questions would be asked,” she said. “We’re not far enough away from Abrams. Let us keep going until daybreak, and then take a train.”

And so they walked on out into the country.

But Millicent hung on Dick’s arm more and more heavily. Realising this, Dick said finally: “We don’t have to keep walking. Let us find a place where we can rest until morning.”

Some distance further along, across a strip of a planted field, a wooded rise loomed through the darkness.

“It would be dry and sheltered under those trees,” Dick suggested.

They crossed the planted strip and penetrating a little way among the trees, came to a bed of dry and ferny stuff. “Bracken!” said Millicent, letting herself sink into it with a sigh of content.

How snug they could have lain there had it not been for Rulon! Dick realised that there could be little sleep for him. He put his back against a tree, and pulled out his pipe. Millicent crept close to him and dropped her head on his shoulder. In a moment or two she was asleep. Dick dared not stir however his limbs might stiffen. He pulled Plug’s head over near his own.

“You sleep first,” he said. “I’ll wake you later.”

Plug stretched out in the bracken with a great sigh, and that was the last he heard from him.

Meanwhile Rulon had dropped down a couple of yards away. Dick could not see him, but could *feel* just where he lay. By the absolute stillness of the man Dick knew that he lay wakeful. It was like having a venomous snake couched in the grass a yard or two away. He touched the gun in his pocket to reassure himself. He reminded himself that Rulon could not possibly take on both him and Plug simultaneously. A measure of calmness returned to him. However, he allowed his pipe to go out. The glowing bowl offered too fair a mark to shoot at.

Dick wondered greatly what was passing through Rulon’s mind. For himself he felt solemn. But what thoughts did the blind night, the hovering trees, the sense of the naked earth beneath one put into the head of a man like Rulon? Dick could not guess. He had no key to Rulon. There was something inhuman about the man. Something was lacking in him that all the other men Dick knew possessed. Rulon was as strange as a snake.

After awhile Rulon answered the unasked question. “You think I’m a pretty bad actor, don’t you?” he drawled in a tone of contemptuous amusement. “You’re figgering to yourself that I’m so plumb rotten you don’t owe me nothing for gettin’ you out of a hole awhile back.” He chuckled dryly. “And so I am! So I am!” he went on, without waiting for Dick to reply. “I’m as bad a man as ever was, I guess. I glory in it. Well, it’s something to be at the head of your profession!” He went on with almost a dreamy note in his voice. “Ever since I was a young kid I been the same. Nobody’s say-so was good enough for me. All that stuff they tell you about what you ought to do and what you oughtn’t to do didn’t take on me. I did what I wanted. That was law enough for me. I always said better be a bad

man than a tame one. What the hell, I like to make trouble. It's a satisfaction to me. But at that, I always face things out; I call things by their right names; I don't kid myself!"

Dick grinned into the dark. You're doing it this minute, old man! he thought.

Rulon seemed not to expect a reply to his apologia, and Dick offered none. A few minutes later the man's deep, slow breathing suggested that he was asleep.

Dick thought: if we could slip away now! And his heart beat fast. He waited awhile, listening hard. Sure a man could not imitate the deep breathing of sleep so unfalteringly. Satisfied at last, he undertook to awake Millicent and Plug by laying a finger on the lips of each in turn. Awakened in this manner by a warning, they sat up without making a sound. He breathed the suggestion into the ear of each, then gave them time to collect their faculties.

Not the whisper of a sound had been made; but as they stood up, by the mysterious influence of telepathy which works alike for the just and the unjust, an intimation of their purpose was conveyed to Rulon's brain. He sat up.

"What's the matter?" he asked mockingly. "Did you hear something?"

The three young people sank back in the bracken, feeling very foolish.

At sunrise, Dick, having had a sleep in the meantime, was on watch again. On one side of him Plug lay asleep; and on the other, Millicent couched with her cheek on her folded hands, and her knees drawn up. His heart swelled with tenderness at the sight. Further away Rulon lay squarely on his back in the bracken, breathing stertorously through his open mouth, not at all a pretty sight.

Looking at him, Dick thought grimly: If I stuck my gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger it would solve all our problems. That's what *he* would do. Unfortunately I've got scruples.

He did not wish to wake Plug and Millicent just yet. In the level rays of the rising sun the prospect before him was lovely. The narrow field below was planted in potatoes, the tops of which were beginning to yellow. A half dozen labourers, men and women, arrived on the scene with a horse and plough and baskets to harvest the crop. Beyond the potato field ran the grey road, climbing into view on the left from a bridge which they had crossed the night before. The bridge itself was not visible. Across the road an

emerald green meadow stretched down to a brimming little English river, with a chequered park-like landscape filling in the distance; the inevitable church tower visible among the trees.

The whirr of a motor was heard in the distance. The sound seemed to act automatically on the consciousnesses of the three sleepers, for one after another they sat up blinking. The car crossed the hidden bridge, and appeared in sight to the left, climbing the hill. Something in the aspect of the battered hood, in the voice of the engine, struck familiarly on Dick's and Plug's senses.

"Our car!" they cried.

In another moment they could quite clearly recognise the figure of Allington at the wheel, still trigged out in the modish afternoon costume he had donned for his wedding the day before.

Rulon sprang up with a devilish sparkle in his eyes. "Let's insult them!" he cried.

Dick seized hold of his coat. "Sit down, you fool!" he cried. "We're hidden here. Let them pass."

Rulon tore himself free. "I never could take a dare," he cried, with a side glance at Millicent. "What the hell! They're licked, and they know they're licked! They wouldn't dast do a thing with them labourers lookin' on!"

He ran out from among the shelter of the trees into the open, and putting his hands to his mouth let out a stentorian yell. The others saw Allington turn his startled head. He stopped the car, and the grey and unreverend head of Abrams stuck out of the window behind. Meanwhile Rulon, on the slope of the little rise, outlined against a background of trees and ferns, was capering and yelling like some strange mythological figure hurling insults.

"Yah! you shyster! You pock-marked, moth-eaten son of an ol' clo'es man, this is me, Michael Rulon! And I've done you up good! And I'll do you up again if you ever cross my path!"

Abrams withdrew his head as sharply as a turtle retreating into its shell. There was a pause, then a puff of smoke appeared through the car window followed by a loud report. In the act of launching fresh insults, Rulon fetched a great sob and collapsed in a heap in the grass. He writhed once or twice, and flopped over on his back stone dead. There was no mistaking the awful look of him.

Dick, Millicent and Plug looked on, paralysed with horror. It happened so quickly they could not take it in. They heard the engine of the car open up, and stupidly watched it speed off up the road. They saw how one of the men labourers made a futile attempt to run after it as if to get the number. But he never got within two hundred yards of it. The other two men started towards the body of Rulon, but slowly, terrified already by what they knew they would find.

It was the sight of these men coming towards their hiding-place that recalled Dick to himself. He sprang to his feet with a sort of grunt. "Here! this is no place for us!" he exclaimed; and seizing a hand of each of his companions, he plunged into the thickest part of the wood, pulling them after him. They tore up the rise, and rushed pell-mell down the other side, never pausing until they had put a good half mile between them and the scene of the tragedy.

Proceeding at a more moderate pace, they looked at each other, still a little stupefied by the recollection.

"Well," said Dick, grimly striving to fix a meaning to the affair, "as it happens, it's a lucky thing for us!"

"Oh, Dick!" protested Millicent, shocked; "the man is dead! If it hadn't been for him we would be in Abrams' hands this minute!"

"I can't feel sentimental about Rulon," said Dick obstinately. "He only saved us from Abrams in order to be able to rob us himself at his leisure. There was worse than robbery in his eye when he looked at you. No! Rulon was the worst of them all! He's better dead!"

Such was the elegy of Michael Rulon.

# 12

Through the woods, across fields and along by-roads they proceeded in a northerly direction for no better reason than that Abrams had been last seen travelling westward. An hour or two's walking brought them to a small market town, which was also a railway junction. Here they procured a much needed breakfast. It was a happy, quiet meal. After the storms of the past few days, a blessed peace and relaxation filled them; they felt free to slouch in their chairs, plant elbows on the table, and be silent with each other; or to talk about small things that didn't matter.

When they began to discuss plans of further action, they discovered a common desire to avoid London. Millicent shivered at London.

"There's no need for us to go back there," said Dick. "Everything we possess in the world is in my pocket."

Exploring through the mazes of a British timetable they discovered that it was possible to reach the midlands of England by branch line trains, without the necessity of returning to the metropolis whence all railways radiated like the spokes of a wheel.

"Let's not stop in England," said Dick. "Let's go on to Scotland. I have heard that it is easier to get married in Scotland."

Everybody at the table took marriage as a matter of course now.

"There is Glasgow," Dick went on, "a big town. There are plenty of ships from Glasgow to New York. Let's stop in Glasgow while we're getting married, and getting a passport for Millicent."

"They might look for us in the ports," suggested Plug.

"They might," conceded Dick, "though I think that Abrams will be fully occupied for the present in keeping out of the hands of his dreaded police. Let it be Edinburgh then; that's big enough to hide in. We'll lodge in Edinburgh until we are ready to sail."

In a provincial town that night they eagerly bought copies of the London afternoon papers. The murder of Michael Rulon constituted a first-class newspaper sensation. It contained all the elements of strangeness and mystery. If it was fascinating to the disinterested reader, consider with what

avidity the three unguessed principals in the affair devoured every published detail.

The farm labourers were, of course, the sole source of information. They told a graphic tale of how, while they were digging potatoes early in the morning, a motor car drove past them, and immediately afterwards a man stepped out from among the trees above, and started shouting at the car. He spoke with a strange accent, and they could not repeat what he said, except one sentence. He had cried out: "I am Michael Rulon!" They were all agreed as to that. The car stopped; a shot was fired from it and the man fell dead. One of them had tried to obtain the licence number of the car, but it had got away too quickly. The police had not succeeded in finding such a car. It was supposed that the murderers must have driven it into deep water in some lonely spot along the coast.

In the first accounts the identity of Michael Rulon remained wrapped in mystery. He carried a United States passport in his pocket, but it was not made out in the name of Rulon. From the endorsements upon it, it was apparent that he had landed in England twice during the summer, the last time, only the day before he was shot. Later editions, though, had plenty of details about Michael Rulon. As soon as the story was cabled to America, anecdotes more or less true of the famous super-thief, the lone wolf, the connoisseur of jewels, came crowding back over the wires. But no one could explain what Rulon was doing in England, and least of all how he had got into that lonely corner of Surrey so early in the morning. Nobody could guess who there was in England who had an object in shooting him. Rulon was buried at the expense of the local guardians, and the affair remained a complete mystery.

Later, while they were lodged in Edinburgh, another story developed in the newspapers which was of scarcely less interest to our three friends than the first one. The invading armies of Nusylvania finally succeeded in overrunning the state of Bulomania, and had taken the capital, Castadja, by storm. The public treasure of Bulomania, and what remained of the ancient crown jewels had been seized as the spoils of war, and a provisional government had been set up, tributary to Nusylvania.

"I guess that disposes of whatever shadowy claim Poniatevsky may have had to the pearls," said Dick, grinning. "As for Nusylvania, I don't believe the most rigid moralist of them all could make out a case that she had any right to them. My conscience is now at rest!"

"I hadn't noticed that it was troubling you much," remarked Plug.

“Perhaps not; perhaps not,” said Dick, airily. “Still, it’s a satisfaction to have the situation cleaned up.”

A subsequent story told how ex-King Miguel, rushing home to his fatherland to lead a forlorn hope—some called it a grand-stand play—had taken sick and died from a surfeit of lobster partaken of on the march. He did not appear to be deeply regretted by any side.

Still later they read that Prince Boris Poniatévsky, late *chargé-d’affaires* in London, had been the first of the Bulomanian nobles to swear fealty to the new government. He had been rewarded with a high position in the State.

“Trust Boris to get in on the ground floor!” said Dick. “And so ends the story of Bulomania as far as we are concerned!”

On the sun deck of s.s. *Tuscania*, Dick, Millicent and Plug were lined up arm in arm in that order, watching the amazing towers of Manhattan emerge through the early morning mist, as the big ship felt her way up the bay. During the voyage which was now drawing to a close, these three had never been seen to separate; nor had they displayed the least desire to admit any other company into their little circle. Among the passengers there had been a good deal of speculation as to which was married to which. This was due to the fact that Dick and Millicent, determined not to let Plug feel like the third, the outsider, had been especially affectionate towards him. Their solicitude made him feel, perhaps, a little more the outsider, still it had been a jolly voyage. All their troubles were behind them.

“So that is New York,” said Millicent. “It looks like a city turned up on edge. I think . . . I think I am a little afraid of it.”

“Oh, we shan’t let it fall on you,” said Dick lightly. “Shall we, Plug?”

“Not if we can help it,” said Plug in his sober style.

“I wonder . . .” said Millicent slowly.

“Wonder what?” demanded Dick, always jealous of his wife’s thoughts.

“I wonder what New York is hiding up her sleeve for us.”

“I can tell you,” said Dick quickly. “No more of that adventure stuff. I’ve had enough thrills to last me the rest of my life. Hereafter my line shall be unalloyed domesticity; slippers by the fire; canary in a gilded cage; horseless piano. A little flat on Madison Avenue somewhere in the Seventies; three rooms and kitchenette. Good-looking furniture . . .”



“You needn’t think I’m going to live with you,” said Plug truculently.

“Oh, well, you can dine with us every day,” said Dick. . . . “I’ll tell you what New York has up her sleeve; twenty pretty dresses for Millicent! I’ll have a job so she won’t get sick of me hanging round the house, and when I come home! Oh, boy! every night it will be like being born anew! . . . . The kitchenette, get me, is just for Millicent to amuse herself making little messes for breakfast and lunch. We’ll go out to dinner. . . .”

“It sounds lovely,” said Millicent, “but . . .”

“But what, woman?”

Millicent gazed wistfully at the towers. “I doubt if we are that sort of people. I doubt if New York will let us alone any more than London did. It looks like an extravagant sort of city . . .”

“It is,” put in Plug.

“. . . Where any wild thing might happen.”

Dick good-humouredly shook his fist at the towers. “I defy New York to get us in wrong!” he said.

“Time will tell,” remarked Plug.

And Time did.

THE END

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By CECIL ROBERTS

*Author of Sagusto, Little Mrs. Manington, etc.*

Mr. Cecil Roberts, in his new novel, has come home, and has written a great London novel, in which he tells the very human story of a young girl from the provinces and her London lover. Their romance is symbolised by two statues, that of "Diana" in Hyde Park, and of "David" in Grosvenor Place. In such a setting delightful Diana and young David work out, through disastrous events, their story amid the bricks of London. It would not be Mr. Cecil Roberts if he did not carry his readers abroad once, and so the author of "Scissors" and "Sails of Sunset" shows us Diana on the Riviera for a brief time, a setting that calls forth the colour and descriptive power which has made his work famous. "David and Diana" is a delectable story of London lovers.

# T HE FORTUNATE WAYFARER

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

*Author of Miss Brown of X.Y.O., The Light Beyond, etc.*

Crossing the cobbled street of a cathedral town, Martin Barnes, commercial traveller, is invited to enter an impressive dwelling with a secluded air, whose owner, Lord Ardrington, believing himself at the point of death, presents this fortunate wayfarer with notes to the value of £80,000. Ardrington, however, recovers, and Barnes, seeking him out at Ardrington Park to refund the money, is confronted with a twelve-foot spiked wall. What is it that inspires Ardrington with such terror? Why does he urge Barnes to marry Laurita, Ardrington's lovely South American step-daughter? And how does the timid ex-commercial traveller deport himself when confronted with Laurita's villainous father, Victor Porle? To answer these questions would be to reveal the plot of one of the most ingenious of mysteries which the prince of storytellers has ever written.

# ERISHABLE GOODS

P

By DORNFORD YATES

*Author of Blind Corner, etc.*

Mr. Dornford Yates has found further adventure for the protagonists of his brilliantly successful novel, "Blind Corner." Because Mansel, Hanbury and Chandos had made a fortune, "Rose" Noble had lost one. He returned to the charge in a letter addressed to Mansel: "The stolen goods will be returned on the receipt of five hundred thousand pounds. . . . No time should be lost, for the goods are perishable." The "goods" are Mansel's beloved friend Adele Pleydell, between whom and Mansel "there never was so gentle a relation." The three friends, and Tester, the Sealyham, journey to Carinthia where Adele is imprisoned in the almost impregnable Castle of Garth. The tense, grim struggle that was waged in and around the castle was to the death; and when "Rose" fell, shot through the head, Mansel, his task accomplished, lay close to death upon the bed of kings.

T

## HE CROUCHING BEAST

A "Clubfoot" Novel by VALENTINE WILLIAMS

*Author of The Eye in Attendance, Mr. Ramosi, etc.*

The Man with the Clubfoot makes a sensational re-entry upon the stage of fiction. The scene is pre-war Germany; the period, those hot summer weeks of 1914 immediately preceding the clash of arms. In the shadow of the glittering panoply of military Prussia lurks a dim figure, awe-inspiring, ruthless, all-powerful, guarding the secret of the War Party's coming bid for world dominion, ready to pounce upon and destroy those who would reveal the truth to Europe sunk in peace. Of the strange adventure that came to Olivia Dunbar one summer night in the Kommandanten-Haus at Schlatz, and of the merciless march of events that drew her into the long duel of wits between the British Secret Service and the Kaiser's Master Spy, hobbling, grim and forbidding, among the brilliant figures of the Imperial Court, the story tells, and its breathless unfolding is interwoven with the charming romance of a British ex-officer who sought and won rehabilitation in the Secret Service of his country.

# SURRENDER

By J. C. SNAITH

*Author of Thus Far, Time and Tide, etc.*

Two men—one English, one American—desert from the French Foreign Legion. They escape into the African desert. After years of terrible hardship and incredible adventure in places where no white man has trod, they reach Cairo, and thence return to the civilisation of the West. Each owes his life over and over again to the exercise of the other's will. But a woman of great beauty and magnetic personality enters the life of both. She is already pledged to the one, but the other learns that she is vital to his existence. The problem of their future seems insoluble; and it finally involves an act of supreme self-sacrifice on the part of the one which the other is forced to accept.

## LIFE STEPS IN

By RUBY M. AYRES

*Author of Broken, The Luckiest Lady, etc.*

When selfish Mollie Hambledon came home from Rhodesia, she invited her old school friend, Diana, to play nurse to Mollie's lame child, "the Little General." Then Anthony Hambledon came back too. Anthony and Ana fight against their love beneath the watchful eye of the philandering Mollie, who eventually deserts Anthony, leaving him free. And down to the sea goes Ana, with her friend Jessica and "the Little General"—to await Anthony's coming. And once more Life steps in. . . . Ruby M. Ayres has written nothing finer than this poignant story of a woman's happiness, snatched away in the moment of fulfilment.

## THE FLUTES OF SHANGHAI

By LOUISE JORDAN MILN

*Author of In a Shantung Garden, Ruben and Ivy Sen, etc.*

This is Mrs. Miln's new novel of the real China. John Cadell was a power in Shanghai, a power in China, whose people he understood and loved. In troubled 1927, with the loyal help of Hing Mee-yin, the flute-girl of the Flutes of Shanghai, he dared death at Chinese hands and calumny from European tongues, for the ultimate benefit of both the White and the Yellow races, and risked all to save the posthumous honour of his friend. Ruth Blake travels, with her rich aunt, to China, and helps to unravel the tangled skein and finds her own happiness. Not a laboured account of international differences—a story of human hearts; not a historical treatise, yet it throws a powerful searchlight on China's present poignant dilemma and on the consequent peril to British interests in China.

## OOFS OFF

By RICHMAL CROMPTON

*Author of The Wildings, The Thorn Bush, etc.*

Richmal Crompton in her new novel takes the roofs off houses—Rosslyn, and Sunnymede, Mentone, The Limes, Balmoral, Glen House, Hess Bank, The Little House, The Beeches, and The Hall—and looks at the folk inside, with ruthless clarity, verity and authenticity, and tells their story. It is a new idea for a novel, and the kind of idea that can only be turned into a big novel—and this is a big novel—by an artist with the sheer ability and skill of craftsmanship of the author of “Millicent Dorrington.”



A

## CESSORY AFTER THE FACT

By MRS. BAILLIE REYNOLDS

*Author of The Gift in the Gauntlet, The Spell of Sarnia, etc.*

Gilda Franklin, attractive and financially independent, had led the comfortable, care-free life of the English professional classes until the day when, lonely and disappointed, she crossed from Lausanne to Evian, on her way to the Green Lake. From that moment, adventures thronged her. The mysterious red-headed man with the heavy bag, who turned out to be the chauffeur at the Hotel du Lac, first aroused her attention. That same evening, when the valley thrilled to the news of the murder on the lonely Pass, and she found to her horror that she had seen the victim's face before, she realised that no course was open to her but to keep her knowledge secret, and remain wholly outside the police investigations. But fate decreed otherwise, and her accidental discovery of the hidden ashes on the mountain-side had unforeseen and startling results.

J

## UGGERNAUT

By ALICE CAMPBELL

"Juggernaut," by Alice Campbell, is a most remarkable first novel. The story deals with the strange experiences of a nurse employed by an English family living in the South of France, and, although it reaches such dramatic intensity, the logical procession of incidents, in a setting outwardly normal, lends it an air of reality which is so often missing in the realm of books. It is this attribute, coupled with the author's ability to make her characters live the atmosphere which she infuses into her work, which will place "Juggernaut" and Alice Campbell in very high company in their first season.

O

## NE OF THE CHORUS

By BERTA RUCK

*Author of Her Pirate Partner, The Mind of a Minx, etc.*

Here is a new romance by Berta Ruck as fresh and scintillating as its title. It is the story of one Melody Wynne, a chorus dancer of good family, and with a temperament which causes her to treat the whole of life as a joy-ride or escapade. When her devoted lover, Keith Cartwright, proposes to her, she tosses up as to whether she shall marry him and go off to India, or continue her profession. The job wins, but only for the time being, and the end of the story shows why it was that Love, this time, got the better of Profession.

# T HE GOLDEN ROOF

An Historical Novel by MARJORIE BOWEN

*Author of The Pagoda, The Countess Fanny, etc.*

The title is taken from the Golden Roof (of copper tiles, gilded) on the Imperial Palace at Innsbruck, one of the few tangible memorials left of the greatness of Maximilian I of Habsburg, 1459-1519, Holy Roman Emperor, who dreamed once to roof the whole world with the gold of his achievements. The characters in the tale are all historic, the Emperor himself, Ludovico Sforza, Louis XII of France, Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII of England, Charles Egmont, Duke of Guelders, and the scene is the Tyrol, Vienna, Auysburg, Flanders, Guelders, and France. The love interest is provided by the love story of Maximilian himself with his first wife, Mary of Burgundy.

# A TALE THAT IS TOLD

By S. L. BENSUSAN

*Author of A Countryside Chronicle, etc.*

In "A Tale That is Told" S. L. Bensusan presents his first novel, after more than thirty years of literary activity in many parts of the world in the service of nearly all the leading papers. The story is written in part round the marshlands of the East Coast, and for the rest is laid in the London of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. The book introduces many of the country types that have appeared in the author's sketches of East Anglia, books like "Village Idylls" and "A Countryside Chronicle," that have achieved noteworthy success.

# A S A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

A Dr. Thorndyke Novel by R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

*Author of The Red Thumb Mark, A Certain Dr. Thorndyke, etc.*

This latest of all stories of Thorndyke, the ace of detectives, has an added interest in that the author deals with a subject usually

avoided in his previous works—the crime of the poisoner. It opens with the arrival home of Barbara Monkhouse, who has been summoned by a telegram and arrives to find her husband dead. Dr. Thorndyke is commissioned to investigate the case, and the story is then occupied with the gradual emergence of the obscure and contradictory evidence, the real meaning of which no one but Thorndyke grasps. Just when it has been decided that the mystery will have to be given up as insoluble, Thorndyke comes suddenly into the open with a complete case for a prosecution.

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## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

In the original book which was used as the basis for this eBook, there is no Chapter 5 in Part III. There was, however a gap in the printing which may have been the correct place for the chapter change. A chapter header has been added at that point. It is not known whether this is correct, or whether it was simply a printer error that the chapter numbers were not consecutive.

[The end of *Anybody's Pearls* by Hulbert Footner]