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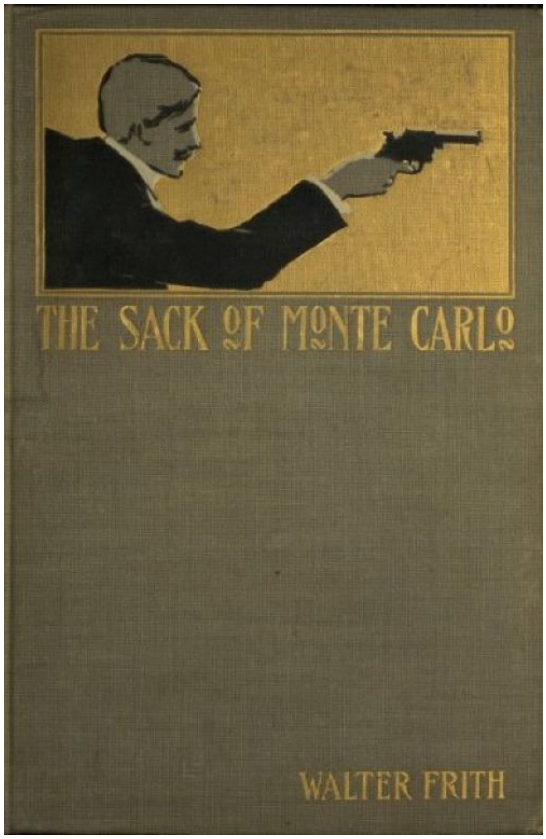

THE SACK OF MONTE CARLO

An Adventure of To-day

As narrated by Vincent Blacker, Esq.
Lieutenant H.M.'s East ——shire Militia

BY
WALTER FRITH
AUTHOR OF "IN SEARCH OF QUIET"

Quo timoris minus est, eo minus est Periculi
LIVY, xii., 5

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By WALTER FRITH.

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A book which will enchain the attention of the reader from beginning to end.—*Boston Advertiser.*

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HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS.

TO

Mrs. F. W. SHARON

IN RECOLLECTION OF MANY HAPPY HOURS IN

NEW YORK, ÉTRETAT, AND PARIS

London, October, 1897

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THE SACK OF MONTE CARLO

“I don’t say that it is possible; I only affirm it to be true.”

CHAPTER I

SOME SLIGHT EXPLANATION—OBJECTS OF THE EXPEDITION—LOVE THE PROMOTER—LUCY THATCHER—HER PORTRAIT BY LAMPLIGHT

THE idea occurred to me, quite unexpectedly and unsought for, early one morning in bed; and, as ideas of such magnitude are valuable and scarce (at any rate, with me), it was not long before I determined to try and realize it.

The expedition was so successful, and we got, on the whole, so clear and clean away with the swag, or, as Mr. Julius C. Brentin, our esteemed American *collaborateur*, called it, "the boodle," that, for my part, there I should have been perfectly content to let the affair rest; but, the fact is, so many of my friends have taken upon themselves to doubt whether we really did it at all, and the Monte Carlo authorities from the very first so cunningly managed to suppress all details (with their subsidized press), that I feel it due to us all to try and write the adventure out; since I know very well how, with most, seeing in print is believing.

Briefly, then, my idea was to sack or raid the gambling-tables at Monte Carlo, that highly notorious *cloaca maxima* for all the scum of Europe, which there gutters and gushes forth into the sapphire and tideless Mediterranean. I had worked details out for myself, and believed that, what with the money on the tables and the reserve in the vaults, there could not be much short of £200,000 on the Casino premises, a sum as much worth making a dash for, it seemed to me, as Spanish plate-ships to Drake or Raleigh. Nor did it seem likely we should have to do much fighting to secure it; for all the authorities I consulted assured me the place was by no means a Gibraltar, and, in fact, that half a dozen resolute gentlemen with revolvers and a swift steam-yacht waiting in the harbor would be more than enough to do the trick and clean the place out; which was pretty much what we found.

As for the morality of the affair, I confess *that* never in the least troubled me—never once. One puts morality on one side when dealing with a gaming-establishment, and to raid the place seemed to me just as reasonable and fair as to go there with a system, besides being likely to be a good deal more profitable. And since the objects to which we destined the money were in the main charitable, I soon came to regard the expedition strictly *in pios usus* (as lawyers say), and hope and believe the public will regard it in that light too.

Let me say right here—to quote Mr. Brentin again—that not one of us touched one single red cent of the large amount we so fortunately secured, but that it was all expended for the purposes (in the main, as I say, charitable) for which we had always intended it—with the single exception of a necklet of napoleons I had made for the fat little neck of my enchanting niece Mollie, which she always wears at parties, and keeps to this day in an old French plum-box, along with her beads and bangles and a small holy ring I once brought her from Rome; being amazingly fond of all sorts of bedizenments, as most female children are.

Mollie, therefore, was the only person who really had any of the swag, or boodle; though, of course, she doesn't know it, and thinks it was properly won at play. For as for Bob Hines, who had some for the new gymnasium and swimming-bath at his boys' school at Folkestone; and Mr. Thatcher (my dear wife Lucy's father), who got his old family estate, Wharton Park, back; and the hospitals, convalescent homes, and sanatoriums, which all shared alike; and Teddy Parsons, of my militia, who had the bill paid off that was worrying him—that was all in the original scheme, and all went to form the well-understood reasons for our undertaking the expedition; without which inducements, indeed, it would never even have started.

So if, after this clear denial in print, the public still choose to fancy anything has stuck to my fingers, all I can ask them in fairness to do is to come to our flat in Victoria Street any morning between twelve and two, when they can see the accounts and receipts for themselves, all in order and properly audited by Messrs. Fitch & Black, the eminent accountants of Lothbury, E. C.…

Now, they say love is at the bottom of most of the affairs and enterprises of the world, and so I believe it mostly is. At all events, I don't fancy I should have undertaken, or, at any rate, been so prominent in this Monte Carlo affair, if I hadn't at the time been so deeply in love with Lucy, and correspondingly anxious to get her father's property back for them at Wharton Park. It is situate near Nesshaven, on the Essex coast; which, though to many it may not be a particularly attractive part of the country, is to me forever sacred as the spot where I first met the dear girl who is now my wife, coming back so rosily from her morning bath, through the whin and the sand, from the long, flat shore and the idle sea, carrying her own damp towel back to her father's inn, "The French Horn."

I can see her now as I saw her then, on that warm September morning eighteen months ago; sea and sky and monotonous Essex land all bathed in hazy sunshine, the whins still glistening with the morning mist, which at that time of the year lies heavily till the sun at mid-day warms them dry and sets the seed-cases exploding like Prince-Rupert drops—I can see her, I say, come towards me along the coast-guard path, round the pole that sticks up to mark it, and towards the wooden bridge that crosses one of the dikes.

If any line of that sweet face were faint in my memory, I have only to look across at her now, as she sits sewing under the lamp as I write, for all its charm and perfection to be present as first I saw it. I have only to put a straw-hat on the pretty, rough, dark hair, which in sunshine gleams with the bronze of chestnut, give her a freckle or two on the low, white forehead, color her round cheek a little more delicately rose-leaf, and there she is—not forgetting to take away the wedding-ring!—as she passed me on the Nesshaven golf-links that hazy September morning eighteen months ago. There is the straight nose, the short upper lip, the pure, fresh mouth, the plump and rounded chin,

and the soft, pink lips that part so readily with a smile and show the beautiful white teeth, white as the youngest hazel-nuts....

Lucy felt my eyes were upon her, and looked up at me and smiled, with something of a blush, for she blushes very readily. She saw me still looking longingly, the invitation in my eyes, and after a moment's hesitation (for, though we have been married nearly six months, she still is shy) she put down her sewing and came to me at my writing-table. She bent over me and put her arms round my neck, her warm cheek against mine. Her soft lips kissed me; I felt the tender, loving palpitation of her bosom as I bent my head back. Our sitting-room seemed full of silence, happy and melodious silence, while from outside in Victoria Street I head the jingle of a passing cab....

CHAPTER II

"THE FRENCH HORN"—MABEL HARKER, MY UNFORTUNATE ENGAGEMENT TO HER—MR. CRAGE AND WHARTON PARK

THOUGH the idea to sack Monte Carlo did not occur to me till late in the year (in the September of which I first met Lucy Thatcher), I must first say something of my going down to Nesshaven in June, and the events which led to my being in a position to undertake an affair of such nerve and magnitude.

Lucy thought I should take readers straight to Monte Carlo, confining myself to that part of the work only; but, after talking it over, she agrees with me now that the adventure must be led up to in the natural way it really was or the public won't believe in it, after all, and I shall have all my pains for nothing. So that's what I shall do, in the shortest and best way I can; promising, like the esteemed old circus-rider Ducrow, as soon as possible to "cut the cackle and come to the 'osses."

Well, then, it was towards the middle of June when I joined the golf club at Nesshaven, just after my militia training month was over. I was introduced by Harold Forsyth (one of our Monte Carlo band later, and one of the stanchest of them), who had the golf fever very badly, and, I must say, was beginning to make himself rather a bore with it.

He and I went down from Liverpool Street and stayed at "The French Horn," the inn kept by Mr. Thatcher, Lucy's father; and after Forsyth had introduced me to the club and shown me round the links, he went back to his regiment, the "Devon Borderers," then stationed at Colchester, very angry and complaining, as soldiers mostly are when obliged to do any work. I remained behind, not that I had yet seen Lucy, but rather to keep out of Mabel Harker's way—the young lady to whom (as Lucy knows) I happened, much against my will, to be at that time unfortunately engaged to be married.

My first visit to "The French Horn" lasted three weeks, during which time I manfully held my ground, though heavily bombarded by Mabel's letters, regularly discharged thrice a week from her aunt's house in Clifton Gardens at Folkestone. At last, as Mabel came to stay at her sister's in the Regent's Park (on purpose, I believe), I was obliged to go up to town for ten days, and there passed a sad time with her at the University match, Henley, and the Eton and Harrow; at which noted places of amusement and relaxation I cannot help thinking I was the most unhappy visitor, though, to be sure, I tried hard not to show it.

But it was dreadful when I got back to my rooms in Little St. James's Street and attempted sleep; for I really think that *not* being in love with the person you have bound yourself to marry keeps more men awake *more miserably* than any of the so-called torments of love, which, with scarcely an exception, I have never found otherwise than agreeable.

At last Mabel went back to Folkestone, and I was free to return to "The French Horn," and I never saw her again (thank goodness!) till the momentous interview between us in October, from which I emerged a free man; she having discovered in a boarding-house at Lucerne an architect named Byles, whom she'd the sense to see was a more determined wooer than I had ever been, and likely to make her a far better husband.

"The French Horn" is not an old house, having been built in about the year 1830, from designs made by Mr. Thatcher's father, who had copied it from an inn he had once stayed in in Spain. For a country gentleman of old family, the father seems to have been a somewhat remarkable person. He had, for instance, been an intimate friend of the celebrated Lord Byron, and was the only man in England (so Mr. Thatcher always said) who knew the real story of the quarrel between the poet and his wife. Byron confided it to him at Pisa as the closest of secrets; but, as he had always told it to everybody when alive, and his son, my father-in-law, invariably did and still does the same, there must be a good many people in England by now who know all about it.

In fact, there was scarcely a golfer or bicyclist came to the house but Mr. Thatcher didn't fix him sooner or later in the bar and ask him if he knew the real reason why Byron quarrelled with his wife and left England. And as it was a hundred to one chance that they didn't, Mr. Thatcher always informed them in a loud, husky whisper, and shouted after them as they left, "But you mustn't publish it, because it's a family secret!"

And the reason was, according to Mr. Thatcher, that Lord Byron had killed a country girl when a young man (somebody he'd got into trouble, I suppose) and flung her body in the pond at Newstead; and that having, in a moment of loving expansion, bragged of it to his wife, Lady Byron had, very properly, promptly kicked him out of the house in Piccadilly; which, also according to Mr. Thatcher, was the origin of those touching lines:

> "They tell me 'tis decided you depart:
> 'Tis wise, 'tis well, but not the less a pain,"

invariably quoted by him on the departure of a guest.

It was this same father of Mr. Thatcher's who had parted with Wharton Park, their ancestral home. He had been a great gambler in his youth, and lost enormous sums at Crockford's and on the turf, so that when he died, in 1850, he had nothing to leave his only son, my Lucy's father, but three or four thousand pounds, very soon muddled away in unfortunate business speculations.

At last, about twenty years ago, it occurred to Mr. Thatcher to come down to Nesshaven and take "The French Horn," close to the Park gates of his old home, where, until the golf mania set in, beyond gaining a bare livelihood, he did no particular good; having to depend on natural-history lunatics, who came there in winter and prowled the shore with shot-guns after rare birds, and, in

summer, on families from Colchester—tradespeople and bank-clerks and so on—who spent their holidays lying about in the warm sand among the whins and complaining of the food. Betweenwhiles there was scarcely a soul about except the coast-guards, who came up to fill their whiskey-bottles, and a few bicyclists who ate enormous teas and never would pay more than ninepence.

But when a Colchester builder erected the club-house down on the links, Mr. Thatcher's business looked up wonderfully, and he really began to make money, and even sometimes to turn it away, for the house was small. Harold Forsyth discovered it, being quartered so near, and it was he who introduced me, for which I can never be sufficiently grateful.

It was a curious place, as most amateur buildings are. Forsyth had not told me anything about it, and I was indeed astonished when we first drove up; for, with its colored bricks, veranda, high-pitched roof, and odd carved wood-work, it reminded me somehow of an illustration to *Don Quixote*, and I quite expected to see a team of belled mules and hear the gay castanet click of the fandango. Instead of which, out came Mr. Thatcher in a dirty old cricket blazer.

It was towards the middle of June, and the sun was just setting at the end of a long, warm day. Mr. Thatcher showed us our rooms, and then took us into the great hall up-stairs, from which a balcony and steps descended into the garden. It had a very high-pitched roof, and was decorated in the Moorish fashion (rather like the old London Crystal Palace; where, by-the-way, I have eaten pop-corn many a time as a boy, but cannot honestly say I ever enjoyed it), and would hold, I dare say, a hundred and fifty people; rather senseless, I thought, seeing there were only seven or eight bedrooms, but possibly useful for bean-feasts or a printer's wayz-goose.

The broad June sun was setting, as I say, and streamed right in from the garden, as Forsyth and I ate our dinner. The only other guests were two brothers named Walton, who spent their lives playing golf. They played at Nesshaven all day, and wrote accounts of it every night, sitting close together, smoking and mumbling about the condition of the greens and their tee-shots, all of which was solemnly committed to paper.

What they would have done with themselves twenty years ago I can't conceive—possibly taken to drink. At any rate, now they only live for golf, and their thick legs and indifferent play are to be seen wherever there's a links and they can get permission to perform.

Mr. Thatcher's wife, a doctor's daughter, had long been dead; but his old mother, of the astonishing age of ninety-three, was still alive, and lived with him in the inn. At first she had not at all liked the idea of settling down almost at the gates of Wharton Park, her old home; but every year since they came she had expected would be her last, and she only lived on on sufferance, as it were, in the hope she would soon die. Sprier old lady, however, I must say, I never saw. She wasn't in the least deaf, and never wore glasses, and she was simply the keenest hand at bezique I ever encountered; at which entertaining game, by-the-way, if she wasn't watched, she would cheat outrageously.

She came of a good old Norfolk family, and actually remembered the jubilee of George III. in 1810; but when asked for details of that touching and patriotic event, all she could say was, "Well, I remember the blacksmith's children dressed in white."

Old Mrs. Thatcher and I were great friends, and used to potter about the garden together in the early mornings. Farther abroad she never ventured, except once a year, I believe, when she trotted off to the church to visit her husband's grave and see the tablet inside was kept clean.

So June and part of July slipped away, diversified, as I have explained, by a visit to London and some melancholy pleasures sipped in Mabel Harker's society, from which I returned to "The French Horn" in a truly desperate and pitiable frame of mind. Indeed, so low and forlorn was I at times that Mr. Thatcher, with great sympathy, once or twice fetched me out a bottle of old port (and not bad tipple, either, for a country inn), which we drank together, while he related to me at some length the misfortunes of his life.

Chief among them was the loss of his ancestral home, Wharton Park. The Thatchers had lived there since the first of them, a Lord Mayor of the time of Henry VIII., had built the house in the year 1543—of which original structure only the stables, in an extremely ramshackle condition, remained. A drunken Thatcher with a bedroom candle had burned the rest, towards the end of the last century, when the present house was built by my father-in-law's grandfather; a bad man, apparently, since though he had a wife and children established in Portman Square, he kept a mistress in one of the wings of Wharton Park, where one night she went suddenly raving mad (treading on her long boa and believing it a serpent come from the lower regions to claim and devour her), and filled the air with her screechings till, a year later, she died.

Mr. Thatcher's father had mortgaged the place heavily to Mr. Crage, an attorney and moneylender of Clement's Inn, and soon after his death, in 1850, the mortgage was foreclosed, and Mr. Crage took possession and had lived there with great disrepute ever since. He was a very vile old man, who had killed his wife with ill-treatment and turned his daughters out-of-doors; no female domestic servant was safe from his dreadful advances, and at last he was left with no one to serve him but the gardener and his wife, with whom, especially when they all got drunk together on gin-and-water in the kitchen, he was as often as not engaged in hand-to-hand fighting.

When I first saw him he was well over eighty, and a more abandoned-looking old villain I never set eyes on; with a gashed, slobbering mouth, in which the yellow teeth stuck up out of the under-jaw like an old hound's; a broken nose, which had once been hooked, until displaced by a young carpenter in the village, whose sweetheart he had been rude to; and the most extraordinary, bushy, black eyebrows. His hand shook so he always cut himself shaving, and his chin was always dabbled with dry blood. In short, a more malignant and gaunt personality I never saw, as I first did quite close, leaning on a gate and mumbling to himself, dressed in a tight body-coat, gaiters, and a dull, square, black hat, like a horse-coper's.

I remember he called out to me over the gate in a rasping voice, "Hi, there, you young Cockney! what's the time?" Whereupon I haughtily replied it was time he thought of his latter end and

behaved himself. At which he fell to cursing and shaking his stick, and making sham, impotent efforts to get over the gate. For they told me he was mortally afraid of dying, as all bad (and, for the matter of that, many good) men are. He knew, of course, Mr. Thatcher was the rightful owner of the place, and he would sometimes come down to “The French Horn” and jeer him about it, offering it for £30,000, which, he dared say, Mr. Thatcher had in the house. And more than once, curse his senile impudence! Mr. Thatcher told me he had offered to marry Lucy!—but this is really too horrible a subject to be dwelt on.

In short, I loathed the old wretch so heartily that it was perhaps the happiest moment of my life (with the exception of that blessed February morning when I stood at the altar of Nesshaven church with Lucy and heard her sweet and tremulous “I will”) when, after our triumphant return from Monte Carlo, Mr. Thatcher and I went up to Wharton Park with the £30,000 in notes and gold and paid the old ruffian out over the coarse kitchen-table, almost the only furniture of the grand drawing-room, where there were still the old yellow silk hangings—as will all come in its place, later on.

Lucy Thatcher at this time, in June and July, was staying with her aunt, Miss Young, her mother’s sister, who kept a girls’ school in the Ladbroke Grove Road, out at Notting Hill. She taught some of the younger children and made herself generally useful, taking them out walks in Kensington Gardens; for Mr. Thatcher wisely thought her too beautiful to be always at “The French Horn,” since bicyclists and golfers are somewhat apt to be too boldly attentive to the lovely faces they meet with on their roundabouts. Nor can I altogether blame them. So, as I have said, I never saw her till my return in September, when her beauty and modesty—which in my judgment are synonymous—at once captured me, and always will hold me captive till I die.

CHAPTER III

I CONTINUE TO KEEP OUT OF MABEL HARKER'S WAY AND GO TO GORING—RETURN TO "THE FRENCH HORN"—WANDERINGS WITH LUCY—MR. CRAGE REHEARSES HIS OWN FUNERAL

As August approached I began to feel apprehensive as to the right course to pursue with regard to Mabel Harker, my *fiancée*. I don't want to say anything unkind about her here in print, but, the fact is, the engagement had been an unfortunate one from the first. Let me only observe that I really honestly think if a man is to choose between behaving like a brute (as people say you do when you break off an engagement) and making himself miserable for life (as I most certainly should if I had married Mabel), he had much better select the former course. At any rate, I know now that if I had had the brutality, or the courage, to tell Mabel point-blank at first that I was very sorry, but I didn't care for her sufficiently to marry her, I should have spared myself a vast deal of annoyance and self-reproach, which now I understand to have been altogether unnecessary; seeing, I know now very well, she didn't really care for me in the least, but simply regarded me as a lay-figure (with eight hundred a year) to stand beside her at the altar rails and mechanically say "*I will*" and "*I do*" and the rest of it.

After her visit to her sister's in the Regent's Park, in July, she had gone back to Folkestone, and I was in some tremor whether she might not desire me to spend the holiday months with them there; but, most fortunately, Mrs. Harker, her aunt, received a very good offer for her house in Clifton Gardens, which she determined to take, and go abroad to Switzerland, where she and Mabel could live in a *pension* and save quite three-fourths of the home rent.

Mabel wanted me to join them, but I managed to get out of it, and very lucky I did; for it was at that very *pension* at Lucerne she met Charles Byles, the architect, her present husband, and a great ass he must have looked with that small face of his and huge mustache, and a rope round him for going up Pilatus; besides being slightly bandy.

As for me, I went off down to my sister's, Mrs. Rivers, married to the publisher, who had taken a little house on the river at Taplow, where I spent the end of August and early part of September with great content, more especially in the middle of the week, when my precious brother-in-law (a dull fellow and a prig) was away doing his publishing in town.

I left Taplow the second week in September, and something gentle, yet persuasive and strong, seeming to call me back to "The French Horn," off I went there; and there, as I have already mentioned, I met and fell madly in love with Lucy Thatcher at first sight, a passion deepening to a tempest before October dawned.

Now, as I am telling the truth in this work, and not writing a romance, I have to admit that the month I had of Lucy's dear companionship, before I knew I was free, was by no means spent idly, and that I made all the running with her of which my amorous wits are capable, just as though I had been really unappropriated.

Nor was this altogether wrong, for I felt quite sure Providence would stand my good friend, as always in such affairs before, and direct Mabel Harker's hopes into another, sounder matrimonial channel than mine. Even if Providence had not, but had stood aloof and fought shy, I should then most certainly have deemed it necessary to play the part myself, seeing how deeply and truly my heart was now *for the first time* engaged.

Dear! dear! at what amazing speed that happy month flew past; how little there seems I can say about it now. Isn't it strange that Time, whom poets prefigure as an ancient person with anchylosed joints, further encumbered, notwithstanding his great age, with a scythe and an enormous hour-glass, is yet on occasion capable of showing the panting hurry of a sprinter?

With Lucy I was alone almost all the time, for Mr. Thatcher, very properly, wouldn't allow her to help in the bar—a department he gracefully presided over himself in his dirty blazer, grasping the handle of the beer engine, and sometimes, on Saturday nights mostly, slightly shaken with a gentlemanly but unmistakable attack of hiccoughs. So dear Lucy had nothing much to do but go bathing and help her grandmother in the garden, gathering the plums and raking down the ripening apples. And though there were days when, womanlike, she shunned me and kept out of my way (so as not to make herself too cheap), yet she was very frank and simple and trusting in giving me at other times her constant companionship; and as on the days when she desired to be more alone I always respected her wish and kept away (just turning at the fourth hole on the links to watch her light, firm figure crossing down to her bathing-tent on the shore, and waving the putter at her), she was, as she has since told me, pleased at my delicacy and perception, and showed her pleasure when we again met by the extraordinary brightness of her eyes and the sweet readiness of her smile.

It was harvest-time, and though Mr. Thatcher had no acreage of his own, still there was plenty of it round him under cultivation, and a fine time it was for the Tap, for which there was a separate entrance, with a painted hand pointing to it for those who couldn't read. While my sweetheart and I strolled about the lanes by day, gathering blackberries and plucking at the wisps of corn caught by the high hedges and low branches from the passing wagons, on warm evenings we would sit alone in the garden, listening to the hearty rustic revelry of premature harvest-homes from the inn, and, when it was very still, hearing the faint, mysterious rustle of the waves on the long, sandy shore, as though the lulling sea were whispering to the land, "Hush! hush! now go to sleep like a good child. You've had a long day and must be tired—*hush!*"

It was at this time, as I very well remember, we strolled up late one afternoon to Wharton Park, her old ancestral home, and a very curious and unedifying sight we witnessed there. We went in at the empty lodge gates, and had a look in first at the church in the Park grounds, of which Mr.

Thatcher kept the key in the bar; for there was no rectory, and the parson came over only on Sundays from Nesshaven for an afternoon service—at six in summer and at three in winter.

The ancient, bird-haunted edifice was pretty full of deceased Thatchers—all of them, in fact, I believe, lie there, except the Lord Mayor of Henry VIII.'s reign, who gets what rest he can in a church off Cornhill, and Mr. Thatcher's grandfather, who is buried out at Florence; and where there aren't tablets and tombs of old-time, worthy Thatchers, there are kindly memorials to their servants, house-keepers, and bailiffs for forty years and so on; which when Lucy and I had duly and reverently inspected and sighed over, we had a peep in at the vestry, where hung the parson's crisp surplice behind a piece of religious arras, and a framed and glazed view of Wharton in 1750 (the mansion that was burned), with pompous gentlemen in three-cornered hats giving their hands to ladies in immense hoops up the centre path; and a tattered, begrimed notice of the reign of Queen Anne, affording the clergy instructions for sending parishioners up to St. James's to be touched for the king's evil.

And when we had mourned over these things, and inspected the fragment of the holy-water scoop, and the blunt, whitewashed squint, and the broken place where once the mass-priests sat, and the Wharton pew, with an icy cold stove in it and a little frame of dingy red curtain hung round on rods and rings, so that the hinds shouldn't see when the quality Thatchers fell asleep—not in the Lord!—on drowsy summer Sunday afternoons—as, alas! they haven't had the opportunity of doing for many years past now; then we went on up to the house, leaving the drive, however, and dodging across the fields to the *ha-ha*, for fear of meeting that old villain Crage.

We got up through a small spinney to the end of the ha-ha that faces the house, and, as we were quite close, saw with our own eyes a most strange and monstrous sight—a sight so strange that many readers would scarcely credit it, had they not noticed that truth and not fiction is my object.

Hidden in the spinney, we were not more than forty yards from the house, which is long and low and not particularly beautiful—in fact, decidedly Gothic and unsightly. In front of it, lengthways and pretty broad, runs a gravel path, and up and down that broad gravel path was stamping and swearing old Mr. Crage; stamping and swearing and shaking his stick at six men (laborers of his, Lucy said, and all men she knew) who were actually carrying a coffin, a smart, brand-new coffin with dandy silver handles, on their shoulders.

The old wretch was positively rehearsing his own funeral! We could very plainly hear him cursing the men for walking too fast and jolting him, and so on; as though, once the miserable old hunks were cold, it mattered how anybody carried him.

Then he made them rest the coffin on one end while he showed them himself the pace they should travel and the demeanor they ought to exhibit; and truly, if it hadn't been scandalous and horrible it would have been ludicrous to see the way the blaspheming old scamp trailed the path before them, dragging one foot along after another, with head and shoulders bent in sham sorrow and reverence; trying, in short, to play-act the distressed, grief-stricken mourner, touched to the quick at his own loss.

When he had finished his parade, he shook his stick at the six men, and cursed them, raving and foaming, for damned scoundrels and thieves and disrespectful ruffians, who would be glad to see him dead, and would whistle and dance while carrying him off, instead of doing it all in the proper depressed manner he had just shown them; while the men stood and looked at him stupidly and sullenly, and, I've no doubt, would have liked to jump on him there and then and beat him to a pulp, finishing once and for all with so dreadful a mockery by making it real.

Dear Lucy and I stole away, quite shocked and silent. Afterwards she told me old Crage had had the coffin a long time, and rehearsed the funeral once before; but that lately, having by threats of an action screwed twenty pounds out of his daughter for money he had lent her (on which, by-the-way, Miss Crage had promptly run away and got married), he had had the silver handles added; and, now that the coffin was, in his estimation, quite perfect, had doubtless gone through the unholy ceremony again, so that when the hour struck there might be no excuse for a hitch.

So Lucy and I stole away back to "The French Horn" in shocked silence. Pleasant and human it sounded, when we got on the road again, to hear a carter singing as he rattled homeward in his empty wagon.

CHAPTER IV

I AM FREE OF MABEL HARKER—RETURN TO "THE FRENCH HORN"—DISASTROUS INTERFERENCE OF HAROLD FORSYTH IN MY AFFAIRS

It was the 13th of October, as I very well remember, that, shortly after Mabel's return to England from Switzerland, she wrote me an incoherent epistle, begging me to come up to town and see her at once, for that she was the most miserable of girls and had sad news for me, signed "your heartbroken Mabel." I must say I was glad to hear it, and greatly looked forward to the sad news; since I very well knew it could only be that another wooer had stepped up on to the Regent's Park *tapis*, and one a good deal more determined to win her than I. Directly I got there and found the fire wasn't lit in the drawing-room, though it was horribly cold, I knew I was right, and the interview was meant to be brief and painful.

It was the same room, by-the-way (though the fire had been lit for us then!) in which I had made my unfortunate declaration in the early spring, soon after Easter—a declaration precipitated by Mabel, who began playing the piano, but soon broke down over it and wept, alleging me to be the cause of her unhappiness; which, being uncommon tender-hearted where the sex are concerned, completely bowled me over and drove me to propose.

When she came in this time, with melancholy mouth but unmistakably triumphant eyes, she at once told me the sad news; to which I listened with as gloomy a face as I could, demanding in hoarse tones the name of my successful rival. I could scarcely contain my mirth when I heard it was Byles, the man she had so often laughed at in her letters from Lucerne, as girls not infrequently do at the man they are one day destined to marry. But I must say I think she might at any rate have *offered* to send me my presents back, for there are many of them (particularly a diamond and sapphire ring—cost me eighteen pounds) I should have liked to have given Lucy. I make no manner of doubt that if it had been garnets and carnelian, I should have had it back at once in a registered letter.

Directly our painful interview was over, I hurried back to Nesshaven and "The French Horn," feeling happier than I had done for months past, a free man, and my heart beating so rapturously I believe an old lady in the carriage with me heard it, she looked so frightened at my restlessness.

But at "The French Horn" a blow awaited me, from which, when I think of it, I yet reel; for judge of my stupor when, on my gay return, I was met, not by Lucy, towards whom I was so impetuously rushing to tell all, but by the whiskified thunders of Mr. Thatcher, who took me at once into the bar-parlor, and proceeded there and then to claw me about the ears with the angry rhetoric of a theatrically outraged heavy father.

Of course he was quite right; but then I was myself *now* quite right, too; and when he talked in real Adelphi fashion about stealing affections and repaying him in this way, I was—thank Heaven!—in a position to be angry too, and give him as good as he gave me.

So I let him fume on till he ran himself down, when I temperately explained what my position really was, and how I was altogether free; and how, above all, that if Lucy cared for me, as I very well knew she did, I was going to marry her at once, and (if not precisely in the immediate neighborhood of "The French Horn") settle down and live happily ever after.

Whereupon Mr. Thatcher's easily corrugated brow began as easily to clear, and he steadied himself and seized and shook me by the wrong hand. So we sat down and had a cigar and a split whiskey-and-soda, and he was good enough to say he had known all along (from the way I had always paid my bill, I suppose) that he could trust me implicitly, and all would come right in the end.

But in the meantime he had shipped off dear Lucy to her aunt's school in the Ladbroke Grove Road, where she had gone back—very tearfully, poor child, at the news of my supposed treachery—to her altogether uncongenial employment with the younger children.

By judicious pumping I discovered it was Harold Forsyth who had blown upon me and "queered my pitch," as showmen say, having come over from Colchester to play golf, and been seized upon by the watchful Thatcher, who of course had noticed my unremitting attentions to his daughter. Upon which Harold, either because he fancied it his duty (old friends are often very inconsiderate) or from sheer stupidity, had let slip the disastrous news of my engagement to another lady; though, as a matter of fact, at the very moment of their conversation it was off and I was free.

Old Mrs. Thatcher took the situation in at a glance, and, either from a natural desire to see her granddaughter properly settled or from pure friendship for me, who had always been attentive to her, and once took a bee out of her hair (that animal being almost the only living thing she really feared), immediately suggested I should go off at once to the Ladbroke Grove Road, provided with a letter to the aunt from Mr. Thatcher, in which everything was explained, and I was given authority to interview and settle matters with my dear sweetheart. So, next morning early, off I drove to Nesshaven Station in the milk cart, gay as a lark—that chorister of the poor and the cheerful well-to-do—and by twelve o'clock was rattling in a cab down the Ladbroke Grove Road.

CHAPTER V

ANGLESEY LODGE—MY INTERVIEW WITH LUCY IN KENSINGTON GARDENS—NOT SO SATISFACTORY AS I COULD DESIRE

THERE was a piano-organ playing in front of Anglesey Lodge as I drove up; it was playing the old "Les Roses" waltz, and quite dramatic and affecting the music sounded as I impatiently waited in the drawing-room, hung with Doré's works to impress parents, and with a model of the Taj under glass, done in soapstone, and sent by some girl-pupil, I imagine, who had married and gone out to India.

The aunt soon joined me, smiling, with Mr. Thatcher's open letter in her hand, and a very handsome woman she must have been—indeed, still was—with traces, on a florid scale, of Lucy's simple and yet delicate beauty.

She was so friendly, and made herself so fascinating, it was fully half an hour before I could get away. She told me Lucy was out with some of the pupils, and that, if I went to Kensington Gardens and walked down the Broad Walk, I should be sure to see them. Further, if we made it up (as we surely should, she graciously added), she begged me to come back to lunch at half-past one; though she must ask me not to walk home with the young ladies through the streets for fear of adverse neighborly comments, and upsetting them for the afternoon studies.

I was soon at the entrance to the gardens in the Bayswater Road, where the keeper's lodge is, with its glass bottles of sweets and half-penny rock-buns; and, true enough, there was dear Lucy, sitting on one of the seats facing the walk, reading to one of the little girls, while the other bigger ones, perhaps half a dozen of them, were playing rounders in French, among the trees and the dead leaves.

"*Combien de rounders avez-vous?*" cried one of them as I came up; and "*Courrez, Maud, courrez!*" cried another, clapping her hands, as the tennis-ball in its torn cover whizzed close by me, whacked by a young person with a racquet, who was soon off on her round in a short frock but with uncommonly long legs.

I came quite close behind Lucy, taking care not to make the leaves rustle. She was reading Bonnechose's *History of France* aloud, something about the wars of the Fronde and Cardinal Richelieu.

"'*The conduct of the cardinal at this juncture*—'" she was saying with great seriousness, when the little girl beside her, who naturally wasn't attending, looked up and saw me. I gave her a friendly smile, and after that moment's careful scrutiny which females of all ages indulge in, she smiled back. The next moment Lucy looked at her and then round up at me, giving a soft, frightened "Hah!" and then going as white as a sheet.

Really, it is quite impossible to say at what age a comprehension of love, its torments and its joys, arises in the fresh girlish breast. The pretty creature seated at Lucy's side couldn't have been more than eleven, but she saw at once I loved her teacher and desired to be alone with her; so she immediately rose, staid and composed as a woman, shook her long hair, and, with complete unconsciousness, strolled off and joined the other older girls; while they, not to be behindhand in delicacy, soon stopped their somewhat noisy game, and, forming a sympathetic group at some little distance under an elm, stood there talking in whispers with their backs to us; pretending to be immensely interested and absorbed in the 'buses rumbling down the Bayswater Road.

But for her little frightened cry, Lucy received me in silence, and didn't even give me her hand. She sat there on the seat—cut and scarred with other, happier lovers' records—with her head slightly turned away from me; perfectly composed, apparently, after the first shock and natural agitation of seeing me again so suddenly were over.

I asked her how she was and how long she had been in town; she said she was quite well, and had been there since the day before yesterday.

Then she said, calmly, "Can you tell me the time, please?" and on my replying it was a quarter to one, murmured she must be going home to dinner, and made as if she would rise.

I stopped her with, "Please, Lucy, let me speak to you first." So she remained perfectly still, though with her pretty head still turned away from me.

Eloquent, or, at all events, talkative, as I generally am with the sex, I admit I couldn't for the life of me tell how to begin.

At last I said I was afraid she must think badly of me, and then waited of course for her contradiction; but as it never came, and she never made a sign, I went on to say I shouldn't dare approach her were it not I was a free man; that my affair with—with the other lady was finally at an end, and so I came to her first and at once with my whole heart. As I spoke, I watched her closely, if only in the hope I might detect some slight twitching of her small ungloved hands, or some involuntary twittering of her eyes or lips, when I told her I was free; but she sat so like an antique, or, for the matter of that, a modern statue, I began to grow frightened, since I know very well how implacable even the tenderest of women can sometimes be when it suits them.

"Oh, Lucy dear!" I stammered, "d-don't be hard on me. I loved you the moment I saw you. I never really loved the other one. Since the day I first set eyes on you, I have never given any other woman a serious thought. You can't be so unkind as to break my life in pieces, merely because I've been careless, merely because I spoke to you before I was quite sure I was free? Why, I was free of her directly I saw you, and if she hadn't released me of her own accord, as she has done—Oh, Lucy! don't leave me in this dreadful suspense! Do, my dear girl, say something kind to me, for mercy's sake!"

"I don't feel kindly towards you, Mr. Blacker," Lucy answered, cold and stern, "and I can't

pretend. I know quite well what's happened. You thought I was only an innkeeper's daughter—"

"Oh, Lucy!"

"And that so long as you were staying there you might as well amuse yourself."

"Love is no amusement, Lucy—it's a most fearful trial."

"But did you ever, when you were daring to make love to me," she said, suddenly turning on me with amazing fierceness, "even cease writing love letters to her? Tell me that, Mr. Vincent Blacker!"

I groaned; for the truth is I had written more warmly to Mabel Harker all that delightful month at "The French Horn" than usual; from the simple fact that, myself feeling happier, I naturally wished Mabel to share, in a sense, in my joy. So what could I do but groan?

"If we hadn't found out quite by accident you were engaged," Lucy went on, "should we have ever found it out from you? Were you making any effort of any sort to free yourself? You were acting an untruth to me all that time. How can I tell you are not acting an untruth to me now?"

"I wasn't in the least acting an untruth when I said I loved you. How can you say such a thing, Lucy dear?"

"You mustn't call me by my Christian name," she answered, pale, and setting her lips tight; and then she was silent again.

"You are very hard on me," I cried, after a pause, "and I hope you will never live to regret it. What could a man do differently, situate so unfortunately as I was?"

"You should have been perfectly honest and frank. At least, you should have made sure you were off with the old love before you tried to be on with the new."

"But you talk as if these things always lay within our power! I didn't purposely fall in love with you—I simply couldn't help myself! And into the other affair I had been more or less entrapped."

"Yes," she replied, with some scorn, "and three months hence you will be saying exactly the same thing to the next girl."

"I shall never speak to any one again," I answered, solemnly and truly, "as I am speaking now to you. You can believe me or not, as you please, but I can never think of any one as I think of you, and I never have. If you will only think of me kindly, and try to make excuses for me; if you will only consult your own heart a little—"

"I mustn't allow myself to be turned round by a few soft speeches," said Lucy, looking almost frightened and rising before I could prevent her. "You have hurt me very much, and I don't know that my feelings will ever alter, or that I should allow them to."

"But you will let me see you again?" I humbly entreated.

"I don't know. Certainly not for some little time."

"I may write to you?"

"No, certainly not!"

"This is all very poor comfort, Lucy," I groaned, "after the journey I have taken on purpose to see you and make it all right."

"What other comfort do you deserve, Mr. Blacker?" she asked me, haughtily, and immediately moved away from the seat towards her young ladies.

"I will come down at Christmas, if I may," I said, tenderly and humbly; but she never replied, and the next moment was marshalling the girls for walking home.

They walked to the gate in the Bayswater Road in a group, and formed up two and two as they got outside.

Lucy never turned her head once, but nearly every young lady treated herself to a look behind; when they might have seen me plunged down in melancholy on the seat, digging a morose pattern into the Broad Walk with the point of my stick.

I drawled back unhappily across the Gardens and down the empty Row to Hyde Park Corner, along Piccadilly, and to the club.

Christmas! and this was only October!

Sympathetic readers (and I desire no others) can have no conception what I suffered during the next few days.

CHAPTER VI

EARLY DIFFICULTIES—I FAIL TO PERSUADE THE HONORABLE EDGAR FANSHAWE, THE REVEREND PERCY BLYTH, AND MR. PARKER WHITE, M. P., TO JOIN OUR MONTE CARLO PARTY

LUCY declares I have written enough about her, and now had better get on to the Monte Carlo part—who went with me, and why they went, and so on.

I dare say she's right; for though we neither of us know anything whatever about writing, she says she represents the average reader, and, having been told (as well as I could do it) something about "The French Horn" and my love-affair there, is, as an average reader, growing anxious to learn how I got the party together for so apparently hazardous, not to say hopeless, an enterprise.

I must just mention, however, that, after my sad interview with her in Kensington Gardens, I at once wrote to Mr. Thatcher and told him exactly what had occurred, informing him of my intention to come down at Christmas and try and settle matters with his daughter. At the same time I begged him to send me up the clothes and portmanteaus I had left behind me at "The French Horn." They arrived, accompanied by a scrawl from Mr. Thatcher, urging me to be a man and bear up and all would come right, and enclosing a rather larger bill than I fancied I owed, but which I thought it politic to pay without protest of any kind.

Even the old lady, his mother, sent me a line, in a very upright fist, kindly informing me "brighter days were in store." A simple prophecy, that long has ceased to interest me; since I have invariably had it from the innumerable fortunetellers, by cards and tea-leaves and the crystal, whom for years past I have rather foolishly been in the habit of consulting, but never derived any real benefit from.

As for my great idea to sack Monte Carlo, it came to me one morning (quite unexpectedly, as I have said) when I was lying in bed, trying to summon up resolution to rise for another dull and irksome day. It was still a long time off Christmas, and life was lying on me with extreme heaviness; for, as I think I have explained, I am in the militia, and when once my month's training is over have nothing to do with myself except live on my eight hundred a year and amuse myself as best I can; and my idleness was rendered further indigestible at this period by the unhappy state of my relations with dear Lucy, whom I could neither see nor write to.

But the idea that I should get a small, resolute party together, and raid the tables at Monte Carlo, brought a new interest into my life; and after making a few quiet and judicious inquiries (for I had never been there), I determined to set about the affair in earnest and see if I could get any one to join me.

My first efforts in that direction, as is generally the case with anything new and startling, were not at all successful; but the more opposition and ridicule I met with, the more obstinate and determined I became. As for the morality of the affair, that, as I have said, has never troubled me from first to last. Does any one think of calling the police immoral when they go and raid a silver gambling-hell in Soho? For the life of me I have never been able to see the difference between us, except that *in our case* there was needed a greater nerve and address.

Now my sister, Mrs. Rivers, the wife of the publisher, lives in Medworth Square, S. W., and, on considering her intimates, I made up my mind to approach the Honorable Edgar Fanshawe first. He has a brother in the Foreign Office, and relations scattered about everywhere in government employ, so I decided he would be a good man to have with us in case the affair proved a *fiasco* and we all got into trouble, a chance that naturally had to be provided for.

Fanshawe, I should explain, was at one time in the Guards, but now writes the most dreadfully dull historical novels, which my brother-in-law publishes, and no one that I have ever met reads. Every autumn, sure as fate, among the firm's list of new books you see announced, *Something or Other, a Tale of the Young Pretender*; or, *Something or Other Else, an Episode of the Reign of Terror*; with quotations from the *Scots Herald*, "this enthralling story"; or, from the *Dissenters' Times*, "no more powerful and picturesque romance has at present issued," etc. Or *The Leeds Commercial Gazette* would declare it "the best historical novel since Scott," which I seem to have heard before of many other dull works.

Fanshawe is a purring, mild, genteel, rather elderly person, who listens to everything you are good enough to say most attentively and politely, with his head on one side, and never will be parted from his opera-hat. When I attacked him one night after dinner in Medworth Square he was in his usual autumnal condition of beatitude at the excellence of the reviews of his latest historical composition (which, as usual, scarcely sold), and beamed on me with delighted condescension, stuffing quantities of raisins.

"What shall you be doing in January?" I cautiously began. "Would you be free for a little run over to Monte Carlo?"

Unfortunately, the Honorable Edgar is the sort of person who, half an hour after dinner, will undertake to do anything with anybody, and then write and get out of it immediately after breakfast next morning, when he's cold; so I quite expected the reply that Monte Carlo in January would suit him exactly, and what hotel did I propose to stay at?

"Now I've an idea," I went on, drawing a little closer. "You've been to Monte Carlo, of course, and know what a quantity of money there is in the place."

"Some of it mine," smiled Fanshawe. "I beg your pardon for interrupting you."

"Well," I said, "how would you like to join a little party of us for the purpose of getting it back?"

"A syndicate to work a system?"

"Nothing so unprofitable."

"I don't know of any other way."

"My idea," I went on, sinking my voice, "is shortly this: that half a dozen of us should join and

take a yacht—a fast steam-yacht—”

“Rather an expensive way of doing it, isn’t it?” objected Fanshawe, in alarm. He doesn’t mind what he pays to have his books published, but is otherwise mean.

“Not when you consider the magnitude of the stakes.”

“Why, the most you can win, even if you break the bank, is only a hundred thousand francs!”

“But consider the number of the tables, to say nothing of the reserve in the vaults, and the money lying about already staked!”

The old boy looked puzzled, but nodded his head politely all the same. “That’s true,” he said, vaguely.

“The place is not in any sense guarded, as no doubt you remember.”

“No, I don’t know that I ever saw a soldier about, except one or two, very bored, on sentry go, up at Monaco. But what has that to do with it?”

“Why, half a dozen resolute men with revolvers could clear the whole place out in five minutes,” I murmured, seductively. “The steam-yacht lies in the harbor, we collect the money, or as much of it as half a dozen of us can carry away, and, once on board the lugger—”

Fanshawe pushed his chair back and stared at me.

“—We go full-steam ahead to one of the Greek islands, divide the swag, scuttle the steamer, make our way to the Piræus, inspect the Acropolis, and come home, *viâ* Corfu, as Cook’s tourists. Or go to the Holy Land, eh, by way of completely averting suspicion?” And I winked and nudged him, nearly falling over in my effort to get at his frail old ribs.

“My dear friend!” gasped the startled Fanshawe; “why propose such an elaborate pleasantry? It’s like school-boy’s talk in a dormitory.”

“I never felt further from my school-days in my life,” I answered with determination. “The affair is perfectly easy—easier than you think. All it wants is a little resolution, and the money’s ours.”

“But it’s simple robbery.”

“Oh, don’t imagine,” I at once replied, “I propose anything so coarse as burglary and the melting-pot. No; I say to myself, here is the most iniquitous establishment in Europe, simply reeking with gold, of which an enormous surplus remains at the end of the year to be divided, principally among Semitic Parisians, who lavish it on their miserable pleasures. Here, on the other hand, are numerous deserving establishments in London—hospitals and so on—with boards out, closing their wards and imploring subscriptions. The flow of gold has evidently got into the wrong channels, as it always will if not sharply looked after. Be ours the glorious enterprise to divert it anew—”

“My good friend,” interrupted Fanshawe, “if I thought you serious—”

“Never was more serious in my life!”

“But, gracious me, suppose you’re all caught?”

“Oh, there is a prison up at Monaco, I believe,” I answered, lightly; “but they tell me prisoners come and go just as they please. That doesn’t in the least alarm me. Besides, Europe would be on our side—at all events, the respectable portion of it—and would hail our *coup* with rapture, even if it ended in failure. And with your brother in the Foreign Office, they’d soon have you back. Now what do you say? Will you make one?”

“My dear Blacker, you really must be crazy!”

“At a given signal, when the rooms are fullest, some of us—two would be enough—drive the gamblers into a corner and make them hold up their hands. The others loot the tables and the vaults. Then we turn out the electric light—”

“Any more wine, Fanshawe?” called out my brother-in-law.

Fanshawe rose, and I saw at once by the limp way he pulled his waistcoat down he was no good.

“Well,” I said, as I followed him into the drawing-room, “if you won’t join us, you must give me your word not to breathe a syllable of what we are going to do. It’s an immense idea, and I don’t want any one to get hold of it first, and find the place gutted by some one else before we can get a look in.”

Fanshawe’s only reply was that if I got into trouble he would thank me not to apply to him to bail me out; so we mutually promised.

I don’t know that, on the whole, I very much regretted him; he is, after all, a very muddle-headed, nervous old creature; but my hopes were for a time a good deal dashed by the refusal of the Reverend Percy Blyth to join us (much as he approved of the scheme), though I did my best to tempt him with the offer of new stops for his organ out of the boodle. He is the clergyman of St. Blaise’s, Medworth Square, and intimate with all the theatrical set, for whom he holds services at all sorts of odd hours; the natural result of which is he is on the free list of nearly every theatre, and has given me many a box.

Now every school-boy knows how priceless the presence of a parson is to all human undertakings—on a race-course, for instance, for thimble-rigging, the three-card trick, and other devices. They call him the *bonnet*, and if you have any trifling dispute about there being no pea, or the corner of the card being turned down, you are likely to be very much astonished to find the clergyman (who, of course, is only a cove dressed up) take the proprietor’s part and, at a pinch, offer to fight you, or any other dissatisfied bystander.

So I naturally thought it would be a good thing for us if we had a real parson in the party, if only as a most superior *bonnet*, to avert suspicion; though, if I had only thought a little, I might have known the idea wouldn’t work, since Blyth couldn’t very well have gone into the Casino rooms in parson’s rig, and I didn’t really want him for anything else.

There was only one other of my sister’s friends I approached on the subject before I had recourse to my own—Parker White, a bouncing sort of young man who had just got into the House of Commons, and who, I thought, might possibly be useful. But, as I cautiously felt my way with him, he looked so frightened, and talked such balderdash about his position and filibustering and European complications (complications with Monaco, if you please, with an army of seventy men!) that I pretended it was all a joke and turned the conversation.

To tell the truth, I was not much disappointed in Parker White, since I know very well how most of those younger men in the House are all gas and no performance; but, all the same, he was pretty cunning; for, to put it vulgarly, he lay low and waited, and when talk began to get about of what we had done, and the Casino Company's shares fell immediately in consequence of our success, he bought them up like ripe cherries; and then, when it was all contradicted by a subsidized press (which made me wild and drove me to writing this work in self-defence), and the shares jumped up again, he promptly sold and made a good thing out of it.

But he has never had the grace to thank me for putting the opportunity in his way; which is so like those men in the House who speculate on their information on the sly and then blush to find it fame.

CHAPTER VII

I INTERVIEW MR. BRENTIN—HIS SYMPATHY AND INTEREST—SIR ANTHONY HIPKINS AND THE YACHT *AMARANTH*—WE DETERMINE TO LOOK OVER IT

I SOON began to see that, out of so conventional an atmosphere as Medworth Square, I was not likely to gather any great profit to my scheme; that, if my idea were ever to bear fruit, I must set to work among my own particular friends in my own way.

On thinking them over, I determined to approach Mr. Julius C. Brentin first, an American gentleman whom I knew to be above prejudice, and to whom I could talk with perfect freedom and security.

He is a man of about fifty-five, a Californian, of medium height (which, like many Americans, he always pronounces *heighth*), with black hair, black eyebrows, and a small black mustache. He carries cigars loose in every pocket, and he will drink whiskey with you with great good-humor till the subject of the immortality of the soul crops up, when he suddenly becomes angry, suspicious, and, finally, totally silent. And that subject he always introduces himself, though for what reason I never can conceive, unless it be to quarrel and part. I had met him in the street a day or two before, when he told me he had recently married a New York young lady and was staying at the "Victoria"; he begged me to come and call, and on going there I found him chewing a green cigar in the smoking-room, his hat on the bridge of his pugnacious nose, and a glass of Bourbon whiskey beside him.

He reached me out a hand from the depths of his breeches pocket, as though he had just found it there and desired to make me a present of it, and pulled me down by his side. Then he gave me a long, black cigar out of his waistcoat pocket, worked his own round to the farther corner of his mouth, while with a solemn gesture he pointed to his trousers, carefully turned up over small patent-leather boots.

"Mr. Blacker," he said, "observe my pants. I am endeavoring to please Mrs. Brentin; I am striving to be English. You English invariably turn up the bottom of your pants; it is economical and it is fashionable, don't yer know." And Mr. Brentin winked at me a glittering, beady black eye.

I hoped Mrs. Brentin was quite well, and he replied:

"Mrs. Brentin has gone way off to Holborn, sir; she has organized an expedition with Mrs. William Chivers, ay socially prominent Philadelphian, in search of the scene of the labors of your Mrs. Gamp. From there she goes to the Marshalsea, to discover traces of Little Dorrit. She knows your Charles Dickens by heart, sir, and she follows him ayround. This is her first visit to the old country, and I humor her tastes, which are literary and high-toned, by staying at home and practising the English accent. I have studied the English accent theoretically, and I trace it to the predominance among your people of the waist muscles. We as a nation are deficient in waist muscles. So I stay at home and exercise them in the refined society of any stranger who can be indooced to talk with me. It is a labor of some difficulty, Mr. Blacker, which is gradually driving me to drink; for the strangers in this hotel are shy, and apt to regard me in the unflattering light of ay bunco-steerer."

Mr. Brentin sighed, drank, and worked his jaw and cigar with the solemnity of a cow masticating.

"At other times, sir," he drawled, "I stroll a block or two, way down the Strand. I compose my features and endeavor to assoom the vacant expression of ay hayseed or countryman. I have long desired to be approached by one of your confidence-trick desperadoes, but my success so far has been mighty small. They keep away from me, sir, as though I had the *grippe*. I apprehend, Mr. Blacker, that in my well-meant efforts to look imbecyle, I only look cunning. If they would only try me with the green-goods swindle, I should feel my time was not being altogether misspent. It is plaguy disheartening, and I might as well be back in Noo York for all the splurge I am making over here. And how have you been putting in your time, sir, since last year, when we went down to the Durby—I should say, the Darby—together?" he asked, turning his head my way.

On any other day, I have no doubt, I should have given Mr. Brentin a spirited and somewhat lengthy sketch of my doings during the last year and a half; but my recent failures in Medworth Square had taught me the value of time, and I plunged at once into the real object of my visit.

Directly, in rapid, clear-cut outline, I began to make my scheme clear, Mr. Brentin turned and looked at me; from the rigid lines of my speaking countenance he saw at once I was in earnest, and transferred his gaze to his pants and boots. Once only he gave me another rapid look, an ocular upper-cut, apparently to satisfy himself of my sincerity, when my mask spoke so strongly of enthusiasm and determination I felt I had completely reassured him, and was, in fact, gradually overhauling his will. As I went on, he began to breathe gustily through his nose and give a series of small kicks with his varnished toe, indications of growing ardor for the enterprise and a desire to immediately set about it that simply enchanted me.

When I descended to details, it was my turn to watch him. The cigar he was chewing was a complete indicator of his frame of mind. As I spoke of half a dozen resolute men with revolvers, it rose to the horizontal; when I mentioned the steam-yacht and a bolt for the harbor, it drooped like a trailed stick; while, as I sketched our rapid flight to the Greek Archipelago and division of the spoil, it stuck up like a peacock's tail, a true standard of revolt against the narrowness and timidity of our modern life.

The American mind works so quickly I was not at all surprised when Mr. Brentin suddenly sat up, took the cigar out of his mouth, and hurled it to the other end of the smoking-room.

Bravo! for I knew it signified away with prejudice, away with conventionality, away, above all,

with fear! It was a silent, triumphant "*Jacta est alea, Rubicon transibimus!*"

Then he turned to me.

"Mr. Blacker," he excitedly whispered, "by the particular disposition of Providence there is a party now lying up-stairs, ay titled gentleman with an enlarged liver, the fruit of some years spent in your colonial service, who owns and desires to part with one, at all events, of the instruments of this enterprise of ours."

"The yacht?"

"The steam-yacht, sir. It is called the *Amaranth*, and lies at this moment at Ryde."

"What is the owner's name?"

"He was good enough to introdooce himself to me one afternoon last week in the parlor as Sir Anthony Hipkins."

"Hipkins? That doesn't sound right."

"Sir," replied Mr. Brentin, "I know very little of your titled aristocracy, but I admit it did not sound right to me. However, I talked it over with my friend, the clerk in the bureau, and he assured me that Hipkins is his real name; that he has been for some years judge on the Gold Coast, and, by the personal favor of your Queen Victoria, has been lately elevated to the dignity of knighthood, as some compensation for his complaint caught in the service. He had the next room to us, but the midnight groaning-act in which he occasionally indulged was too much for Mrs. Brentin, and we were forced to shift."

"Has he spoken to you about his yacht?"

"He introdooced himself right here in the parlor, and offered it me for three thousand pounds."

"What did you say?"

"I presented him to Mrs. Brentin right away, as I invariably do when I want an inconvenient request refused. She explained that ay steam-yacht was very little use to her in the journeys she is at present taking about this city in search of the localities of Charles Dickens. Whereupon Judge Hipkins, who impressed me as being brainy, immediately replied, 'What about Yarmouth and little Em'ly' "

"What did Mrs. Brentin say to that?"

"Why, sir, Mrs. Brentin thought three thousand pounds too much to pay for the privilege of approaching Yarmouth by sea; more especially as she is a bad sailor, and commences to be sick at her stomach before leaving the kay-side. Now, however, Mr. Blacker," he said, rising, "we will, if you please, go and find Sir Anthony Hipkins, and we will buy his steam-yacht."

The rapidity of the American mind somewhat alarmed me; still, I felt there was nothing for it but to follow Mr. Brentin. He went straight to the bureau, and, on inquiring for Sir Anthony, learned he was up-stairs ill in bed, and that his wife was with him.

As we went up in the lift, Mr. Brentin winked at me. "It is in our favor, sir, that the judge is sick; we will be sympathetic, but we will not offer more than two thousand five hundred pounds."

We found No. 246, and Mr. Brentin knocked. A deep groaning voice called to us to come in.

"The judge must be real bad if he has sent for his wife," observed Mr. Brentin. "On reflection, we will try him with two thousand. Come right alawng in, sir, and I will present you."

I followed him into the bedroom, and there we found Sir Anthony lying, propped up in bed. He was a long, gaunt man, with a grizzling beard, a hook-nose, like a tulwar, and a quantity of rough, brown hair turning gray. By his side was sitting a small, dry, prim old lady, reading from a book, with gold pince-nez, and notwithstanding our entrance she went steadily on.

"Stop that now, Nanny," Sir Anthony called, fretfully, stretching his hand out of the bed over the page, "and let us hear what these men want."

"Sir Anthony and Lady Hipkins," said Mr. Brentin, politely, with a bow to each, his hat in his hand, "permit me to present to you my young friend, Mr. Vincent Blacker. He is in want of a yacht, and though he has his eye on several, would be glad to learn particulars of yours before concluding."

Sir Anthony rolled his bony head on the pillow and groaned. Directly he withdrew his hand from the page the dry old lady went on with her reading in a curious, dull, flat voice. Mr. Brentin came to the foot of the bed, and, leaning his arms on the brass rail, surveyed him sympathetically.

"Are you too sick, judge," he asked, "to discuss business matters with us?"

"*And in the eleventh year of Joram, the son of Ahab*—" droned her ladyship.

"Go away, Nanny," shouted Sir Anthony, pointing to the opposite door; "go into the next room, or go out and take a walk."

Mr. Brentin opened the door, and, after putting the Bible on the bed under Sir Anthony's big nose, Lady Hipkins left the room quietly, as she was directed.

"You're Mr. Brentin, ain't you?" asked the judge. "Beg your pardon for not recognizing you. What did you say your friend's name was?"

Mr. Brentin explained that I was Mr. Vincent Blacker, a gentleman of position and the highest integrity, an officer in Queen Victoria's militia.

"Oh, ah!" said the judge, sitting up in bed and scratching his legs ruefully. "And he wants to buy a yacht?"

"He has almost concluded for the purchase of one," Mr. Brentin replied, "but I have suggested he should wait—"

The judge began most unexpectedly to laugh, bending his head between his knees and stifling his merriment with the counterpane.

"The judge is better," observed Mr. Brentin, with a wave of his hand. "The presence of gentlemen who sympathize with his complaint, and the likelihood of completing—"

"It's too damn ridiculous," laughed the judge, "to be caught shamming Abraham like this, by George! Serves me right. You see, Mr. Blacker, after three years of the Gold Coast I was naturally anxious to see whether London had greatly altered in my absence, and, consequently, neglected to go and reside at Norwood with her ladyship. Whereupon her ladyship wrote, demanding the reason

of my lengthy stay in the metropolis. What was I to do but say I was too ill to move, but that the minute I was well enough—" Sir Anthony went off laughing again, and I laughed too.

"But that midnight groaning-act of yours, judge," asked the shocked Brentin, "which so much disturbed and alarmed Mrs. Brentin and myself?"

"Oh, that was genuine enough," chuckled Sir Anthony; "but it was more the thought of having to go to Norwood and attend the concerts at the Crystal Palace than any actual physical pain."

Mr. Brentin's visage clouded over, and he grew sombre and grave. With true American chivalry, he could not bear the idea of any one imposing on a woman, especially an old and plain one.

"However," said the judge, "I'm rightly punished by her ladyship's descending on me and forcing me to go to bed—not to mention the Book of Kings, and all my smoke cut off."

"This will be ay lesson to you, judge, I trust," observed Mr. Brentin, sternly.

"First and second lesson, by George! And now let's talk about the yacht. Your friend wants to buy a yacht?"

I must say I was a good deal alarmed at Brentin's coolness and precipitancy in so readily bringing me forward as purchaser of the *Amaranth*, and, as I listened to their conversation, quite made up my mind not to bind myself irrevocably to anything. Three, or even two, thousand pounds! My idea was doubtless a remarkable one, but I had no notion of backing it to that amount—at all events, with my own money. So, with an air of sham gravity, I listened, assuming as solid an air of wealth as I could on so short a notice, determined at the last moment to make the necessary fatal objections, which would finally effectually prevent my being saddled with the thing.

The judge explained that the yacht had only just been left him by an uncle who had died very suddenly in the "Albany"; that it was in complete order, ready victualled and manned; that it had usually been sent round to the Riviera, and joined there overland by his uncle, who spent the winter months on board till the advent of spring enabled him to return to London; that there it was lying at Ryde, awaiting his orders, and that he had accidentally heard that Captain Evans, in default of instructions, was actually employing it for excursions on his own behalf, and taking the Ryde people for trips in the Solent and runs over to Bournemouth at so much a head when the weather was favorable; which would all have to be accounted for, added the judge, of course. It was a large yacht, of about four hundred tons, and, rather than be bothered with it, the judge would let it go for three thousand pounds.

"Why don't you go down and see it," he asked, "before you decide? And, if I were you, I wouldn't let Evans know you are coming; if it's a fine day, you are sure to catch him at some of his little games, and that'll give you a hold over him."

"Three thousand pounds is ay large sum of money, judge," objected Mr. Brentin.

"Not bad; but then it's a large yacht. Now look here, don't you haggle with me," he went on, irritably, "because I don't like it. You can either take it or leave it. I won't let it go for a penny less. Rather than that, I'll go and live on board and spend my time crossing between Portsmouth and the island. I should be safe from her ladyship, at any rate, for even coming up in the lift upsets her."

We shook his hand and left him composing himself to receive Lady Hipkins again. She was walking up and down the corridor as we came out, and Mr. Brentin went up to her and bowed.

"The judge is real bad, ma'am," he said, with great gravity, "and should not be left. He has been explaining to us what a comfort you and your reading are to him, and how much he looks forward to being taken down to Norwood and nursed back to his former robust health at your hands. If I may venture to advise, you should procure a hotel conveyance as soon as possible and drive him way down home by easy stages. The air in this city, ma'am, is not good for ay man of the judge's temperament and physique."

"You have a kind face," her ladyship answered, in her strange, flat voice, "and mean kindly, I am sure. But I am extremely deaf, and have not heard one word you have said. Perhaps you would kindly write it down for me?" she added, handing him a little book.

"It's of no consequence," bawled Mr. Brentin through his hands. "Good-afternoon!"

"Why doesn't the old shakes carry a trumpet" he said, angrily, as we went down-stairs. "What's the matter with a trumpet?"

In the hall, before leaving him, I hastened to explain I had no thought of expending three thousand pounds in the purchase of Sir Anthony's or any yacht whatsoever; that my contribution to the expedition would be the idea, and so many of the resolute men as I could lay hands on among my friends.

"That will be all right, Mr. Blacker," Brentin loftily replied; "I will see after the yacht portion of the affair. It can be made good to me, if I run short, out of the boodle, and, if it all fails, I have no doubt I shall have my money value in excitement. In the meantime, sir, let us waltz in and secure the yacht, to begin with. If you will be free in the morning, we will descend upon Ryde and Captain Evans. If we find him going to sea, so much the better; we shall have the opportunity of testing the sailing capacities of the *Amaranth*. Good-day to you, sir. I have to thank you for infusing my exhossted veins with a breath of the true spirit of the forty-niners, who made the State of California what she is. The holding up of ay Sacramento bank will be nothing to this, sir, if we don't spile—that is, spoil—it."

CHAPTER VIII

WE GO TO RYDE—THE *AMARANTH*—ACCIDENTAL MEETING WITH ARTHUR MASTERS AND HIS LADY FRIEND—I ENROLL HIM AMONG US PROVISIONALLY—WE DECIDE TO PURCHASE THE YACHT

I DON'T know that it would be altogether necessary to the course of the narrative of this work to say much about our visit to Ryde and the *Amaranth* were it not that, while there, we accidentally encountered Arthur Masters, an old friend and school-fellow of mine. He was staying at Seaview, and, being in a mazed condition of lovelornness (for nothing short of it would have induced him to neglect the harriers of which he is master in Hertfordshire), had come over for the day with the young lady, and was spending it there mainly on the pier, being uncommonly warm and fine for November.

Mr. Brentin and I had just arrived, and were keeping our weather-eye open for the *Amaranth*, when we came on Arthur and his young lady sitting on the pier in the sun. She was introduced to us as Miss Rybot, and wore a straw-hat and a shirt, just as though it were summer.

We told them we had come down about a yacht, and, if we could only find her, were thinking of making a small trial-trip across the Solent.

As we were talking and persuading them to accompany us, up comes a sailor in a blue jersey, with *Amaranth* across it in red, and hands us a printed bill.

> "*The* Amaranth, *fast steam-yacht (Captain Evans, Commander), will sail daily from Hyde pier-head (weather permitting) for a two hours' trip in the Solent. Fares: Saloon, half a crown; fore cabin, one shilling.*"

"Doing much business?" asked Mr. Brentin carelessly, cocking his eye on the man.

"Pretty fair, mister," the sailor replied, "when the weather's like this. There's a good few aboard already."

"Is there?" Mr. Brentin innocently remarked. "All right. Give Captain Evans Sir Anthony Hipkins's compliments and say we will come aboard right away."

"Sir Anthony! Lord love you!" ejaculated the sailor, and was off pretty fast down to the pier-head.

"We will give the captain a few minutes to clear out his Ryde friends," observed Mr. Brentin with a wink, "and then we will pro-ceed."

And, sure enough, as we got leisurely down to the pier-head there we found a boat just landing from the *Amaranth*, half a dozen excursionists in her with hand-bags and bottles, talking fast among themselves and giving frightened glances back at the yacht lying in the tideway two or three hundred yards off.

"Anything wrong on board, my friend?" drawled Mr. Brentin to a large, puce-faced man with a red comforter loosely knotted round his throat, as he clambered up the pier steps.

"Anythin' wrong?" echoed the terrified man. "Captain says rust 'as suddenly got into the b'ilers and 'e's afraid they'll bust. That's all!—Mother, where's Emma?"

"We shall have the ship to ourselves," remarked Mr. Brentin. "Music provided, too. Sakes alive!"

The music was a harp, a cornet, and a stout woman with a large accordion slung on her back. The cornettist, a battered-looking young man with one eye, carried a shell for collecting the money, and a camp-stool.

"Oh, don't go!" drawled Mr. Brentin; "we have a passion for music on the waters."

"'Ave you?" cried the sarcastic cornettist. "Well, I 'ope you'll like gittin' blown up, too. Full steam a'ead, mates! Now then, missis, out of the way!"

Off they all trooped together as fast as they could down the length of the pier, giving occasional frightened glances back at the yacht, which began to blow us a sycophantish salute with her whistle.

"The only person who will get blown up to-day," observed Mr. Brentin as he took his seat in the boat, "will be Captain Evans."

All this time Miss Rybot had scarcely said a word. She was rather a haughty, not to say disagreeable-looking, young lady; tall, slightly freckled, with a high nose and a quantity of beautiful auburn hair. She appeared to take the situation with the utmost indifference, and not in the least to care whether she stayed on shore or went to sea and never came back. Altogether the sort of young lady who might lead an adorer rather a dance.

"Get under way at once, if you please, Captain Evans," said Mr. Brentin, sternly, as we came on board and found the captain waiting for us, exceedingly alarmed, his cap in his hand.

"Aye, aye, sir!" bleated the captain. "Where to?"

"Anywhere where we can give the yacht's speed a fair trial. What's the matter with our going round the island?"

"There's nothing the matter with it, sir, that I am aware of," answered the startled Evans.

"Then make it so! And then come and give me a few moments' conversation in the saloon. For the use of which," Mr. Brentin gravely added, "I do not propose to pay half a dollar."

"Aye, aye, sir!" And off we bustled towards Spithead.

"Where will you sit, Miss Rybot?" Masters asked, humbly.

"Anywhere out of the wind," was the indifferent answer; "and be good enough, please, to leave me to myself for a little. I wish to collect my thoughts, and you have, no doubt, a good deal to talk over with your friend."

The unfortunate Masters found her a sheltered seat (which she soon left and selected another), wrapped her legs in a rug (which she promptly threw off), and then came and sat himself down by

me.

"She's an orphan," he whispered, biting his nails, "and has to teach. I met her at Seaview. She has forty pounds a year of her own, and has one little nasty pupil, whom she loathes. She's a strict Roman Catholic, and talks of entering a convent, but she's a good deal in debt, and wants to pay off her debts first. She talks of going to Monte Carlo and winning enough at the tables to pay her debts, and then becoming a Poor Clare."

"A Poor Clare?"

"They're a strictly enclosed order," he groaned; "they keep a perpetual fast, have no beds, and go barefooted. They spend all their time in prayer and meditation, and live on alms."

"Then they don't marry, I suppose?"

"Don't I tell you they're strictly enclosed?"

"How long have you known her?"

"About a month. I met her at a friend's house at Seaview."

"Have you said anything to her yet?"

"Nothing very definite. I was going to to-day. But I don't believe it will be any use," he sighed; "she seems bent on the convent."

"Do you think she suspects your attachment?"

"Oh, she must by this time. I've given up several days' golf for her. But she's so confoundedly independent and thinks so badly of men. She fancies they're all after her because she's poor."

"Extraordinary young person!"

"Well, she says that if a man knows a girl's poor he always believes she's only too ready to marry him, just to escape from teaching and secure a comfortable home. That's the sort of girl she is; she swears she won't be purchased. What am I to do? What do you advise?"

I gave him plenty of sound advice, but could see he wasn't attending to me. At last he roused himself to ask about my affairs. He had heard the Mabel Harker entanglement was over, and naturally supposed there was some one else. So off I went about Lucy and "The French Horn," describing her minutely, and how unhappy I was, and how I was going down there at Christmas to make it all up, and that in the meantime—

"Then you would speak to her to-day and get some definite answer out of her?" he asked, biting his nails.

"How can I to-day, when she's miles away in the Ladbroke Grove Road?"

Masters stared, and I saw, of course, he hadn't been attending and was only thinking of himself.

With his mind in so confused and despondent a condition, I judged the opportunity excellent to try and get him to join us; so, after a few cautious preliminaries, I drew closer and let him into the whole secret of our visit to Ryde and trial of the yacht, giving him to understand that Mr. Brentin was already one of the heads of the enterprise, and that, if I couldn't get the necessary half-dozen resolute Englishmen, he would easily fill their places with the same number of ditto Americans, from the hotels in Northumberland Avenue; which would cause me some national shame, I said, and give me ground for fearing the ancient spirit of the country was really gone and dribbled off into mere stock-jobbing, as so many people assert—Drake and the Gilberts and Raleigh having shuffled into Capel Court, touting on curb-stones like Hamburg peddlers or ready-money pencillers, instead of taking the broad and daring road of nerve and valor.

Further, I seductively pointed out there would be no sort of reason why Miss Rybot shouldn't be of the party and try legitimately to win enough at the tables to pay her debts, if her heart was set on it; which would free her from all obligation towards him and bring about their marriage in the most natural way; and that if a chaperon were needed, I would engage to supply one, whether the young lady went to Monte Carlo by land or by sea.

As I had already experienced, different men take an announcement of this high order in different ways—some are shocked, some incredulous; some see all the difficulties at once, some never see any. As for Arthur Masters, he was in such a state of depression that I believe if I had said, "Arthur, we are going North to root up the Pole; will you make one?" he'd have answered, "Delighted!" and been off to Beale & Inman's at once to order the necessary outfit.

At all events, what he did say was, that if Miss Rybot could be induced to come, he would certainly come too, and do his best, charging himself with the duty of feeling his way with her, and promising to let me know the result as soon as possible. He only stipulated he should not be away longer than a fortnight in January, because of his harriers, which all this time were being rather inefficiently hunted by his younger brother and the dog boy.

We got back safely to Ryde, thoroughly satisfied with our outing and the behavior of the *Amaranth*, and caught the six-o'clock train back to Victoria.

Mr. Brentin had unfortunately taken a strong dislike to Miss Rybot, and imitated her cold, haughty "Really! you don't say so!" and other stand-offish little speeches, most of the way up. The imitation was not in the least like, of course, but served to show me the scornful bent of his mind towards her. When I told him I had secured Masters on the condition she came too, he grew quite angry, and declared that whatever route she took he should most certainly take the other, rather than be frozen in her society. He added, as a further ground of dislike, she was "pop-eyed"—a somewhat unjust description of her slightly prominent, large, cold, gray optics.

As for Captain Evans and his little game of using the yacht for excursions on his own account, the captain had given the, to me, rather lame explanation that yachts left idle came to no good, and should, in short, be taken out for exercise just like horses. Questioned why he didn't go out without company, he averred he must have ballast or the yacht would throb her sides out, and that he thought he might as well make the ballast pay. Also that he had kept a most careful record of receipts, and was prepared to account for every farthing to the rightful owners, whoever they should turn out to be.

In short, as is so often the case, Captain Evans had managed to prove quite conclusively that Mr. Brentin was entirely in the wrong in suspecting his proceedings, and that he was a much injured

and wholly innocent British sailor.

“That, sir,” said Mr. Brentin, chewing his cigar as we rattled along in the train, “has happened to me more than once with your lower orders. I go into my tailor’s with my noo coat bulging at the back, bursting with ay sense of injury at the misfit considering the price I have paid. And that tailor keeps cool while I stamp around; he surveys me with ay pitying smile, he calls up his assistants to admire the fit, and he proves to me con-clusively that the best part of that coat is precisely the bulge in the back, and that I shall injure his reputation and ruin the coat if I have it touched. I enter that store, sir, like ay raging lion, and I leave it ay teething lamb, my mouth overflowing with apologies, which the damn tailor will scarcely accept. And I know he thinks, ‘What infernal fools these Yankees are!’ and is laafing at me in his sleeve as the bulge and I disappear in the crowd of his other misfits, and are lost in the night of his paid accounts.”

That same evening the purchase of the yacht was concluded by Mr. Brentin, as he wrote me in the morning; directing me, further, to go right ahead and get the rest of my desperadoes together for a dash on the tables in January. He added in a postscript that, for his part, he was going into the city early next morning to buy three fair-sized cannon, capable of throwing three fair-sized shells; for, in case anything went wrong and we were captured, it would be just as well to leave orders with Captain Evans to shell the Casino, and so continue till we were released and replaced on board the *Amaranth*, with a guarantee for our expenses, and an undertaking for no further molestation.

Bold as I am, owing in some measure to my militia training, the rapidity of the American mind was again causing me some considerable qualms.

CHAPTER IX

MY SISTER'S SUSPICIONS—HEROES OF *THE ARGO*—MY SISTER DETERMINES TO COME WITH US AS CHAPERON TO MISS RYBOT

FROM now right on to Christmas I lived in a constant hurry and ferment of excitement; for not only was I full of every sort of preparation for our adventure, but every day brought me nearer "The French Horn" and my seeing dear Lucy once more. By the second week in December I had at last got our party of six together; to which number, for the present, at any rate, by Mr. Brentin's advice, it was determined to limit it. If it were to be done at all, he said, six could easily do it, and by adding more we were only increasing the danger of the affair leaking out and the people at the tables being forewarned and forearmed; neither of which, though more particularly the latter, did we at all desire.

Directly the party was complete, I informed Mr. Brentin, and by his directions gave them all a rendezvous at "The French Horn" for Christmas. He wished to see us all together he said, and take our measure; not that he doubted I had chosen the right sort, but rather that he might consider what post should be assigned to each—who should lead the van and who should guard the rear, and who, if necessary, should form the reserve and direct the shell-throwing on the Casino in case of our capture.

Meantime I had been so busy running over the country, interviewing and persuading, and by many being point-blank refused, that I had quite neglected my sister, Mrs Rivers, and Medworth Square; and whether it was she suspected something from my continued absence, or something had leaked out through Parker White, I never could quite discover; but, at any rate, she one day sent for me to come to tea, and attacked me at once to know what I was doing and why I never came to the house.

From very early days my sister Muriel has been my confidante in everything. My father I scarcely remember, beyond the fact that he always wore a white waistcoat and smelt of sherry when he kissed me, and my dear mother died in Jubilee year—a very sad year, notwithstanding the universal illuminations and rejoicings, for me; so to Muriel I have always carried all my troubles and griefs, and no better sister for that sort of work could any man wish for.

Particularly has she always been the sympathetic recipient of my love-affairs, with the single exception of my affair with Lucy; for though Muriel isn't in the least a snob, yet I don't suppose she would have been best pleased to learn of her only brother's attachment to an innkeeper's daughter, of however old a family. So all she knew was that the Mabel Harker business was at an end, and was naturally wondering how my vagrant heart was being employed meantime; questions on which subject, however, I had always managed to shirk.

Directly we were alone in the Medworth Square morning-room, she opened fire on me.

"Frank has been asking what has become of you lately, Vincent," she said—"what have you been doing with yourself?"

"I've been seeing a good deal of some Americans at the 'Victoria,' and a good deal in and out of town."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing of any importance. How's Mollie?"

"You can go and see Mollie afterwards. Now, look here, Vincent, you're up to something, and I mean to know what it is. I can't have my only brother drifting into a scrape, without doing my best to keep him out of it. You'd better make a clean breast. I shall be sure to find out."

I'd half a mind to tell her a downright fib and stop her importunities that way; but I'd the instinct she knew something of the fact, and was well aware that, if she weren't told all, would set her prig of a husband to work; and then our enterprise would as likely as not be nipped in the bud by being made public property.

So, on the whole, I judged it best to tell her exactly what we were doing and were going to do, taking care only to bind her over to the completest secrecy, which, once she had given her word, I knew she would die sooner than break.

She was half amused, half frightened, and at first wholly incredulous.

"But who on earth have you found to join you in such a cracked scheme?" she asked. "I didn't know you'd so many desperate lunatics among your acquaintances."

"Well, there's Arthur Masters and Bob Hines, to begin with; you know them."

"I don't think I know Mr. Hines, do I? Who is he?"

"Oh, he was at Marlborough with me, and now keeps a boys' school at Folkestone."

"A nice instructor of youth, to go on an expedition of this kind," laughed my sister.

"That's exactly what he's afraid of; he says if he's caught, it'll be the end of his business and he'll have to break stones."

"Then why does he go?"

"Well, you see, he's very much in want of a gymnasium for his boys, and I've promised to build him one out of the swag, if he'll join us."

"Tempted and fallen!" said my sister. "Really, Vincent, you're a Mephistopheles. And who else?"

"Harold Forsyth, of the Devon Borderers."

"Is that the little man who always looks as if he was bursting out of his clothes with overeating?"

"I dare say."

"But I thought he was engaged to be married. What's the young lady about, to let him go?"

"Well, the fact is," said I, "the young lady turns out to be a wrong un, and is now chasing him about with a writ for breach of promise in her glove, like a cab-fare."

“So he’s off to escape that?” said my sister. “You’re a nice lot. Any one else?”

“Teddy Parsons, in my militia.”

“He’s a poor creature,” my sister observed. “I shouldn’t take him; why, all he can do is play the banjo and walk about Southport in breeches and gaiters!”

“Yes, but he’s an old friend, and I want to do him a good turn.”

“You’ve odd notions of doing people a good turn,” Muriel laughed.

“The fact is,” I said, “he’s rather in a hole about a bill of his that’s coming due. He’s gone shares with one of our fellows in the regiment in a steeple-chaser and given him a bill to meet the expenses of training and the purchase; and as the bill’s coming due and he’s mortally afraid of his father—”

“You undertake to meet the bill, on the condition he joins you. I see. And has that been the best you can do? Who’s the sixth?”

“Mr. Brentin, who’s bought the yacht; the American at the ‘Victoria.’ ”

“Well, all I can say is,” said my sister, after a pause, “you’re rather a lame crew. Why, Teddy Parsons alone is enough to ruin anything!”

“Yes, I know,” I groaned, “but what is one to do? I’ve been all over the country seeing men, but they’re all much too frightened. We’re an utterly scratch lot, I know, but Brentin and I must do the best we can with the material and trust to luck.”

“That you most certainly will have to do,” said my sister, with conviction.

“Why can’t you come with us,” I urged, “and be the mascot of the party? We must have some one of the kind, if only to chaperon Miss Rybot.”

“Dear me, who’s Miss Rybot?”

“Arthur Masters’s young woman, without whom he won’t stir.”

Now my sister Muriel is like a good many other highly respectable Englishwomen: she is a most faithful wife and devoted mother, but she doesn’t care in any particular degree about her husband, and is only too glad to welcome anything in the way of honest excitement, if only to break the monotony of home life. And here was excitement for her, indeed, and, properly regarded, of the most irreproachably honest description.

It flattered, too, her love of adventure, for which she had never had much outlet in Medworth Square. Where we Blackers get our love of adventure from, by-the-way, I don’t quite know, unless it be from my mother’s father, who fought at Waterloo, and died a very old gentleman, a Knight of Windsor; but we certainly both of us have it very strongly, as all good English people should.

To cut a long story short, for I must really be getting on, my sister finally agreed to come, if only as chaperon to Miss Rybot. Like the rest of us, she had never been to Monte Carlo, having been hitherto forbidden by her husband; but now she said she would insist, and allege as a reason the necessity of her presence for keeping her only brother from ruining himself at the tables.

So I was delighted to hear of her plucky resolve, particularly as it at once got rid of the difficulty of Miss Rybot’s chaperon—since Brentin had made up his mind not to take his wife, but send her down to Rochester while he was away, and keep her fully employed there, in Charles Dickens’s country.

I kissed my sister, promising to come back to dinner, and meantime went up in the nursery, where I found my niece Mollie seated by the fire, wrapped in a grimy little shawl, reading Grimm’s *Fairy Tales*.

CHAPTER X

MR. BRENTIN'S INDISCRETION—LUCY AND I MAKE IT UP—BAILEY THOMPSON APPEARS IN CHURCH—ON CHRISTMAS DAY WE HOLD A COUNCIL OF WAR

Now it was the very day we went down to "The French Horn" together that Mr. Brentin confessed to me how, in spite of our agreement as to keeping the affair a profound secret, he had actually been so rash as to confide our whole plan to a stranger—a stranger casually encountered, above all places, in the smoking-room of the "Victoria"!

How incomprehensible, how weak and wavering is man! Here was Julius C. Brentin, as shrewd an American as can be met with in Low's Exchange, deliberately pouring into a strange ear a secret he had hitherto rigidly guarded even from his young and attractive wife.

Of course he had his excuses and defence; what man has not, when he does wrong? But whatever the excuse, there still remained the unpleasant fact that there was positively a man walking about (and from his description one evidently not quite a gentleman) who knew all about our arrangements and could at any moment communicate them to the authorities at Monte Carlo.

When I asked him, somewhat sharply, how ever he had come to commit so gross a blunder, he had really no explanation to give. He seemed to think he had sufficiently safeguarded himself by exchanging cards with the man, than which I could not conceive anything more childish—

MR. BAILEY THOMPSON

without an address or a club on it! What possible guarantee was there in that? Brentin himself couldn't quite say; only he seemed to fancy the possession of his card gave him some sort of hold on the owner, and that so long as he had it in his keeping we were safe against treachery.

How totally wrong he was, and how nearly his absurd confidence came to absolutely ruining us all, will clearly appear as this work goes on and readers are taken to Monte Carlo.

At last, as I continued to reproach him, he took refuge in saying, "Well, it's done, and there's an end to it; give over talking through your hat!" A vulgar Americanism which much offended me, and caused us to drive up to "The French Horn" in somewhat sulky silence.

It was the 23d of December, and we found Mr. Thatcher ready for us. I at once left him to show Brentin over the house, the great hall decorated with holly and cotton-wool mottoes, and to his room, while I went in immediate search of Lucy.

Over that tender meeting I draw the sacred veil of reticence. The dear girl was soon in my arms, soft and palpitating, full of forgiveness and love. We spent the afternoon together in a long walk across the links and down to the coast-guards' cottages, where we had tea; returning only in time for dinner, through the dark and starry evening of that singularly mild December.

The result of our walk was that we made up our minds to be married shortly before Easter—so soon, in fact, as I could get back from abroad and settle my affairs. About Monte Carlo, I told her nothing further than that my sister was not well, and I had undertaken to escort her there, and see after her for a time—a fib, which, knowing Lucy's apprehensive nature, I judged to be necessary, and for which I trust one day to be forgiven.

Mr. Brentin and I dined together, partly in silence, partly snapping at each other. On Christmas Eve our party was complete, with the exception of Harold Forsyth, who came over next morning from Colchester. On Christmas Day, "What's the matter with our all going to Church?" said Mr. Brentin.

"Nothing particularly the matter," Bob Hines replied, rather gruffly, "except that some of us are probably unaccustomed to it."

However, Brentin insisted, and to Church, accordingly, we all went, as meek as bleating lambs.

Now in the Wharton Park pew was sitting Mr. Crage. The pew is so sheltered with its high partition and curtain-rods, I didn't see him till he stood up; nor did I know there was any one else there till the parson glared down straight into the pew from the clerk's ancient seat under the pulpit, whence he read the lessons, and said he really must beg chance members of the congregation to observe the proper reverential attitude, and not be continually seated.

Whereupon a deep voice replied, amid considerable sensation, from the bowels of the pew, "Sir, you are in error. I always rise as the rubric directs, but having no advantage of height—" the rest of the speech being lost in the irreverent titters of our party.

Brentin, who was next the pew, looked over the partition and added to the sensation by audibly observing, "Sakes alive! It's friend Bailey Thompson."

When the service was over and we all got outside, he whispered, "Wait a minute, Blacker; send the others on, and I'll present you to my friend." So the others went on back to "The French Horn," while I remained behind with some apprehension and curiosity to take this Mr. Bailey Thompson's measure. He came out alone, Mr. Crage remaining to have a few words with the parson (with whom he was continually squabbling), and Brentin and Bailey Thompson greeted each other with great warmth.

He turned out to be a short, dark, determined-looking little man, with a square chin and old-fashioned, black, mutton-chop whiskers. No, he was clearly not quite a gentleman, in the sense that he had evidently never been at a public school.

"This," said Mr. Brentin as he presented me, "is the originator of the little scheme I was telling you of—Mr. Vincent Blacker."

"Oh, indeed!" Mr. Bailey Thompson replied, looking me full in the face with his penetrating black eyes, and politely lifting his small, tall hat. "Oh, indeed! so you really meant it?"

"Meant it?" echoed Brentin. "Why, the band of brothers is here; they were in the pew next you.

Mr. Bailey Thompson, we are all here together for the making of our final arrangements, and in two weeks we start."

"Oh, indeed!" he smiled; "it's a bold piece of work."

"Sir, it is colossal, but it will succeed!"

"Let us hope so. I am sure I wish you every success."

"Mr. Bailey Thompson," said Brentin, evidently nettled at the way the little man continued incredulously to smile, "if you care to join us some time during the afternoon we shall be glad to lay details of our plan before you. They will not only prove our *bona-fides*, but show how complete and fully thought out all our preparations are."

"If I can leave my friend Crage towards four o'clock, I will," Mr. Thompson replied. "I know Monte Carlo as well as most men, and may be able to give you some useful hints."

"We shall be glad to see you, for none of us have ever been there. But not a word to your friend!"

"Not a word to a soul!" smiled the imperturbable little man; and he left us to join the abandoned Crage, who was still inside the sacred edifice snarling at the parson.

It was quite useless saying anything further to Brentin. I merely contented myself with pointing out that if anything could make me suspect Mr. Bailey Thompson, it was his being the guest of Mr. Crage.

"Pawsibly!" drawled Mr. Brentin. "I don't pretend the man is pure-bred, nor exactly fit at this moment to take his seat at Queen Victoria's table; but that he's stanch, with that square chin, I will stake my bottom dollar. And seeing how well he knows the locality, we shall learn something from him, sir, which, you may depend upon, will be highly useful."

The attitude of the band of brothers so far had been rather of the negative order. Whether their enthusiasm was cooling, as they had been employing their spare time in pitifully surveying the difficulties and danger of the scheme, instead of the glory and the profit, I know not; but, obviously, neither on Christmas Eve nor Christmas morning were they any longer in the hopeful condition in which they were when I first approached and secured them.

That they had been talking the matter over among themselves was clear, for no sooner was the Christmas fare disposed of in the great hall than they began to open fire. Their first shot was discharged when Mr. Thatcher brought us in a bowl of punch, about three o'clock, and Brentin proceeded to charge their glasses, and desire them to drink to the affair and our successful return therefrom.

They drank the toast so half-heartedly, much as Jacobites when called on to pledge King George, that Brentin lost his temper.

"Gentlemen!" he cried, thumping the table, "if you cannot drink to our success with more *momentum* than that, you will never do for adventurers; you may as well stay right here and till the soil. And that's all there is to it!"

"What's the matter with eating fat bacon under a hedge?" growled Bob Hines. He had been much nettled at the way Brentin had taken us all in charge, and more particularly at his being ordered off to church. Hence his not altogether apposite interruption.

Brentin fixed him with his glittering, beady eyes. "Mr. Hines," he said, "if you are the spokesman of the malecontents, I am perfectly ready to hear what you have to object."

"You are very good," Hines replied, stiffly, "but I imagined the scheme was Blacker's, and not yours at all."

"The scheme is the scheme," said Brentin, impatiently. "Neither one man's nor another's. Either you go in with us or you do not; now, then, take your choice, right here and now. You know all about it, what we are going to do and how we are going to do it. There are no flies on the scheme, any more than there are on us. We don't care ay ginger-snap whether you withdraw or not; but at least we have the right to know which course you intend to pursue."

"The difficulty appears to me," Forsyth struck in, in conciliatory tones, "that none of us have ever been to the place, so that we can't really tell whether the thing is possible or not."

"Exactly!" murmured Teddy Parsons.

Brentin gave a gesture of vexation. "Monte Carlo has, of course, been thoroughly surveyed before this determination of ours has been arrived at—from a distance, ay considerable distance, I admit. Still, it has been surveyed, though, naturally, through other parties' eyes. Every authority we have consulted agrees that the thing is perfectly feasible; every one, without exception, wonders why it has never been done before; every one admits it is a plague-spot which should be cauterized. Shall we do it? Yes or no? There is the whole thing in ay nutshell."

Teddy Parsons observed, "There is one thing I should like to know, and that is—er—will there be any bloodshed?"

"Not unless they shed it," was Brentin's somewhat grim reply.

Teddy shuddered and went on, "But I understand we are actually to be armed with revolvers."

"That is so," said Brentin, "but they will not be loaded, or with blank cartridge at the most. Experience tells us that gentlemen are just as badly frightened by an unloaded as by a loaded gun."

Then Arthur Masters struck in, "I suppose there will be likely to be a good deal of hustling and possibly violence before we can count on getting clear away?"

"I don't apprehend," said Brentin, "there will be much of either; though, of course, we can't expect the affair will pass off quite so quietly as an ordinary social lunch-party. We may, for instance, have to knock a few people down. Surely English gentlemen are not afraid of having to do that?"

"It is not a question of fear," Masters haughtily replied. "I'm not thinking of that."

"Hear! Hear!" cried that snipe Parsons.

"I am thinking of the ladies of our party."

"There's a very pretty girl here," Parsons ventured. "I wish she could be persuaded—"

Forsyth nudged him, while I cried "Order!" savagely.

"There will be ladies in our party," Masters went on. "It would be a terrible thing if they were to

be frightened or in any way injured."

"I yield to no man," declaimed Brentin, "in my chivalrous respect for the sex. But there are certain places and times when the presence of ladies is highly undesirable. The Casino rooms at Monte Carlo, when we are about to raid them, is one. That's the reason which has determined me to leave Mrs. Brentin behind, in complete ignorance of what we are about to do. I do not presume to dictate to other gentlemen what their course of action should be, but I must say our chances of success will be enormously magnified if no ladies are permitted to be of the party."

"Hear! Hear!" murmured Hines, who from a certain gruffness of manner is no particular favorite with the sex.

"Perhaps it would be enough," urged Masters, "if, on the actual day of our attempt, the ladies of our party undertook not to go into the rooms?"

"Perhaps it would," Brentin replied, "but for myself I should prefer they remained altogether in England, offering up a series of succinct and heartfelt prayers for our safe return."

Bob Hines gave a snort of laughter, whereupon Brentin fixed him inquiringly.

"Englishwomen have prayed for the safe return of heroes before now, Mr. Hines."

"I am aware of it."

"Then why gurgle at the back of your throat?"

"I have a certain irrepressible sense of humor."

"That is remarkable for an Englishman!"

Whether Mr. Brentin were deliberately bent on rubbing us all up the wrong way, I don't know, but he was most certainly doing it, so I thought it judicious to interpose. It was just at that moment Mr. Bailey Thompson stepped into the room.

CHAPTER XI

MR. BAILEY THOMPSON GIVES US HIS INGENIOUS ADVICE—WE ARE FOOLS ENOUGH TO TRUST HIM—MISPLACED CONFIDENCE

"THE very man!" cried Brentin. "Mr. Bailey Thompson, let me present you to my friends. You are just in time to give them assurance of the feasibility of the great scheme you and I have already had some discussion over."

Now Bailey Thompson's name had been cursorily mentioned during dinner as that of a gentleman who might look in in the course of the afternoon, and, if he came, would be able to give us some useful hints; but, beyond that, Brentin had kept him back as a final card, having already some notion of the wavering going on, and desiring to use him to clinch the business one way or the other.

Mr. Thompson bowed and smiled, and Brentin went on.

"There is some dissatisfaction in the camp, sir; there is some doubt and there is fear. Advice is badly needed. I look to you to give it us."

"I shall be very glad to be of any use."

"Then let me present you, Mr. Thompson. This powerful young man with the leonine head and cherry-wood pipe is Mr. Hines; next him, with the slight frame, tawny mustache, and Richmond Gem cigarette, is Mr. Parsons; opposite, with the clean, clear, and agreeable countenance and the cigar, is Mr. Forsyth; next him, with the sloping brow and thoughtful back to his head, is Mr. Masters, who doesn't smoke. Vincent Blacker you know. Gentlemen, Mr. Bailey Thompson. There is your glass, sir; drink, and when you feel sufficiently stimulated and communicative, speak!"

Mr. Thompson darted his penetrating eyes over the company, smiled again, and took his glass of tepid punch.

"So you really mean it," he said, sitting between us.

Mr. Brentin groaned. "Don't let us hear that from you again, sir," he said; "it is likely to breed bad blood. Take it from me, we really mean it, and only need advice how it should best be done. Mr. Bailey Thompson, we are all attention."

"In the first place, then," the little man remarked, amid dead silence, as he sipped his punch, "let me say you have, in my judgment, enormously underestimated the amount of money in the rooms."

"Ah!"

"I know the place well, and speak with some authority."

"Just what we want."

"Now, there are nine roulette and four trente-et-quarante tables. Each, I am told, is furnished with £4000 to begin play on for the day; total, £52,000."

"Mark this, gentlemen!" cried the agitated Brentin.

"But each table wins per diem, roughly speaking, about £400; so that, if you select, say, ten o'clock in the evening for your attempt, you may count on £5200 more—total, say, £58,000."

"Make a note, gentlemen," said Brentin, "that we select ten-thirty, to make sure."

"That does not take into account the money lying there already staked by the players, which you may calculate as fully £3000 more."

"Oh, go slow, Mr. Bailey Thompson, sir, go slow!"

"But where your underestimation is most marked," said the impressive little man, sweeping his eyes round the attentive circle, "is in calculating the reserve in the vaults. In short, I have no hesitation in saying that, taking everything into consideration, there must be at least half a million of money lying in the Casino premises, at—the—very—least!"

In the dead silence, broken only by the taking in of breath, I could hear Lucy playing the piano down-stairs in the little room behind the bar.

Mr. Thompson sipped his punch again and looked at us calmly over the rim of his tumbler.

"And you think the money in the vaults is as easily got at as the rest?" Bob Hines asked, in a constrained voice.

"That I shouldn't like to say," Thompson cautiously replied. "I can tell you, however, that I have myself twice seen the bank broken; which only means, by-the-way, that the £4000 at that particular table had been won."

"And what happened?"

"Play at that table was merely suspended while a further supply was being fetched from the vaults."

"And where are the vaults?"

"Below the building somewhere, but precisely where I cannot tell you; but I have no doubt, once the rooms are in your possession, and, given the time, you would have no difficulty whatever in breaking into them."

Impressive silence again, broken at last by Brentin. "And now, sir, will you be good enough to give us some idea of the amount of opposition we are likely to meet with?"

Bailey Thompson looked meditative, and, after a pause, proceeded. "Outside the building, at every twenty paces or so, you will find men stationed. They are merely firemen, whose chief duty it is to see no bomb is thrown into the rooms or deposited outside by the anarchists, who have frequently threatened it. They are not soldiers, and are not in any way armed."

Teddy Parsons breathed heavily and murmured, "Capital!"

"And what force is there inside?"

"There are a great number of men about, attendants and so forth, but I cannot conceive them capable of any resistance."

“You don’t imagine they are secretly armed?” asked the palpitating Teddy.

“Dear me, no, any more than the attendants at an ordinary club!”

“In short,” said Mr. Brentin, “you feel pretty confident that neither inside nor outside we are likely to encounter a single weapon of offence?”

“Perfectly confident. Perfectly confident, gentlemen.”

“And what about the army?” Parsons asked. “I understand the Prince of Monaco has an army of seventy men.”

“Quite correct,” Bailey Thompson replied, “but it is stationed up in Monaco, at least a mile away.”

“Then it would be some time before they could be mustered.”

“Besides,” Mr. Brentin dryly observed, “they are not likely to be of much use unless they can swim. We propose to escape on board the *Amaranth*.”

“That’s your best chance, gentlemen,” said Mr. Thompson—“in fact, your only practicable one.”

“And you think six of us are enough for the business?” asked Masters.

“You will be the best judges of that, perhaps, when you see the place. My own feeling is that, to make it all perfectly safe, you should be at least a dozen.”

“If necessary,” said Mr. Brentin, “we can always impress half a dozen of our crew. Nothing like a jolly Jack-tar for a job of this kind.”

“If you do,” smiled Bailey Thompson, “you will have to fig them out in what they call *tenue de ville convenable*. They won’t let them into the rooms in their common sailor dress. Why, gentlemen, they refused me admission once because my boots were dusty. Clean hands don’t so much matter,” he added, in his sly fashion.

Then he rose and remarked, “I must now be returning to Wharton; my poor old friend Crage is in low spirits, and I have undertaken not to be more than half an hour away from him. If there is any further information wanted, however—”

“Just this,” said Hines; “taking it at its worst, and supposing we are all, or any of us, captured, what do you imagine will be our fate?”

Mr. Thompson shrugged his shoulders. “You will be treated with every courtesy; you will undoubtedly be tried, but—if only from the fact of your failing—you will, I should think, be let off easily. If you succeed, and all of you get clear away, I do not imagine there will be any serious pursuit, for policy will close the authorities’ mouth; they will not care to advertise to the world how easily the place can be looted. In fact, from what I know of them, they will most likely take particular pains to deny it has ever been done at all. You see, gentlemen, the entire Continental press is in their pay.”

“There is, no doubt, a criminal court and a prison at Monaco?”

“Oh yes; and if, unfortunately, you are caught, you will all be sentenced for life, I imagine.”

“I don’t call that being let off easy,” grunted Teddy.

“Perhaps not in theory, but in practice, yes; for in a year or so you will find yourselves free to stroll about the town, and even down to Monte Carlo.”

“In fact, bolt?” said Masters.

“Exactly; more especially if your relatives pay due attention to the jailers and see they want for nothing. In conclusion, gentlemen, I drink to your enterprise, and wish you all well through it. *Au revoir!*” And with a courteous bow and wave of his gloved hand (he wore dogskin gloves the whole time), Mr. Bailey Thompson, accompanied by the jubilant Brentin, withdrew.

“Well,” I said, “what do you say now?”

There was a brief silence, and then Teddy Parsons observed, “It seems to me we may as well go.”

“Half a million of money!” murmured Forsyth, meditatively, “and most of it for hospitals.”

“I think, out of *that*, you might manage to stand me a swimming-bath as well as a gymnasium, eh?” whispered Bob Hines.

Mr. Brentin returned to us radiant. “Well, gentlemen, what do you think of it all now?”

“They are coming,” I ventured to say, and the band of brothers nodded.

“But, I say!” spluttered Masters, who had for the most part kept silent—“who is Mr. Bailey Thompson? Who knows anything about him? Who can guarantee he won’t give us away to the Monte Carlo people, and have us all quodded before we can even get a look in?”

Mr. Brentin frowned. “I will answer for Mr. Thompson with my life!” he cried. “He is a gentleman of the most royal integrity. I have studied him in every social relation, and I never knew him fail.”

“Oh, well, that’ll do,” interrupted Bob Hines, who had all along shown some impatience at Brentin’s long speeches. “We only want to know somebody is responsible for his not selling us, that’s all.”

A responsibility Mr. Brentin undertook with the greatest cheerfulness and readiness, and that, mind you, for a man who turned out to be Scotland Yard personified—who, but for his inane jealousy of the French police and his desire to effect our capture single-handed, would have been the means of casting five highly strung English gentlemen, and one excitable American, into lifelong chains; and who, on the very morning after his interview with us (as he afterwards confessed to me), was actually at Whitehall concerting plans with the authorities there how best to catch us *in flagrante delicto*!

How, on the contrary, we caught *him*, and had him deported to the southernmost point of Greece, forms one of my choicest memories, and will now soon be related at sufficient length.

CHAPTER XII

MONTE CARLO—MR. VAN GINKEL'S YACHT *SARATOGA*—WE PROSPECT—FORTUNATE DISCOVERY OF THE POINT OF ATTACK—FIRST VISIT TO THE ROOMS

It was a brilliant January day, mild and sunny, when Mr. Brentin, Parsons, and I were standing in the old bastion on the point of Monaco, straining our gaze for a glimpse of the *Amaranth*. In front stretched the flickering, shifting pavement of the Mediterranean, of a deep, smooth sapphire, ruffled here and there, as the nap of a hat brushed the wrong way. Nothing to be seen on it but the one loose white sail of a yacht drifting out of harbor past the point.

We had strolled up the long ramp from the Condamine and through the gateway leading to the old bastions, chiefly to see whether they were provided with guns; we were relieved to find they were not—mere peaceable flower-walks, in fact, and already blossoming with geranium.

From the unfinished cathedral behind us in the old town, crushed and huddled together like a Yorkshire fishing village, came the rolling throb of the heavy mid-day bell; up from the harbor far below, the smart bugle-call of a French corvette. Little figures in white ran about the deck, and the tricolor fluttered from the peak. Close alongside her lay an American yacht, the *Saratoga*, belonging to Mr. Van Ginkel, a former friend of Mr. Brentin's. Both the vessels caused us a considerable amount of uneasiness; the corvette carried guns, the *Saratoga* was noted for her speed. It was quite uncertain how long they might continue to grace the harbor. One could easily blow us out of the water; the other could just as easily give us an hour's start, take fifty men on board, pursue, overhaul, and bring us back, flushed though in other respects we might be with victory.

We had already been three days in Monte Carlo, and so far there had been no sign of their departure. "If the worst comes," said Mr. Brentin, "we must take Van Ginkel into our confidence and indooce him to take a trip over to San Remo on the night of our attempt. The mischief is, I am so little of his acquaintance now I hesitate to ask so great a favor."

"What sort of man is he?" I asked.

"Well, sir, we were classmates at Harvard in '60. Since then, though full of good-will, we have scarcely met. I understand, however, he has some stomach trouble, and is ay considerable invalid."

"Married?"

"Di-vorced. Mrs. Van Ginkel is now the Princess Danleno, of Rome, a widow of large wealth. She owns the Villa Camellia at Cannes, and is over here constantly, in the season, they tell me. She plays heavily on a highly ingenious and complicated system of her own, which costs her about as much as the *Saratoga* costs her former husband."

We had taken up our abode at the "Hôtel Monopôle"—a hotel recommended to us by Mr. Bailey Thompson, by-the-way, for purposes of his own. It is a quiet little house, up the hill, and not far from the "Victoria"; there we had safely arrived three days before—Parsons, Brentin, Bob Hines, and I. Forsyth, Masters, my sister Mrs. Rivers, and Miss Rybot had embarked in the *Amaranth* from Portsmouth a few days before we left London, and were now about due at Monte Carlo. My brother-in-law, the publisher, had made no difficulty to my sister's joining the expedition, as to the true object of which he of course knew nothing; in fact, he was delighted she could get a holiday on the Riviera so cheaply. It was understood she was not to play, and not to spend more than £10 *en route*. I heard afterwards that Paternoster Row simply ran with his brag. "I'm a bachelor just at present. My wife's yachting in the Mediterranean with some rich Americans. Very hospitable people; they wanted me to come, but really, just now—" etc., etc.

We had spent our first three days, not unprofitably, in prospecting the place. We reached Monte Carlo in the afternoon, and at once drove up to the hotel. Almost the first thing we saw was a large board over a little house on the hillside, close by the Crédit Lyonnais, with "*Avances sur bijoux*" on it.

Brentin chuckled. "Well, gentlemen," he said, "we sha'n't play the game quite so low down as that, eh? It will be either neck or nothing with us."

It was five o'clock before we started to go down to the Casino. We set out in solemn silence, down the steep and glaring white road, past the "Victoria" and the chemist's. At the head of the gaudy, painted gardens, that look like the supreme effort of a *modiste*, we came in full view of the rooms. There we paused, choked, the most sensitive of us, by our emotions.

In front there was a long strip of gay flower-beds and white pebble paths, flanked by rows of California palms. To my excited fancy they were the planted feather brooms of *valets-de-place*—moral *valets-de-place* who had set out to sweep the place clean but had never had the courage to go further. To the right of us were the hotels—the "St. James's" and the "De Paris"; to the left, the Casino gardens again, and the shallow pools where the frogs croak so dolorously at nightfall. They are, I believe (for I am a Pythagorean), the souls of ruined gamblers, still croaking out their *quatre premier*, their *dix-quinze*, their *douze dernier*.

"Peace, batrachians!" I cried to them one evening, in the exalted mood that now became common to me. "Be still, hoarse souls! push no more shadowy stakes upon a board of shadows with your webbed fingers. We are here to avenge ye!"

Then we went on down to the front of the rooms. There, unable to find a seat, we leaned against a lamp-post and gloated on the fantastic building that held our future possessions. On our left was the Café de Paris, overflowing with *consommateurs* at little tables under the awning; from the swirling whirlpool of noise made by the Hungarian band issued a maimed but recognizable English comic air. The sun was just setting in a matchless sky of Eton blue; the breeze had dropped, and the dingy Monaco flag over the Casino hung inert.

"Soldiers!" whispered Teddy, giving me a frightened nudge.

They were, apparently, a couple of officers of the prince's army, strolling round, smoking cheap cigars; they carried no side arms, and were of no particular physique. "Besides," I said, "they are not allowed to enter the rooms. Don't be so nervous, Teddy."

"Let us go down on to the terrace," murmured Brentin, "and view the place from the back. We must see how close we can get the yacht up!"

So we went to the right, past the jingling omnibus crawling up from the Condamine, down the steps, and on to the terrace facing the sea. We passed the firemen Bailey Thompson told us we should find there, five or six of them; one at every twenty paces, in uniform, with an odd sort of gymnastic belt on. They were stationed at the back, too, and clearly formed a complete protection against any possible bomb-throwing.

"There are too many of those men," observed Brentin, irritably. "We shall have to do something to draw them off on our great night or they'll get in the way."

Then we went and looked over the balustrade of the terrace. Below us ran the railway from Monaco; on the other side of the line, connected by an iron bridge with the Casino terrace, was the pigeon-shooting club-house and grounds. They formed a sort of bastion, jutting out into the sea; the pale, wintry grass was still marked with the traps of last year.

"*That* won't do!" Brentin said, decisively, after a few moments' survey. "The run's too far over that bridge and down across the grass. Besides, we should want rope ladders before we could get down the wall. Come, gentlemen, let us try this way."

We went to the extreme right of the terrace, and there, miraculously enough, we found at once the very thing we wanted. Mr. Brentin merely pointed at it in silence, keeping his attitude till we had all grasped the situation. It was a rickety gate at the head of an evidently unused flight of steps, leading down on to the railway line below. Beside it stood a weather-worn board with "*Défense d'entrée au public*" on it. It looked singularly out of place amid all that smart newness; but there it was, the very thing we were in search of.

The railway below ran six or eight feet above the sea, without any protecting parapet to speak of. Just at the angle where the pigeon-shooting ground jutted out there was a sort of broken space, where, for some reason (perhaps to allow the employés to descend), rocks were piled up from the shore. A boat could be there in waiting; the yacht could lie thirty yards off; if we had designed the place ourselves, we couldn't have done it better.

Mr. Brentin slowly pointed a fateful finger down the steps, across the line, to the corner where the shore lay so close and handy.

"Do you observe it, gentlemen?" he whispered, awe-struck—"do you take it all in? There is no tide in the Mediterranean; the edge of the sea will always be there. Even if the night turns out as black as velvet we could find the boat there blindfold."

It was a solemn moment, broken only by the jingle of omnibus bells. I felt like Wolfe when he first spied the broken path that led up the cliff face from the St. Lawrence to the Heights of Abraham.

By accident or design, Brentin gave Teddy Parsons's white Homburg hat a tilt with his elbow; it tumbled off down the face of the terrace and fell out of sight on to the line.

"There's your chance, Teddy," I said. "Run down the steps and fetch your hat. You can see if there's another gate at the bottom where that bunch of cactus is."

Teddy came back breathless. "There's no sort of obstruction," he gasped. "It's a clear run all the way. Only we shall have to be careful, if the night's dark; some of the steps are broken." Poor Teddy, how prophetic!

We entered the rooms for the first time after dinner.

Readers who have been to Monte Carlo will remember that, before going into the hall, there is a room on the left, where half a dozen men sit writing cards of admission and drawing up lists of visitors. They make no trouble about it, they simply ask you your hotel and nationality—*Anglish, hein?*—and hand you over a pink card, good only for one day. Then you go to the right and leave your stick. Neither stick nor umbrella are allowed in the rooms. "Another point in our favor," as I whispered to Brentin.

Facing is the large hall; up and down stroll gamblers, come out for a breath of air or the whiff of a cigarette. Any one may use it, or the concert-room on the right, or the reading-rooms above, without a ticket; the ticket is needed only for the gambling. You can even cash a check or discount a bill there; for clerks are in attendance from the different banking-houses, within and without the principality, who will attend to your wants as a loser or take charge of your winnings.

On the left, heavy doors are constantly swinging. You can hear, if you listen, as they swing, the faint, enticing clink of the five-franc pieces within.

"Oh, my friends," murmured Brentin, as we moved towards them, "support me!"

He presented his pink card with a low bow to the two men guarding the entrance; we followed, and the next minute were palpitating in the stifling atmosphere of the last of the European public infernos.

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. WINGHAM AND TEDDY PARSONS—HE FOOLISHLY CONFIDES IN HER—I MAKE A SIMILAR MISTAKE

Now there was staying at our hotel, among other quiet people, a quiet old lady, whom, from her accent and the way she occasionally stumbled over an h, I took to be the widow of a well-to-do tradesman, a suburban *bon marché*, or stores. She played regularly every afternoon till dinner-time, dressed in black, with a veil down just below the tip of her nose, and worn black kid gloves, staking mostly on the *pair* or *impair* at roulette; and every evening she sat in the hotel over a bit of wood-fire, reading either *Le Petit Niçois* or an odd volume of *Sartor Resartus*, which, with some ancient torn *Graphics*, formed the library of the "Monopôle." Her name I discovered afterwards to be Mrs. Wingham.

It was only the third evening after our arrival that, going into the reading-room to write my daily loving letter to Lucy, there I found Mrs. Wingham and Teddy Parsons seated each side of the fire, talking away as confidentially as if they had known each other all their lives. Bob Hines, who had taken to gambling and couldn't be kept away from the rooms, and Brentin had gone down to the Casino.

Few things I know more difficult than to write a letter and at the same time listen to a conversation, and I soon found myself writing down scraps of Teddy's inflated talk, working it, in spite of myself, into my letter to Lucy—talk all the more inflated as I had come into the room quietly at his back, and he didn't know I was there.

He was telling the old lady all about his father, the colonel, and how he had fought through the Crimea without a scratch. Yes, he was in the army himself—at least, the auxiliary portion of it: the second line. He lived most of the year at Southport, when he wasn't out with his regiment, or hunting and shooting with friends, and always came up to London for the Derby and stayed in Duke Street. He was very fond of a bit of racing, and, in fact, owned some race horses—or, rather, "a chaser"—

"A what, sir?" asked the old woman, who was listening to him with her mouth open.

"A chaser—a steeple-chaser, don't you know—'Tenderloin,' which was entered for the Grand National, and would be sure to be heavily backed."

No, he didn't care much about gambling; a man didn't get a fair run for his money at Monte Carlo, the bank reserved too many odds in their own favor; to say nothing, as I knew, of his being kept very short of pocket-money by the colonel. And then he was actually fool enough to say, with a self-satisfied laugh, that he'd a notion the right way to treat the bank was to raid it.

"Raid it, sir?" cried the old woman.

"Yes, certainly, raid it; go into the rooms with a pistol and shout 'Hands up, everybody!' and carry off all the money on board a yacht, and be off, full speed." Did Mrs. Wingham know if it had ever been tried?

From that to confiding our whole plan would have been only one step; but just at that moment in came Mrs. Sellars and Miss Marter, the only two other English ladies in the hotel, and Teddy and Mrs. Wingham fell to talking in whispers.

Mrs. Sellars, who was a stout, comfortable-looking person, with a large nose, a high color, and an expansive figure, generally attired in a blouse and a green velveteen skirt, was given to walking up and down the reading-room, moaning in theatrical agony over the disquieting news from South Africa. If she didn't get a letter from her husband in the morning, she didn't know what she should do; it was weeks since she had heard from him; something told her he was dead—and so on. Every distressed turn she took brought her nearer the ramshackle piano; so at last Miss Marter, mainly to stop her (for old maids don't take much interest in other women's husbands, alive or dead), with some asperity remarked, "Sing us something, dear; it will calm you."

Then she came to me and said, excitedly, "*Do* you mind if I bring down my little dog? I always ask, as people sometimes object. It is the dearest little dog, and always sits in my lap."

Teddy gave a violent start when he heard me answer, and knew he was detected. He got up, and, pretending to hum, immediately left the room. I didn't like to follow at once, as I felt inclined; it would look as though Mrs. Sellars's threatened singing drove me away. But the moment she finished I meant to go and give the wind-bag a good blowing-up, and meantime went on with my letter.

Mrs. Sellars hooted "'Tis I!" and "In the Gloaming," and was beginning "Twickenham Ferry" when she broke down over the accompaniment, rose, and came to the fire. Miss Marter was sitting one side of it, stroking her torpid little terrier, and Mrs. Wingham (who was focussing *Sartor Resartus* through her glasses) on the other.

"Thank you, dear," said Miss Marter. "I hope you feel calmer."

"I shall never be calmer," Mrs. Sellars moaned, "till George is home again at my side."

"Well, dear," Miss Marter maliciously replied, looking down her long nose, "you know you insisted on his going."

So I left the two ladies to squabble as to who was mainly responsible for George's being in South Africa in such ticklish times, and went in search of Teddy.

He was neither in the *fumoir* nor his bedroom, so down I went to the rooms.

There I found Bob Hines punting on the middle dozen and the last six at roulette, with a pile of five-franc pieces before him.

"Those your winnings?" I whispered; to which he gave the not over-polite reply, "How can you be such a fool?"

So I knew he was losing, and went off in search of Brentin.

I found him in an excited circle watching a common-looking Englishman at the *trente-et-quarante* tables, who with great coolness was staking the maximum of twelve thousand francs, two at a time, one on *couleur* and one on black. In front of him the notes were piled so high that, being a little man, he had to press them down with his elbows before he could use his rake. Sometimes he won one bundle of notes, neatly pinned together and representing the maximum; sometimes both, as *couleur* and black turned out alike. Rarely he lost both. Others were staking, but mostly only paltry louis, or the broad, shining five-louis pieces one only sees at Monte Carlo. There was the usual church-like silence, broken only by the dry, sharp tones of the croupier's harsh voice, "*Le jeu est fait!*" and then, sharper still, "*Rien ne va plus!*"

Once the tension was broken by a titter of laughter, as a withered little Italian with a frightened air threw a five-franc piece down on the board and the croupier pushed it back. The poor devil apparently didn't know that gold only may be staked at *trente-et-quarante*.

I plucked Brentin by the sleeve and drew him to a side seat against the wall. "I hope that gentleman may be staking here this day week," he chuckled. "Notes are easy to carry, and I myself have seen him win sixty thousand francs."

When he heard about Teddy he was furious. It was all I could do to prevent him from going off at once to the hotel and insisting on his leaving Monte Carlo by the next train.

"I allow," he said, "I was precipitate with Bailey Thompson, but at least we drew something out of him in the way of information. But to confide in a blathering old woman, who has nothing to do but eat and talk—"

I went back to the hotel, only to find Teddy's bedroom door locked, and to have my knocking greeted with a loud, sham snore. Mrs. Wingham I found still in the reading-room, alone, still focussing *Sartor Resartus* with her shocked and puzzled expression.

"Your friend has just gone up to bed," she remarked, "if you are looking for him."

I thanked her, and, sitting the other side of the fire, proceeded to draw her out. She soon told me Teddy was so like a nephew of hers she had recently lost she had felt obliged to speak to him. She noticed him at once, she said, the first evening at dinner, and felt drawn to him immediately. What a fine, manly young feller he was, and how full of sperrit.

Yes, I said, he was, and often had very ingenious ideas—for instance, that notion of his to raid the tables I had overheard him discussing with her. But, then, there was all the difference in the world between having an idea and the carrying it out, wasn't there? Merely as a matter of curiosity, what did she think of the notion—she, who doubtless knew the place so well?

The artful old woman—Bailey Thompson's sister, if you please, and spy, as it afterwards turned out; hence his recommending us the "Monopôle," so that she might keep an eye on us and report—the artful old woman looked puzzled, as though she were trying to remember what it was Teddy had said on the subject. Then she began to laugh. "Oh, I didn't think much of that. Why, look at all the people there are about! Why, you'd need a ridgiment!"

Now, will it be believed that I, who had just been so righteously indignant with Parsons for his talkative folly, did myself (feeling uncommonly piqued at her scornful tone) immediately set out to prove to her the thing was perfectly possible, and then and there explain in detail how it could all be successfully done, and with how small a force. I did, indeed, so true as I am sitting writing here now, in our flat in Victoria Street.

Mrs. Wingham listened to me attentively, laughing to herself and saying, "Dear! dear! so it might!" as she rubbed her knuckled old hands between her black silk knees. When I had done, I felt so vexed with myself I could have bitten my tongue out.

I rose, however, and, observing, "Of course, it is an idea and nothing else, and never will be realized," bade her good-night and left the room, feeling uncommonly weak and foolish. She murmured, "Oh, of course!" as I closed the noisy glass door behind me and went up-stairs to bed.

A few minutes later, remembering I had left my book on the table where I had been writing to Lucy, I went down-stairs again to fetch it. Mrs. Wingham was still there, sitting at the table writing a letter. The envelope, already written, was lying close by my book, and I couldn't help reading it.

It was positively addressed to "Jas. B. Thompson, Esq., 3 Aldrich Road Villas, Brixton Rise, S. E. London."

I felt so faint I could scarcely get out of the room again and up the stairs.

But such is our insane confidence, where we ourselves and our own doings are concerned—such, at any rate, was mine in my lucky star—that I really felt no difficulty in persuading myself the whole thing was merely a coincidence, and that the writing of the letter had nothing whatever to do with either my or Teddy Parsons's divulgations; more especially as the Bailey, on which Thompson evidently piqued himself, was omitted.

And I determined to say nothing about it to Brentin, partly because I didn't care about being blackguarded by an American, and partly because I felt convinced it was all an accident, and nothing would come of it. Nor, in my generosity, did I do more to Teddy Parsons than temperately point out the folly he had been guilty of, and beg him to be more careful in future, which he very cheerfully promised, and for which magnanimity of mine he was, as I meant he should be, really uncommonly grateful.

CHAPTER XIV

ARRIVAL OF THE *AMARANTH*—ALL WELL ON BOARD—THEIR FIRST EXPERIENCE OF THE ROOMS

THE next afternoon, soon after four, the *Amaranth* arrived in harbor.

Bob Hines was gambling, as usual, but Brentin, Teddy, and I went down to the Condamine to meet them. Teddy and Brentin had had their row out in the morning, to which I had listened in silence—with the indulgent air of a man who doesn't want to add to the unpleasantness—and now were pretty good friends again. It was clearly understood, however, that no new acquaintances were to be made, male or female, and that henceforth any one of us seen talking to a stranger was immediately to be sent home.

I fear the party from the *Amaranth* did not have a very good impression of Monte Carlo to begin with, for they landed in the Condamine, just where the town drain-pipes lie, and came ashore, each of them, with a handkerchief to the nose.

"So this is the Riviera!" snuffled my good sister. "I understood it was embosomed in flowers."

They all looked very brown and well, and seemed in high spirits.

As for the yacht, she had behaved splendidly all through, and the conduct and polite attentions of Captain Evans and the crew had been above all praise. The only difficulty had been to explain away the shell and the three cannon; for which Forsyth had found the ingenious excuse that they were wanted for the Riff pirates, in case we determined to voyage along the African coast, where they are said to abound and will sometimes attack a yacht.

We all strolled up the hill together, and, such were their spirits, nothing would content the new arrivals but an immediate visit to the rooms. Miss Rybot, especially, was as cheerful as a blackbird in April; she had come there to gamble, she said, and gamble she would at once. She and Masters were evidently on the best of terms, and even the captious Brentin was pleased with what people who write books call her "infectious gayety."

"You have your own little schemes," she cried, "and I have mine. I am going to win fifty pounds to pay my debts with, and then I am going home, whether you have finished or not. And if I haven't finished, you will all have to leave me here."

They were soon provided with their pink admission-cards (ours had that morning, after the usual pretended scrutiny and demur, been exchanged for white monthly ones), and, after leaving their cloaks, passed through the swing-doors into the rooms.

It was just that impressive hour—the only one, I think, at Monte Carlo—when the Casino footmen, in their ill-fitting liveries, zigzagged with faded braid, bring in the yellow oil-lamps with hanging green shades, and sling them from the long brass chains over the tables. The rest of the rooms lie in twilight, before the electric light is turned up. Dim figures sweep noiselessly as spectres over the dull-shining parquet floor, and, like a spear, I have seen the last long ray of southern sunshine strike in and touch the ghastly hollow cheek of some old woman fingering her coins, lifeless and mechanical as Charon fingering his passage-money for the dead; but, just over the tables, the yellow light from the lamp falls brilliant, yet softly, brightly illuminating the gamblers' hands and some few of their faces, throwing the white numbers on the rich green cloth as strongly into relief as though newly sewn on there of tape.

"*Faites votre jeu, messieurs!*" croaks the croupier, in his dry, toneless voice.

With deft fingers he spins the active, rattling little ball.

"*Le jeu est fait!*"

The white ball begins to tire, drops out of its circuit.

"*Rien ne va plus!*"

A few seconds of leaping indecision and restlessness, before the ball falls finally into a number and remains there, while the board still spins.

"*Trente-six!—Rouge, pair et manque!*"

The croupiers' rakes are busy, pulling in the money lost; the money won is thrown with dull, heavy thuds and clinks on to the table. In a few moments it is begun all over again.

"*Faites votre jeu, messieurs!*"

"So this is Monte Carlo!" whispered my sister, in the proper, hushed tones, as though asking me for something to put in the collection. "My one objection is, no one looks in the least haggard or anxious. I understood I should see such terrible faces, and they all look as bored as people at an ordinary London dinner-party. Take me round."

Brentin came with us, and we visited each of the busy roulette-tables in turn. Monte Carlo was very full, and round some of the tables the crowd was so deep it was impossible to get near enough to look, much less to play. But between the tables there were large vacant spaces of dull-shining, greasy parquet; the tables looked like populous places on the map, and the flooring like open country. Here and there stood the footmen, straight out of an old Adelphi melodrama; some of them carried trays and glasses of water, and some gave you cards to mark the winning numbers and the colors.

"It is not quite so splendid and gay as I imagined," my sister observed. "In fact, it's all rather dim and dingy. Do you know it reminds me of the Pavilion at Brighton more than anything else. And how common some of the people are! Isn't that your friend, Mr. Hines?"

Bob Hines was sitting in rather a melancholy heap, with a pile of five-franc pieces in front of him, and a card on which he was morosely writing the numbers as they came up.

"Let's ask him how he's doing?"

"Never speak to a gambler," I whispered; "it's considered unlucky."

"Judging from his expression, he will be glad to get something back in your raid! And why seat

himself between those two terrible old women?”

“They look,” Brentin murmured, “like representations of friend Zola’s the fat and the lean. Sakes alive! they’d make the fortune of a dime museum. Those women are freaks, ma’am, freaks.”

Hines was sitting between two ladies; one, with a petulant face of old childishness, was enormously stout. Her eyebrows were densely blackened, her pendulous cheeks as dusty with powder as the Mentone road. She was gorgeously overdressed; her broad bosom, fluid as of arrested molten tallow, was hung with colored jewels, like a *bambino*. With huge gloved hands and arms she was wielding a rake, whereof poor Bob had occasionally the end in his face. Beside her, on the green cloth, lay a withered bunch of roses, dead of her large, cruel grasp. At her back stood her husband, a German Jew financier, who couldn’t keep his pince-nez on. Continually he smoothed his thin hair and tried to get her away, grumbling and moving from leg to leg; for hours he would stand behind her chair, supplying her with money, for she nearly always lost. Occasionally she grabbed other people’s stakes, or they grabbed hers. Then she was sublime in her horrible ill-humor; half rising, with her great arms resting on the table, she shouted at the croupiers to be paid, in harsh, rattling, fish-fag tones. The sunken corners of her small mouth were drawn upward; the deep-set eyes worked in dull fury; you saw short, white teeth that once had smiled in a pretty Watteau face. Now the body was old and torpid and swollen; but the rabbit intelligence was still undeveloped, except in the direction of its rapacity.

Poor Bob Hines! He was indeed badly placed! On his other side sat a lath-and-plaster widow in the extensive mourning of a Jay’s advertisement. Her face was yellow and damaged as a broken old fresco at Florence; thin, oblong, brittle, only the semi-circular, blackened eyebrows seemed alive. The dyed, pallid hair looked dead as a Lowther Arcade doll’s; dead were her teeth, her long, thin, griffin hands with curved nails. Decomposition, even by an emotion, was somehow palpably arrested; perhaps she was frozen by the bitter chill of fatal zero. Horrible, old, crape-swathed mummy, one would have said she had lost even her husband at play. Who could ever have been found to love her? At whom had she ever smiled? at what had she ever laughed or wept? Bride of Frankenstein’s monster, she worked her muck-rake with the small, dry, galvanized gestures of an Edison invention. Poor Bob Hines! It sickened me to think these women, and others perhaps worse, were of the same sisterhood with Lucy. What a day when we should sweep them all out before us, as the fresh autumn wind sweeps the withered leaves across the walks of Kensington Gardens!

“So this is Monte Carlo!” murmured my sister again. “It stifles me! Take me out to the Café de Paris and give me some tea.”

As she took my arm and we went down the steps, “Easier place, however, to raid,” she remarked, “I never saw. As for the morality of it, I was a little doubtful at first, but now—”

CHAPTER XV

INFLUENCE OF CLIMATE ON ADVENTURE—UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL OF LUCY—HER REVELATIONS—DANGER AHEAD

So a few days passed, and, pleasantly idle though it all was, it began to be time for us to think seriously of our purport in being at Monte Carlo at all. Our party had very easily fallen into the ways of the place, and appeared to be enjoying themselves, each in their own fashion, amazingly.

"Here's Teddy's got a bicycle," as I said to Brentin, "and is always over at Mentone with friends. Bob Hines does nothing but gamble, and is scarcely ever with us, even at meal-times. He lives on sandwiches and hot *grog Américaine* at the Café de Paris. Forsyth struts about in fancy suits, making eyes at the ladies, and Masters is all day at the back of Miss Rybot's chair, supplying her with fresh funds and taking charge of her winnings."

"*C'est magnifique*," yawned Brentin, "*mais ce n'est pas la guerre*."

"It's worse," I said; "it's Capua, simply, and must be put a stop to."

"I know if I were here a fortnight longer," yawned my sister, "with nothing to do, I should desert my husband and child and be off into Italy along the Corniche with white mice."

"Turn pifferari; exactly," said Brentin. "Therefore, sir, we must move in this business, and the sooner the better, or the golden opportunity will slip by us, never to return. And that's all there is to it. We will summon a council of war this evening on board the *Amaranth* and fix the day finally."

"Well, all I ask is," said my sister, "that in case of failure Miss Rybot and I are afforded every opportunity of escape. I don't want to give those Medworth Square people the chance of coming and crowing over me in a French prison. Besides, it wouldn't do Frank's business any good, if I were caught."

"Why, just think what a book you could make of it," I murmured—"*Penal Servitude for Life; by a Lady*. Rivers would make his fortune."

What would have been, after all, the end of our adventure, whether the sunshine might not have softened us into finally abandoning the enterprise altogether—to my lasting shame and grief!—I cannot take upon myself to say. All I know for certain is, that if our hands had not been, in a measure, forced—if circumstances had not made it rather more dangerous for us to go back than to go on—our party would at any rate have needed an amount of whipping into line which would as likely as not have driven them into restive retirement, instead of the somewhat alarmed advance which was ultimately forced on us and turned out so entirely successful.

And as it is my particular pride to think I owe the undertaking, in the first place, to my love for Lucy, so it is my joy to reflect how the final carrying of it out was due to her affection for me, that drove her to journey—quite unused to foreign parts as she was—right across Europe, alone, and give me timely warning of the dastardly scheme on foot for our capture and ruin.

It was the very afternoon following the morning of our brief conversation on the terrace that I went back early to the hotel, with some natural feelings of depression and irritation at the growing callous inertia of our party.

I was going up to my room, when from the reading-room I heard the sound of the piano. I stopped in some amazement, for there was being played an air I never heard any one but Lucy play. It was an old Venetian piece of church music (by Gordigiani, if I remember right), and I had never heard it anywhere but at "The French Horn," on the rather damaged old cottage piano in the little room behind the bar.

I stole down-stairs again, and, my heart beating, opened the glass door noiselessly.

It was Lucy! and the next moment, with a little scream, she was in my arms. I took her to the sofa; for some moments she was so agitated she couldn't speak, nor could I, believing, indeed, it was a ghost, till I felt the soft pressure of her arms and the warmth of her cheek as her head lay on my shoulder, while she trembled and sobbed.

"Don't be frightened," I murmured. "It's really I. Now, don't cry; be calm and tell me all about it. We are both safe; we love each other. Nothing else in the world matters."

At last, in broken tones and at first with many tears, she told me the whole story. I listened as though I were in a dream, and my bones stiffened with anger and apprehension.

The gist of it was briefly this: that one day Mr. Crage had come down to "The French Horn" and had an interview with her father in the bar-parlor. He had come to put an end to Mr. Thatcher's tenancy, a yearly one, and turn him out of the inn, unless, as he suggested, exactly like a villain on the stage, Lucy would, for her father's sake, engage to marry him, in which case he might remain, and at a reduced rent. Thatcher, who, after all, is a gentleman, declared the idea preposterous, more particularly as his daughter was already engaged, with his full consent and approbation.

"Oh, ah!" snarled Crage—"to that young cockney who was down here at Christmas. Suppose you call her in, however, and let her speak for herself."

Whereupon Lucy was sent for and told of Crage's iniquitous proposal, of which Thatcher very properly urged her not to think, but to refuse there and then.

"Oh, ah!" Crage had grinned. "The young cockney has enough for you all and won't grudge it, I dare say. He's gone to Monte Carlo, ain't he?"

Yes, said Lucy, Mr. Blacker had, and had promised her not to gamble.

"Gamble or not," sneered Crage, "I know what he is up to. The police are already on his track. Why, I shouldn't be the least surprised to hear he's already in their hands, and condemned to penal servitude for life."

On hearing that, poor Lucy said she thought she should have dropped on the floor, like water. But she has the courage of her race, and, telling the old man in so many words he was mad, turned

to leave the room.

Now, it's an odd thing that the old wretch, though he never minded being called a liar, never could bear any reflection on his sanity—it was the fusty remains, I suppose, of his old professional Clement's Inn pride; so he lost his temper at once, and with many shrieks and gesticulations told them the whole story.

That—as I have written—Bailey Thompson was a detective, frequently in the "Victoria" smoking-room in the course of his duty; and that Brentin had actually confided in him—as we know—all that we were going to do, that he was an old friend of Crage's, dating from the Clement's Inn days, and on Christmas night had divulged the whole scheme just as he had received it from us, telling him with much glee, being a season of jollity and good-will, how he was going to follow us to Monte Carlo and make every disposition to catch us in the act. Crage added that Bailey Thompson had rather doubted at first whether we weren't humbugging him; but having since heard from his sister, Mrs. Wingham, that she believed we were really in earnest, was already somewhere on his way out to superintend our capture in person.

"I didn't know what to do," cried Lucy, piteously; "I could only laugh in his face and tell him he was the victim of a practical joke."

"Practical joke!" Crage had screamed; "you wait till they're all in prison; perhaps they'll call that a practical joke, too. Now, look here, Thatcher, you're a sensible man; you break off this engagement before the scandal overtakes you all, and I'll treat you and your daughter handsomely. You shall stay on in the inn, or not, just as you please, and the day we're married I'll settle Wharton on dear Lucy here. I sha'n't live so very much longer, I dare say," he whined—"I'm eighty-two next month—and then she can marry the young cockney, if she wants to, when he's done his time. Don't decide now; send me up a note in the course of the next few days. Hang it! I won't be hard on you; I'll give you both a fortnight."

And with that and no more the wicked old man had stumped out of the bar parlor.

Lucy's mind was soon made up. Notwithstanding her father's expostulations, she had determined to come after me and learn the truth for herself; and as he couldn't come with her, to come alone. She hadn't written, for fear of my telegraphing she was not to start. And here she was, to be told the truth, to be reassured, to be made happy once more; if possible, to take me home with her.

"Oh, it's not true, Vincent, dearest!" she murmured. "It's all a fable, isn't it? You're not even dreaming of doing anything so dangerous and foolish?"

Now, deep and true as is my affection for Lucy, I should have been quite unworthy of her if I had allowed myself to be turned from so deeply matured and worthy a purpose as ours merely by her tears.

The more I had seen of Monte Carlo, the more sincerely was I convinced of its worthlessness, and the dignity of a serious effort to put a stop to it. For it is simply, as I have written, a *cocotte's* paradise and nothing more; and if, by any effort of mine, I could close it, I felt I should be rendering a service to humanity only second to Wilberforce and the Slave Trade. What a glorious moment if only I could live to see a large board stuck out of the Casino windows with *À Vendre* on it, to say nothing of the boards taken in from outside the London hospitals and the closed wards in working order again, full of sufferers!

So I calmed dear Lucy and told her how glad I was to see her; that above all things she must trust me and believe what I was doing and going to do was for the best and would turn out not unworthy of nor unserviceable to her in the long-run; more especially, if only it were, as we had every reason to believe it would be, successful.

After some further talk, she promised to say no more and to trust me entirely, both now and always, begging me only to assure her I was not angry, and that what she had done in coming was really for my benefit and welfare. I told her truly she had rendered me the greatest possible service, and that I loved her if possible more deeply for this new proof of her devotion than before. Then I telegraphed to her father of her safety, got her something to eat, and sent her off early to bed after her long journey (she had come second-class, poor child, and had stopped once at least at every station, and twice at some), and at nine o'clock we went down to the Condamine to go on board the *Amaranth* for our council of war.

On the way down I told Brentin the reason of Lucy's sudden visit, and the new danger from Bailey Thompson, who by this time was clearly on his way after us, if indeed he hadn't already arrived. At the same time, I candidly confessed to my indiscretion with Mrs. Wingham, and the letter I had seen her writing to her brother. We found no difficulty in agreeing we both had behaved like arrant fools, and might very fairly be pictured as standing on the romantic, but uncomfortable, edge of a precipice.

"But we must go on, sir," said Brentin, with decision. "It will never do to back out now, after coming so far and spending so much money. We must never allow this shallow detective trash to frighten us; we must meet him in a friendly spirit, and find some means to dump him where he may be both remote and harmless. The Balearic Isles, for choice."

"What about the band of brothers?" I asked. "How will they regard these fresh revelations?"

"That's the difficulty," replied Brentin, thoughtfully. "We must exercise care, sir, or they'll be scattering off home like Virginia wheat-ears."

CHAPTER XVI

COUNCIL OF WAR—CAPTAIN EVANS'S DECISION—I GO TO THE ROOMS AND CONFIDE IN MY SISTER

WHEN the band of brothers in the saloon on board the *Amaranth* heard all, or rather so much as we thought fit delicately to tell them, they turned—collectively and individually—pale.

"Then there's an end of it," chattered Teddy. "It was a fool's journey from the beginning, and the sooner we all go home again the better."

"The sooner you go, sir," retorted Brentin, "the easier we shall all breathe. Is there any other palpitating gentleman desires to climb down?"

"One moment, first," said Hines; "before we decide to break up, can't we consider whether there may not be a way of either stopping your friend Bailey Thompson *en route*, or at least rendering him powerless when he arrives? The fact is," he diffidently continued, "I have lost a good deal of money here, and don't altogether care about leaving it without an effort of some kind to get it back, to say nothing of the lark of the thing, which I take it has been one of its chief recommendations from the first."

To say nothing, too, of the fact—as I knew—that before leaving Folkestone he had sent out a circular to the parents of his boys to announce the addition of a swimming-bath and a gymnasium to his establishment, the non-erection of which would surely cause him to look more foolish than a schoolmaster cares about. And what would the boys say who had cheered him loudly at the end of last term, when, in a neat speech, he had announced his generous intention?

"Spoken like ay white man!" cried Brentin. "Why, whoever supposed that in an enterprise of this magnitude there would not arise danger and difficulties? They are only just beginning, gentlemen; if any of you, therefore, still desire to shirk, he has only to say the word. Conveyance to the shore is immediately at his service; he can this moment go and pack his grip and be way off home. We shall be well rid of him."

There was a pause, and then Forsyth said:

"Aren't you going, Parsons?"

Teddy lighted a cigarette nervously and replied:

"Well, dash it all, let's hear what's proposed first."

"No, sir!" shouted Brentin, thumping the table. "You go or you stay, one or the other; we will have no ha-alf measures. The time for them has elapsed."

"Very well," stammered the unhappy Parsons, "if you are all going to stay, of course I must stay too. I thought the affair was all over, that's why I spoke. I wasn't thinking, you know, of deserting my pals."

"Bravo!" cried Hines, sardonically. "You ain't exactly a hero, Parsons, but I dare say you'll do very well."

"There is just one thing I should like to point out," Arthur Masters observed, "before we go any further. The affair is assuming a somewhat grave aspect, and it is of course possible that, in spite of all precautions, we may, after all, be captured, either on shore or, later, on board the yacht."

"Hear! Hear!" Teddy murmured.

"Now, is it fair to get Captain Evans and the crew into difficulties without letting them know what we are going to do, and giving them the chance of refusing to join us first?"

"Well, sir," objected Brentin, "we always meant to tell him, but not until the last moment, when we should have claimed their assistance, if only in removing the boodle. You see, gentlemen, the British sailor is a fine fellow, but he is apt to tank-up and get full—full as ay goat, gentlemen—and in that condition he is confiding. Now we have unfortunately been confiding when dry, but the British sailor—"

"We must risk that," Masters replied. "And, after all, once they are told and have consented, they can be refused permission to go on shore again before we start."

"Well," said Forsyth, "why not have Captain Evans in and tell him now; then he can use his discretion as to telling the crew at all till the last moment, or selecting the most trustworthy and sober of them for his confidence at once."

So we decided to send for Captain Evans before going any further.

When he stepped into the saloon, smart and sailor-like, peaked cap in hand, Brentin begged him to be seated, and gave him one of his longest and blackest cigars.

Then, "Captain Evans," he said, "we have sent for you so that in case of this affair of ours going wrong you may not have any cause of complaint against us."

"Aye, aye, sir!" said the captain, "and what affair may that be?"

He listened with the deepest attention and in complete silence while our scheme was unfolded.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, when Brentin had finished, "I will be perfectly frank with you. Your scheme is your own, and you know best how far it is likely to fail or to succeed. But if it fails and we are all caught, I shall never be able to persuade the authorities I was an innocent party, and there will be an end to any future employment. I have a wife and a fine little boy to think of, gentlemen; how am I going to support them?"

"Your objection is perfectly fair, captain," said Brentin. "My answer to it is, that if you get into trouble, I will personally undertake to make you an allowance of £150 per annum for the period dooring which you remain out of a berth. In the case of success, and the boodle being considerable, you must trust us to make you such a present or *solatium* as shall in my opinion repay you for any risks you may have run. How will that do?"

"That will do, gentlemen, thank you," the captain replied. "And what about the crew?"

"We shall be glad if you will select six of the most elegant of your men, whose assistance will be

needed in the rooms on the night. Clothes will be provided for them, and their duties will be explained in good time. As for the others, if they are to be told, they must not be allowed on shore. To-day is Wednesday; we propose to start Friday. Till Friday they must be confined on board."

"With the exception of the cook, gentlemen," urged the captain. "He has to go on shore marketing."

"Then don't tell the cook. Now, do we understand each other?"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"One question, captain," said Brentin, as he rose. "The French corvette has left the harbor, I understand?"

"Yes, sir, she sailed to Villefranche yesterday."

"And the *Saratoga*, what of her?"

"She's away over at San Remo, sir, and returns some time to-night or to-morrow."

"Thank you, Captain Evans; that will do. Good-evening."

"My friends," he said, as the captain closed the door, "this is going to cost a lot of money; let us hope we shall all come out right side up."

"And now, what about Bailey Thompson?" Bob Hines asked.

"Our plan is obvious," Brentin replied. "I must board the *Saratoga* first thing in the morning, reintrodooce myself to Van Ginkel, confide in him and beg him to take Thompson on board for us, and be off with him kindly down the coast. East or west, he can dump him where he pleases, so long as he does dump him somewhere and leave him there like dirt. How does that strike you, gentlemen?"

"If only he can be got to go!" I answered; "and Mrs. Wingham? You must remember it was he who advised us to go to the Monopôle, no doubt giving the old lady instructions to keep an eye on us and report."

"Well," said Brentin, "Mr. Parsons here is her friend. He must manage to let her know we don't start operations till Saturday. That will put her off the scent. And now, gentlemen, let us discuss details and positions."

I left them to their discussion and went on shore to find my sister and Miss Rybot, who were at the rooms. My sister knew nothing whatever about Lucy—still less of her being at Monte Carlo. I had to make a clean breast of it all, and get her to take Lucy on board the yacht in the morning, so as to be out of Bailey Thompson's way.

I found them without much difficulty, full as the rooms were. Miss Rybot was seated, playing roulette, rather unsuccessfully, if I might judge from her ill-humored expression. Facing her, standing staring at her pathetically, with a soft hat crushed under his arm, was a tall, blond, sentimental-looking young German.

"Tell that man to go away, please," she said to me, crossly. "He's been standing there staring at me the last half-hour, and he brings me bad luck. Tell him I hate the sight of him. Tell him to go away at once."

I explained that I was scarcely sufficient master of German for all that.

"Keep my place, please," she said, imperiously, and went round to the young man, who received her with a fascinating smile.

"*Vous comprenez le Français?*" I heard her say to him, folding her arms and looking him resolutely full in the face.

"*Oui, mademoiselle.*"

"*Alors, allez-vous-en, sivooplay,*" she went on; "*je n'aime pas qu'un homme me regarde comme ça. Vous me portez de la guigne. Allez-vous-en, ou j'appelle les valets. C'est inouï! Allez-vous-en! Vous avez une de ces figures qui porte de la guigne toujours. Entendez-vous? toujours!*"

With that, entirely unconcerned, she resumed her seat, while the young German, who had hitherto been under the impression he had made a conquest, strolled off somewhat alarmed to another table.

My sister I found in the farther rooms watching the *trente-et-quarante*. "Hullo, Vincent!" she said. "Council over? Dear me, I wish I hadn't promised Frank not to play; my fingers are simply tingling. However, I've been playing in imagination and lost 40,000 francs, so perhaps it's just as well."

I drew her to a side seat and soon told her all about Lucy and her arrival, softening down the Bailey Thompson part for fear of alarming her unduly; giving other reasons for the dear girl's sudden descent on us, all more or less true.

My good sister was as sympathetic as usual, only she entreated me to be sure I was really serious and in earnest this time.

"You know, Vincent," she said, "you have so often come moaning to me about young ladies, and I have so often asked them to tea and taken them to dances for you, and nothing whatever has come of it."

"But that hasn't been my fault," I answered. "I have simply got tired of them, that's all. This time I am really in earnest."

"So you always were!" she laughed, "up to a certain point. Why, you're a sort of a young lady-taster."

"Well," I replied, "how are you to know what sort of cheese you like unless you taste several?"

"Rather hard on the cheese, isn't it? The process of tasting is apt to leave a mark."

"Oh, not in the hands of an adroit and respectable cheesemonger's assistant."

"Vincent," said my sister, severely, "don't be cynical, or I'll do nothing."

All the same, she knew what I said was true. Men would, I believe, always be faithful if only they could feel there was anything really to be faithful to. But they meet an angel at an evening party, and then, when they go to call, they find the angel fled and the most ordinary young person in her place; one scarcely capable of inspiring a school-boy in the fifth form to the mediocre height of the most ordinary verse-power.

But with Lucy! Sympathetic readers don't, I am sure, look for protestations from me where she's concerned. At least, not now.

The end of our talk was, it was arranged between us Lucy should go on board the *Amaranth* in the morning and there remain.

And the next morning there she was comfortably installed, and already looking forward to the Friday evening, when she was told we were going to make a move out of harbor, and probably go home by way of the Italian coast, and possibly by rail from Venice.

Everything else was kept from her carefully, which is, I think, the worst of an adventure of this kind; one is driven to subterfuge even with those one loves best.

CHAPTER XVII

ENTER MR. BAILEY THOMPSON—VAN GINKEL STANDS BY US—WE SHOW THOMPSON ROUND AND EXPLAIN DETAILS—TEDDY PARSONS'S ALARM

THE Bailey Thompson problem confronted us *in propriâ personâ* that very same afternoon, the Thursday, at about half-past four, when, as we were some of us sitting outside the Café de Paris at tea, I saw him strolling round the central flower-beds in front of the rooms. He wore one of the new soft straw hats, a black frock-coat, tan shoes, and the invariable dog-skin gloves, and over his arm he carried a plaid shawl. In short, he looked like what he was, Scotland Yard *en voyage*.

I pointed him out to Brentin, who immediately jumped up, crossed the road, and greeted him with effusion. Then he brought him over and introduced him to our party, among whom, luckily enough, was seated Mr. Van Ginkel.

Now I don't want to say anything uncivil in print about a gentleman who rendered us later a service so undeniable, and, indeed, priceless; but I cannot help observing that Van Ginkel, on the whole, was one of the dreariest personalities I ever came in touch with.

He was about Brentin's age, fifty-four or so, but he appeared years older; his hair and beard were almost white, and his face was so lined, the flesh appeared folded, almost like linen. He had some digestive troubles that kept him to a milk diet, and he would sit in entire silence looking straight ahead of him, searching, as it were, for the point of time when he should be able to eat meat once more.

Brentin had boarded the *Saratoga* early that morning on its return, and given a full account of our scheme and its difficulties. Van Ginkel had listened in complete silence; and when Brentin had told him of Bailey Thompson, and our earnest desire to get him out of the way, ending by asking him to be so friendly as to take him on board and keep him there till we had finished, Van Ginkel had just remarked, "Why, certainly!" and relapsed into silence again.

"He has very much altered," Brentin had whispered, after presenting me; when Van Ginkel shook me by the hand, said "Mr. Vincent Blacker," in the American manner, and was further entirely dumb. "He was the liveliest freshman of my class and the terror of the Boston young ladies, especially when he was full. As, of course, you know from his name, he is one of the oldest families of Noo York State."

"Yes," I replied, "and he looks it."

Bailey Thompson sat with us for some little time outside the "Café de Paris," and made himself uncommonly agreeable, according to his Scotland Yard lights. He told us, the hypocrite, he usually came to Monte Carlo at this time of the year, and usually stayed at the "Monte Carlo Hotel," just where the road begins to descend to the Condamine, once Madame Blanc's villa.

Where were we? Oh! some of us were at the "Monopôle" and some on board the yacht. Really? Why, the "Monopôle" was the hotel he had recommended us, wasn't it? He hoped we found it fairly quiet and comfortable, and not too dear, did the arch-hypocrite!

When my sister rose to go back to the rooms and look after Miss Rybot, Van Ginkel roused himself to ask her to lunch with him the next day, Friday, on board the *Saratoga*, and go for a sail afterwards to Bordighera. He managed the affair like an artist, for he didn't immediately include Bailey Thompson in the invitation, as though he knew too little of him just for the present. It was not till later, as we strolled down to the Condamine—he, Thompson, Brentin, and I—that he asked us to come on board the yacht and see over it, and not till finally as we were leaving that (as though reminding himself he must not be impolite) he begged the detective to be of the party, if he had no other engagement of the kind.

Thompson—simple soul!—was enchanted to accept, and, as we went back on shore in the boat, went off into raptures at the beauty of the yacht and the politeness of the owner in asking him on so short an acquaintance.

As we three strolled up the hill, Brentin, with the most natural air of trust, at once launched out on the subject of our plan.

"Well, here we are, sir, you see," he said; "everything is in train. We approach the hour."

"Here am I, too," smiled the cool little man. "I told you I should most likely be over."

"We are real glad to see you."

"And you really mean it, now you're on the spot and can measure some of the difficulties for yourselves?"

"So much so that we have decided for Saturday night," was Brentin's light and untruthful reply. "We have observed the rooms are at their fullest then."

"Where are the rest of your party—the other gentlemen I saw at 'The French Horn?' "

"Mr. Hines is gambling, having unfortunately developed tastes in that direction. Mr. Masters is in attendance on a lady friend—"

"The ladies of your party know nothing of your intentions, I presume?" said Thompson.

"Nothing, sir; nothing. For them it is a mere party of pleasure all the time. Then Mr. Forsyth is playing that fool-game, tennis, with his late colonel, behind the "Hôtel de Paris," and Mr. Parsons is somewhere way off on the Mentone Road, choking himself with dust on ay loaned bicycle."

"That's the six of you. But now you have seen everything, do you really think six will be enough?"

"Sir," said Brentin, "six stalwarts of our crew have been confided in. They will be furnished with linen bags to collect the boodle, directly the tables are cleared of the croupiers and gamblers by us; in fact, acting on your kind hint, longshore suits have been provided them in which they have already rehearsed."

"Not in the rooms?"

“Sir, they were there mid-day just before you came, and their behavior was as scroopulous as the late Lord Nelson’s.”

“Was there any difficulty made about their cards?”

“Why, none whatever. They went in in pairs, and each told a different lie: one pair were staying at the ‘Metropôle,’ another at the ‘de Paris,’ and another at the ‘S. James.’ They were well coached and they are brainy fellows. They were informed they must behave like ornaments of high-toned society, and not expectorate on the floor; and they paraded in couples, ejaculating *Haw, demmy!*”

“Really!” murmured Bailey Thompson, “these people deserve to be raided. And that is your yacht, I suppose, lying off there—the *Amaranth*, isn’t it?”

“That is the *Amaranth*, sir. At 9.30 to-morrow—I should say Saturday!—*Saturday* night, she will have orders to get as close up to the shore as quickly as she can. If you will step this way, sir, down on to the terrace here, we will have pleasure in showing you the spot marked out by Nature and Providence for our retreat.”

When we showed him the board with *défense d’entrée au public* on it, the steps leading down on to the railway line, the broken piece of embankment, so few feet above the shore, Bailey Thompson gave a low whistle.

“Lord! how simple it is,” he murmured. “Now you’d think people would take better care than that of property of such enormous value, wouldn’t you?”

“Sir,” said Mr. Brentin, with magisterial emphasis, “in the simplicity of the idea lies its grandeur. It is significant of poor human nature to make difficulties for themselves; they neglect what lies at their feet, ready to be carted away for the trouble. Everybody has heard of the man who stood on your London Bridge offering sovereigns for a penny apiece, and doing no trade in them; while we all know the Boer children played for years with large diamonds, believing them to be white pebbles. Sir, it’s the same thing here precisely, and that’s all there is to it.”

“I need hardly say, of course, that here there’s a good deal of risk,” said Thompson. “You have naturally all of you thought well over that?”

“We have thought well over everything. If you care to attend the rooms on Saturday—*Saturday* night—at about ten, you will see for yourself how complete in every respect our thought has been. And you will be amused, I fancy, at the little scene you will witness, in which I will undertake, Mr. Bailey Thompson, you shall be neither hurt nor hustled,” added Mr. Brentin, considerately.

As we strolled back with Thompson to his hotel, I could, having some sort of gift that way, see quite well what was passing in his mind.

After all, he said to himself, he was an English detective; why should he interfere to protect a French company who couldn’t look after themselves? Why, too, should he spoil gentlemen’s sport? They didn’t want the money for themselves; they wanted it (as we had always been careful to explain) for hospitals and good works generally. It wasn’t as if we were vulgar cracksmen, long firm swindlers, gentry he had been brought up to struggle with and defeat all his life. Hang it all! we were gentlemen and had treated him well, quite as one of ourselves. We had been frank and above-board, and had told him everything from the first.

I could see it was on the tip of his tongue to blurt out: “Mr. Brentin and Mr. Blacker! you have been quite frank with me, and, at any cost, I will be quite frank with you. I am a detective from Scotland Yard, and unless you promise me to give up this scheme of yours—which, as Heaven shall judge me, will, I believe, be successful!—it will be my unpleasant duty to warn the police here and have you all arrested.”

But there lay the difficulty, eh? We could scarcely be arrested for an idea, without overt act of any kind. Wouldn’t it be a complete answer if we declared the whole thing a practical joke, and turned the tables by laughing at him for being so simple as to believe it? No, if we were to be successfully caught, we must be caught in the act, that was clear.

And then I felt the detective was too strong in him: the desire for the reward, the fame of such a capture; his professional pride, in short, bulked too large before him to be ignored.

No! he said to himself, if we would go on with it, why we must take the consequences. For his part, he would go to the Principality police, arm a couple of dozen of them, and have them ready in the rooms. It would be a simple matter, for hadn’t we always told him our revolvers would not be loaded?

When, after a long silence, he ended by shrugging his shoulders, I was as well aware of his resolve as though he had spoken it out loud.

We left him at the door of his hotel, undertaking to meet him in the rooms at nine and show him every detail of our plan, so that we might have the benefit of his final advice on any possible weak points.

“There is, of course, the chance,” I observed to Brentin, “of his going off at once to the police, and getting them to be present on Friday night as well, *ex majori cautelâ*.”

“Oh, he won’t do that! We’ve told him no lies at present.”

“None at any rate that he has discovered.”

“The same thing!—and if we say Saturday, he probably believes we mean it. He won’t go to the police till the very last moment; he wouldn’t go then if only there were any way of managing the business by himself.”

“And our ultimate arrest, now that he knows us all?”

“Why, sir, that will be the affair of the authorities here; that is, of course, the chief risk we have now to run. My own notion, however, always has been that, if only for fear of advertising our success too widely, and suggesting the scheme to others, the Casino Company will put up with their loss, just as though we had legitimately won the boodle at play.”

“Let us hope so!” I said, and parted from him with a warm grasp of the hand.

Then I went down to the Condamine, and signalled for the *Amaranth* boat. We had left Lucy on board all day, for fear of her running up against Bailey Thompson on shore, and so arousing his suspicions by her presence. As for old Crage’s finding means to let him know what, in a fit of

temper, he had blurted out, that I didn't think altogether likely; in the first place, he would probably be afraid; and in the second, he would believe Lucy had by this time warned us and the whole affair was off. So I spent a very happy hour with dear Lucy on board, finding her sewing in a very bewitching tea-gown of my sister's, and, going back to the hotel, discovered Teddy outside in a considerable state of alarm and excitement. He had just seen Thompson leaving the hotel, parting from Mrs. Wingham at the door.

"Oh, Vincent!" he cried, "it's not too late; we'd better hook it, we had really!"—and other terrified absurdities—the fact being, no doubt, that Thompson had merely come up to see the old lady and find out from her whether she knew if Saturday really was the day, or if we were by any chance trying to put him off the scent.

I calmed Teddy with the assurance all was going on perfectly well, and that he had only to keep calm to do himself and his militia training full justice.

"Hang it all!" I said to him, "you are as nearly as possible a British officer; do, for goodness' sake, try and behave like one."

But he never did, from first to last; and for that, painful as it is, I feel myself obliged publicly to censure him here, in print.

CHAPTER XVIII

EXIT MR. BAILEY THOMPSON

FRIDAY dawned, blue and auspicious, and soon after twelve Brentin and I called at his hotel to conduct the luckless Thompson on board the *Saratoga*. We had matured our little plan, and as we went down the hill to the Condamine we began to put it in motion.

In this wise. Brentin suddenly pulled up short, saying: "Sakes alive! I have forgotten to telegraph to the hotel at Venice to secure our rooms. Mr. Blacker, will you conduct our friend to the boat, and I will join you?"

I went on with Thompson to the boat lying ready for us, and there we waited. Then at the top of the hill appeared Brentin, as per arrangement, outside the telegraph office, making weird signals with his arms.

"What on earth is he doing?" I innocently asked.

"He apparently wants you," replied the unsuspicious Thompson; "perhaps he has forgotten the name of the hotel."

"Oh, Lord!" I ejaculated, "and I shall have to go all the way back up that horrible hill. Don't you wait for me, please. If you don't mind just going on board and sending the boat back, we shall be ready, and by that time Parsons and Hines will have joined us. We are a little too early as it is."

"The others come from the *Amaranth*, I presume?"

"Yes; there's the boat"—for we had arranged they should at any rate start, and not turn back till they had seen the detective decoyed below deck on board the *Saratoga*.

"*Au revoir!*" I cried, and without turning, up the hill I hastened, only too delighted and relieved to hear the boat put off and the soft plash of the oars behind me.

I never turned till I got to the telegraph office, and then Brentin and I stood there and watched with breathless interest. Brentin had glasses with him, and at once turned them on the *Saratoga*.

"Van Ginkel receives him," he chuckled, "with stately, old-fashioned courtesy. Thompson explains how it is he is alone, and that the boat is to go back for us. Van Ginkel insists on taking his plaid shawl, and entreats him to come below out of the sun. He leads the way, and they go to the head of the saloon companion-ladder, engaged in affable conversation and friendly rivalry for the shawl. They disappear. Bravo! The *Amaranth* boat turns back. The *Saratoga* men rapidly haul their own boat on board. The anchor is apparently already weighed. Animated figures cross and recross the deck. Orders are rapidly given—she's off! By Heaven, sir, she's off!"

A long pause, while the shapely *Saratoga* begins to leave the harbor and head for the open sea. She crosses the bows of the *Amaranth*, where the rest of our company are standing, with Captain Evans and his crew, waiting and watching.

"Ah, ha!" roared Brentin, suddenly. "Thompson's head reappears, without his hat. He looks round him, scared. He hurries to the captain, who is walking the bridge, his hands behind him, his eye watchful. He speaks to the captain. He shouts, he beats the bridge, he foams at the mouth. The captain pays him no heed—no heed, sir, whatever. He even casually steps on his fingers. Ha! he rushes to the man at the wheel. He gesticulates, he yells, he attempts to seize the wheel. Steady, Scotland Yard! You should know better than that. Bravo! The man at the wheel kicks a long leg out at him and shouts to the captain. The captain gives sharp, decisive orders. Bravo! Well done! Bailey Thompson is seized by a couple of Long Tom Coffins and hurried away. They hurry him, struggling violently, to the head of the companion-ladder. Down with him, gentlemen! Down with him, among the dead men! Bravo!"

Bailey Thompson's struggle and discomfiture were watched by our friends on the *Amaranth* with interest at least as keen as ours. As the *Saratoga* fell away across their bows, and Thompson disappeared down the companion-ladder, Captain Evans takes off his cap and leads his brave fellows to a cheer. They cheer vociferously and derisively, the ladies wave their handkerchiefs.

"Exit Mr. Bailey Thompson!" cried Brentin, and taking off his hat he gave a loud "Hurray!" much to the astonishment of the man outside the telegraph office, who stands there with a tray of colored pince-nez for sale, as a protection against the Monte Carlo glare of white roads and blue sparkling sea.

Just then up came Parsons and Hines.

"Well, is it all right? Has he gone? Have they got him?"

"Look for yourselves, gentlemen!" he cried, handing them the glass. "Search earth and sky for vestiges of Mr. Bailey Thompson, of Scotland Yard and Brixton. You will not find him. He has passed out of our ken. He's on his way to Majorca, Minorca, Ivaca, and the Balearic Isles generally. For purposes of any active mischief he is as dead and harmless as the dodo."

"For the present—only for the present!" muttered Teddy, who was in his usual pallid condition.

"And now," said Brentin, with satisfaction, putting away his glasses, "rebellion being dead, let us go back to the 'Monopôle,' enjoy our breakfast, and pay our bill. Then we pack up and get our things on board the yacht. Fortune smiles on us, gentlemen," he added, "as ever on the bold. Nothing, so far, could be better!"

From the terrace of the "Monopôle" we took a last look over the sea before going in to breakfast. There was the *Saratoga*, rapidly growing diminutive as she bustled far away out to sea to the right. Exit Mr. Bailey Thompson, indeed!

Mrs. Wingham's place, between Mrs. Sellars and Miss Marter, was empty. They told Teddy the old lady had breakfasted early, and was down at the rooms for a long afternoon's play.

And Mr. Parsons was leaving? How sorry they were—how much they would miss him! Certainly they would say good-bye to Mrs. Wingham for him. Oh, we were all going to Bordighera in a friend's

yacht, and should most probably not return. Well, good-bye. *Bon voyage!*

"Now she'll think," said the sagacious Teddy, as he joined us, "the whole affair's off, notwithstanding my telling her it was fixed for Saturday. She'll fancy we've got frightened, or been warned, and have bolted. Good business!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE GREAT NIGHT—DINNER AT THE "HÔTEL DE PARIS"—A LAST LOOK ROUND—THE SACK AND ITS INCIDENTS—FLIGHT

By five o'clock of that same afternoon—Friday, January 17th—we and our luggage were all safe on board the *Amaranth*.

Our luggage stowed away and our cabin arrangements made (rather a tight fit we found it), I took Lucy on shore to show her round, or give her a walk rather, as it was nearly dark; for now that Bailey Thompson was well out at sea, there was no danger of her being met and recognized. For the night, our plan of action briefly was, that at a quarter to eight we were all to dine together at the "Hôtel de Paris," the ladies afterwards to return on board the yacht. At ten we gentlemen, with the six sailors, were to be in the rooms; at half-past, precisely, the start was to be made.

At ten-twenty the boats, two of them, were to leave the yacht and be ready at the spot I have indicated. They were not to start a minute earlier, for fear of exciting suspicions among any of the firemen or police who might be about on the terrace. For them, on Brentin's suggestion, we had arranged a small pyrotechnic display—what he called "fire-crackers"—on the terrace not far from the band-stand. Parsons had purchased a "Devil among the Tailors" over at Mentone, and Jarvis, one of the sailors—the same, by-the-way, who had first accosted us on the pier at Ryde—was to light it one minute before the half-hour. We calculated it would explode and draw the firemen away, just about the time when they would otherwise be in demand to stop us in our rush down the terrace steps, and through the rickety gate on to the railway line.

Our dinner at the "Hôtel de Paris" was a very expensive and merry one. It was lucky, by-the-way, as it turned out, that I ate and drank a good deal more than usual, for it was almost four-and-twenty hours before I got anything approaching a proper meal again; through that idiot Teddy Parsons' fault, as presently will plainly enough appear.

Soon after half-past nine we sent the ladies off in a carriage down to the Condamine to go on board the yacht. It was a solemn moment, for it was quite on the cards I might never see any of them again, and one was my sweetheart and one my sister. Indeed, so affected was I, that I bent into the carriage and kissed Miss Rybot by mistake, which made everybody but Arthur Masters laugh. I knew I had made the mistake directly my lips touched her cheek, for hers was hard and cold as an apple off wet grass, whereas dear Lucy's was ever soft and warm as a sunny peach.

Then they drove away, laughing and kissing their hands; Lucy particularly merry, for she still knew nothing of what we were almost immediately going to do, and was quite gay at the thought of leaving Monte Carlo so soon—to which unhallowed spot, as most good and sensitive women, she had taken the supremest dislike.

We gentlemen sat a little time smoking, in somewhat perturbed silence, and just before ten we had a glass of old brandy each, paid our bill, and left. The others went on into the rooms, while Brentin and I walked down on to the terrace to have a last look at the gate, and see it was still open; or, rather, would open to a slight push.

The night was singularly mild, dark, and heavy; the terrace absolutely deserted. There was not a star in the dense, low sky; they all seemed fallen on shore, outlining the Condamine and heights of Monaco in the many regular pin-pricks of the gas-lamps. From the "Café de Paris" came the swirl of the Hungarian band; from the Casino concert-room, the high notes of Madame Eames singing in the new opera; from the Condamine, the jingle of the omnibus bells. Not another sound of life from earth or heaven; but mainly the persistent jangle of those omnibus bells, as though sadly shaken by some dyspeptic Folly. The Mediterranean, as ever, was absolutely still.

I could have stayed there a long time, but—

"Come!" whispered Brentin, and taking my arm, walked me back up the steps towards the rooms. As we passed the end of the concert-room, I noticed that up against the outside balconies, at the back of the stage, ladders were reared, so that, in case of fire, the artistes might have some other chance of escape than the dubious one of fighting their way through the *salle*. I found myself fitfully wondering whether those ladders would be used.

"Come!" whispered Brentin, again, feeling, I dare say, the alarm in my elbow. "Courage!"

For I do not mind confessing here in print that, as the hour approached, I began to feel frightened at the audacity of what we were going to do, and, if only I could—consistently with my honor—would willingly have withdrawn; nay, to put it plainly, turned tail and bolted. My revolver, loaded with blank cartridge only, in the pocket of my smoking-jacket beat remindfully against my hip as I walked up the Casino steps. Even now as I write, months after the occurrence, the tremor of that hour seizes me and my hand shakes so I can scarcely guide the pen.

Another moment, and we had walked through the hall, and passed the swing-doors into the stifling gambling-rooms.

It is extremely unlikely I ever visit Monte Carlo again; indeed, my conduct, on this the last occasion I entered the rooms, rather precludes me from ever even making the attempt; but if ever I do, they will never make the same impression on me as they did that warm January evening when Brentin and I strolled into them arm in arm.

Every incident of that memorable evening, every face I then saw, is photographed into my memory, still remains there distinct and indelible. The rooms, either because of the attraction of a new opera or because the night was so warm, were somewhat empty. The crowds were only round the table, and the parquet flooring between looked more than usually vacant and dull.

Dimmer they looked, too, and more than ever badly lit; and the air seemed even heavier charged with gamblers' exasperation.

Now, in some slight particulars, we had modified our original plan. We had long given over all attempt to turn the light out, for one thing, since we had never been able to discover where the mains were; probably somewhere well out of sight, down below among the vaults, which also we had decided not to attempt. Nor did we intend to do anything towards securing the gamblers' valuables, as at one time we had projected. It was very like vulgar robbery, to begin with, and next, as Thompson had pointed out, it would take too much time.

Directly we got inside, Brentin looked up at the clock over the door and set his watch by it; then we strolled off to find the rest, and, showing each of them the watch, saw that each had the precise time. Our six sailors were wandering about genteelly in pairs; to each Brentin whispered, "Got your bag all right?" and each nodded a reply. Each had a linen bag buttoned inside his short, respectable reefer jacket. One who, I fear, was not quite sober, a man named Barker, took his bag out with a stupid laugh to show us; whereupon his companion (Frank Joyce, from Sandown, in the Isle of Wight, who had him by the arm) said, "Now then, Barker, don't be a fool, it ain't time yet."

It was then between the ten minutes and the quarter past ten.

When we had visited the rooms with Bailey Thompson the night before, and explained our plan in detail on the spot, we had, by his advice, and very wisely, reversed it. Previously, we had designed to begin at the first, the *roulette* tables, and drive the people gradually before us into the last room, towards the *trente-et-quarante*; but that, as he pointed out, would force us to work with our backs to the exit and bring us between two fires as it were; whereas, if we began in the farthest rooms and cleared the *trente-et-quarante* tables first, we should have our faces to the doors, and, by driving everybody before us, secure the further advantage of increasing the confusion that would arise from the people rushing in to see what was wrong and meeting the people rushing out. And through that surging, terrified mass we ought to have no difficulty in forcing a passage, if only we kept our unloaded revolvers up to the mark and frowned unflinchingly.

As for masking ourselves, which we had also at first designed, Thompson was strongly against it; it would all take time, and might only obscure our vision; for, as he truly pointed out, that sort of thing scarcely ever fits properly.... I gave a nervous glance at my watch, and found it nearly ten-twenty.

I was standing just by the last *roulette* table, and saw one or two little things that, as I have said, are still distinctly photographed in my memory. There were two young men standing behind me, and one said, "I'll just chuck a louis on the table and see where it will fall." It fell on the number eighteen, and eighteen actually turned up! He laughed excitedly as the croupier pushed him thirty-five times his stake. "That's not bad for my one gentle little louis, eh?" he giggled.

Opposite, a brown-faced English yachtsman, over from Mentone, was steadily backing the colors with notes of five hundred francs. He was always right; he changed from side to side, and always hit the right red or black. He was watched by two common Englishmen, with long upper lips and ridiculous pantaloon beards, dressed in shiny broadcloth. "That feller's won another twenty-pound," said one of them, gaping. "We must bring Louisa in to see this."

Now it was past the ten-twenty, and I moved off into the *trente-et-quarante* rooms.

Every one who has been to Monte Carlo knows that the four *trente-et-quarante* tables are in the two end rooms, two in each.

In the right-hand room were to be stationed Brentin, Parsons, and I, with three of the sailors; in the left, Forsyth, Masters, and Hines, with the other three. Brentin was to give the signal in our room—"*Levez les mains!*"—and Hines in the other, while the immediate discharge of the "Devil among the Tailors" outside on the terrace would, we hoped, increase the confusion and alarm within. It was rather awkward that we were forced to go to work a little out of sight of each other; for, though there is an opening between the rooms, we meant to begin well at the back, and the opening did not so far reach as to bring us in sight of each other.

It was close on the twenty-five minutes past ten, and so alarmed was I at the difficulties which, now we were actually on the spot ready to overcome them, loomed so desperately large, that I would willingly have sacrificed half my income to be allowed to leave without even making the attempt.

On one side of me was Brentin; on the other a very pretty, smart young Englishwoman, standing with a purse in her hand, watching the run on black. As in a dream, I noticed all the details of her dress, the white facings of her dark jacket on the cuffs and pockets, the piquant spots on her veil. Quietly, as though she were paying for a pair of gloves, she staked all the gold she had left, about twenty pounds, and lost that. She searched her purse, found it quite empty, snapped it leisurely, and sauntered away. Brentin whispered me he had seen her stake roll after roll of notes, and lose them all. Beautifully dressed, with a hanging, jewelled little watch and many neat gold bracelets, I had often seen her strolling about the gardens, neither speaking to nor looking at any one; now I found myself stupidly wondering who she was, even envying her, notwithstanding her totally cleaned-out condition.

The relentless minutes stole on. I looked piteously at Brentin, glaring with resolution straight in front of him, his hand in his pocket fingering his revolver; at Parsons, white as this paper, his legs bending under him.

Piteously I looked at the table in front of me; at the croupiers, with their cropped black heads and emotionless faces; at the *chef* sitting above them, his bored, round back towards me; at the delicately pretty, demure Italian, olive-skinned and colorless, leaning her arm, in its long white glove, over the back of his chair; at the young Frenchman staking his thousand-franc notes, his forehead and eyes twitching with excitement, or some nervous complaint; at the gaunt English girl —

Bang! from the terrace outside. *Bang! bang!*

I gave a jump like a terrified horse. It was the "Devil among the Tailors," set off a minute or two too soon by our friend and accomplice, the sailor.

The confusion and alarm it caused was nothing compared to what followed. I had just time to see

the Italian lady's frightened profile, as she turned and put her white glove up to her smooth cheek, when the bold Brentin gave a hoarse shout—"*Levez les mains!*"—and produced the revolver. Then, indeed, a panic set in! comparable, I imagine, to nothing but the sudden striking of a ship.

At first a dead pause, and then immediately a rushing to and fro, as of rats in a pit, the haggard looking in each other's fallen, discomposed faces. And then the noise! the overthrow of chairs and the dragging of them along the parquet floor, caught in screaming women's dresses as they scudded away like sea-shore birds, bent low, with their hands up to their ears, while the shouting, swearing, groaning men clutched at their money, and tried to thrust it in their pockets, as they leaped and huddled themselves away, the louis falling and tinkling on the floor.

I saw before me a hideous, moving frieze of terror, of distorted faces—Russian, French, German, Italian, English, American, Greek—all reduced to the same monotony of look under the overmastering influence of the same passion—abject fear. The English were no better than the rest; they were a little quicker in getting away, perhaps, and that was all. The confusion of tongues was as complete as though, on the Tower of Babel, some one had screamed the foundations were giving way, and all must save themselves as best they could.

As in a battle the soldier knows only incidents, the faces he sees as frightened or determined as his own, the eyes peering into his through smoke he mostly himself seems to make; so, out of this action—so famous and yet so little known—can I only report the events that met me in my narrow section of the struggle, a section drawn almost in parallel straight lines from the point I started at to the point of exit at the farther end of the rooms.

First it was the *chef*, on his high chair facing me, who fell over backwards, ridiculous enough at such a time of tragic import. One of the croupiers, in jumping horrified to his feet, gave him a tilt and over he went. He was a youngish man, with round, fat, clean-shaven cheeks, and a small, bristling, black mustache. His arms and legs waved and kicked like an impaled insect; his mouth opened with a stupendous screaming oath, and as he fell—strange how at all times one notices details!—I saw he wore half-shoes and blue socks.

In another minute we were at the vacant table, the *chef* crawling away under a sofa-seat against the wall, and two of our gallant sailors were stuffing the notes and coins into their linen bags. The second table was equally deserted, and there the not-quite-sober sailor, Barker, with empty, delighted laughter, was already scratching the notes out of the metal stand they are always kept in. Suddenly I saw he nearly fell; some one under the table had him by the leg. He clutched the *chef's* empty high chair, and, with a mighty oath and mighty random kick, released himself.

"Hurry up, men! hurry up!" chanted Brentin, as we moved forward irresistibly over the bare floor.

Bang! suddenly went Teddy's revolver off, in his nervousness, close to my ear. It was a mistake, but not altogether a disastrous one; it showed we were in earnest, and soon cleared some of the people away from the space between the roulette rooms and the *trente-et-quarante*. Like a wave that breaks against the shore and then returns, so these broken people, spent against the struggling mass round the swing-doors, had gushed back again and almost reached the point they started from.

From the room on the left, where Hines and his party were at work, I suddenly heard Arthur Masters shout, "Look out, Forsyth!" At what, I know not; I just gave a look in their direction, and their room seemed as vacant of opposition as ours.

"Forward!" cried Brentin. "Hurry up! hurry up!"

The sailors, with their bags, fell behind us, and forward we three charged. As we came through the sort of ante-chamber dividing the rooms, there, through the other door, at the same moment, came Hines, Forsyth, and Masters, hurrying.

"Bravo!" screamed to them the excited Brentin. "The left-hand table, gentlemen!"

Right and left the tables were absolutely deserted. As the sailors pounced on and proceeded to clear them, I had an unobstructed view down the length of the remaining rooms right to the exit.

Such a scene of terrified, shouting, screaming confusion I never saw; nor ever shall, unless my lurid evil star should one day carry me into the hot heart of a theatre-panic, the uncontrollable frenzied meeting of a fighting pit, gallery, dress circle, and stalls. They say a man will give all he hath for his life, and here were innumerable men and women, believing their precious lives in peril, giving all their fiery energies play in their efforts to best their neighbor and reach the door. Often, by-the-way, as I have heard of people wringing their hands, this was the only occasion on which I ever really saw it done. One of the footmen, in his absurd, ill-fitting livery, was standing on one of the side sofas, a chap with laughable long whiskers, a discolored beak of a nose, and a rabbit mouth; there he stood, dancing up and down, his face all puckered with terror, actually wringing his hands in his misfitting long sleeves. Then he suddenly fell over and crawled away, yelping like a frightened lap-dog, and for the life of me I couldn't help a spirit of laughter.

"Gracious!" yelled Brentin, above the indescribable din, "I hope no one will be injured. Loose off your gun, friend Parsons."

Bang! went Teddy's revolver. I looked at him; his face was still dead white, while his mouth was working and distorted with a dreadful grin. *Bang!* it went again, while Teddy gave a silly laugh. Like a shot in a mine that clears the air, or like the blowing out of a candle at ten paces, the blank discharge had its due effect. The tortured mass heaved and groaned, yielding irresistibly to the pressure of their terrors; irresistibly they began to pour and gush out through the swing-doors at the end. Every second, so fast they went, our road to safety was notably being cleared for us.

"Forward! Forward!" Brentin sang.

To the right we went again into the next room, in the same irreproachable order, with the same sublime results. Arthur Masters, in all the energetic glory of battle, was waving his revolver, trying to crack it, beating it against his thigh, as though it were a whip, cheering on his men like hounds. He is master, as I have mentioned, of a pack of harriers in Hertfordshire, and all the time he was at work in the last two rooms he was musically crying, "Melody! Harmony! Trixie! Hie over, lass, hie

over!" And once, as one of his sailors bent on the floor over a few scattered louis, he roared at him, "'Ware trash!" When safe in England, I told him of it afterwards. He laughed and declared he hadn't the slightest recollection of doing anything of the sort.

Now will it be believed that, so universal was the panic, at one of the tables only, at the bottom one in the room before the last, was there anybody found to receive us! And that not so much, I fancy, in the spirit of opposition as of curiosity, or perhaps inability to move.

For there we found an English lady tranquilly seated—elderly, perhaps sixty, with a shrewd, not unpleasant face. To this day I don't know her name, but I know her quite well by sight, having often seen her driving in Piccadilly and Bond Street. At the back of her chair her husband was standing, eye-glass in eye; a tall man with a large head, rather of the empty House of Commons air of importance, coolly watching us.

"You will be good enough not to touch this lady's money," he said, as our men pounced on the table. Then, as a sort of after-thought, he added, "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

"Write to the *Times*," chuckled Brentin, impudently.

The old lady looked hard at me, as much as to say, "I've seen *you* somewhere before, more respectably engaged than this."

And, before I forget, it is an odd thing that, only a week or so ago, I again met her driving in Piccadilly; I was in a cab with Lucy, and we met her victoria face to face. We stood side by side for quite three minutes in a block, and she recognized and stared at me in astonishment. I returned her stare, not rudely, I hope, and then positively couldn't help beginning to laugh; she didn't laugh back, but I could see quite well she was very near it.

There still remained the end room of all and our exit through the doors. Now was the time for all our nerve, all our resource.

Breathlessly, I glanced up at the clock, and saw it was just over the twenty-five minutes to eleven. We had taken only some six or seven minutes to clear eleven tables; there still remained the two last and our rush for the yacht.

Our friends on the left hurried up to us, we having been slightly quicker on the right; and then, strangely enough, there was a moment's dead silence, at any rate, in the rooms. In the pause we could hear the dull, frightened roar from the hall outside, and then, suddenly and faintly, the short, sharp, defiant call of a bugle.

The gamblers and croupiers, still massed struggling round the exit, turned, many of them as though by an understanding, and faced us, some of them even crying "*Silence!*" "*Silence!*" The valets, clambering on the side seats, leaned towards us expectantly. It seemed as though they were looking for us to make them a speech, some kind of an apology for our inexplicable and outrageous conduct. It was a sort of "Gentlemen of the French Guard, fire first!" and though I don't suppose it lasted more than a second, it seemed an age.

Then Brentin stepped forward, and sweeping his revolver along the line of their expectant faces, said in his ordinary voice—and all the more authoritative and effective it sounded—"*Retirez-vous!*"

My gaze was fixed on a tall croupier, a man I had often seen walking about in a straw-hat with his little daughter; indeed, once I had stopped and kissed the child, she was so pretty. Then he had been delighted; now he was staring at me with hard, frightened eyes, grinding his teeth.

As Brentin stepped forward, we stepped forward too.

"Close up behind us, you men!" Masters called to the sailors. "Use your fists if they try to stop you!"

Instantly the screaming and shouting began again. As we moved briskly and irresistibly forward, the seething crowd at the swing-doors melted away before us like wax before the fire. Men and women began to steal behind us and run back frantically into the vacant rooms we had just stripped and left.

"*Retirez-vous!*" cried Brentin, in a higher key.

I kept my eye on the tall croupier, clearly meditating mischief, and then suddenly covered him with my unloaded revolver. His face fell like a shutter; all at once he seemed to be struck imbecile. Death was staring at him, he fancied, down the stubborn, steel tube—death! and he had never made his *salut*—would die in the gambling-rooms! He fell back with the rest, using his elbows viciously, and out we went with a rush, like uncorked soda-water opened by an unskilful hand at a picnic.

An arm reached out at me from behind the door as I darted through, and caught my coat. I gave myself a vigorous wrench and swore (the first and only time that night), while my pocket came tearing off in the villain's grasp. He was very welcome to it, if only as a souvenir.

The hall was pretty empty, for most people who had escaped from the rooms had rushed wildly out into the night, in their terror. When the "Devil among the Tailors" first went off on the terrace, there had been shouts and cries of "*Les Anarchistes!*" and all who heard it thought the building was about to be blown to atoms with a bomb, and flew, like sand before the wind.

Still, numbers were beginning to pour into the far end of the hall out from the concert-room, where the alarm was just spreading and playing the deuce with the new opera. As we ran through and down the steps to the right, I could hear the band still playing and some one singing. Then, evidently, the alarm reached the instrumentalists, for they stopped suddenly with a wheeze, like a musical box run down.

Down the steps we rushed, knocking some few of both sexes, I am ashamed to say, over and aside in our stride. Out of the watchful corner of my right eye I saw the waiters come running out of the "Café de Paris," in their white aprons.

Outside, as we turned the corner of the building, to the left down on to the terrace, one or two firemen came bounding up the steps to meet us. One of them faced us, holding out his arms and saying something in French I didn't catch.

It was addressed to Barker, whose only reply was to grunt and knock the man head over heels into a heap of cactus. Hating violence as I do, I am pleased to report it was absolutely the only blow struck the whole time, and was a singularly efficient one.

At the bottom of the steps to the right we darted, so close together we might have been almost covered with a pocket-handkerchief, of the larger Derby-winner type.

“Get in front, you men!” panted Brentin, in a sibilant whisper. “Take the first boat, this way!”

The sailors plunged in front as Brentin pulled the gate open. Down the steps they clattered. One of them, as he passed me, I saw was trying to tie the tape round the neck of his linen bag with his teeth.

And now furious steps were rushing after us over the gravel of the terrace; menacing dark figures, many of them, were making for our gate.

“Give ’em a fusillade!” hissed Hines, and turning we fired, each of us, pretty nearly the whole of our six blank barrels.

From that moment our retreat, which had hitherto been conducted in such beautiful order, became as loose and streaming as the tail of a comet. As for me, I fired most of my six barrels as I ran down the steps, straight over my head, anywhere. I can feel now the soft kick of my revolver as I held it loosely in my left hand.

Now I don’t know it is exactly to my credit, but it certainly says something for my physical condition, that I was first down. I plunged panting across the railway lines, and simply hurled myself down the embankment, on to the shore.

The first boat with the sailors already in it, the boodle in its linen bags gleaming ghostily in a tumbled heap at the bottom, was just pushing off. I tore through the water up to my waist, and they soon had me on board, pulling me in excitedly by the arms. The night was so dark that, a dozen strokes from the shore, there was nothing to be seen but the yacht’s lights, fifty yards ahead. We flew over the water, the men talking, swearing, panting, and helping one another push at the oars. We were alongside almost immediately, and I was the first up on deck.

“All safe, sir?” cried the captain, as I swung myself up.

“Get her ready,” I panted, “the others will be here in a minute.”

“Aye, aye, sir!”

My sister ran up and kissed me. Miss Rybot was standing at the taffrail, glaring like a young eagle over the black water, and drumming her fingers on the rail. A few heavy raindrops were beginning to fall.

“Where’s Lucy?”

“We sent her below; she’s reading a book.”

I paused to listen for the other boat, and could hear the tearing of the oars, the thud of the rowlocks. Away down from Monaco came the stern and menacing beat of a drum. Through the open lighted windows of the Casino concert-room I could see dark figures preparing to descend the ladders I had noticed considerately placed there against the balconies.

And then, suddenly, for the first time since we had been aboard, just as the other boat came tearing alongside and I stumbled off breathlessly below, it began to rain in earnest, a seething, hissing downpour; what my old Derbyshire nurse used picturesquely to call, *whole water*.

By the time I reached Lucy’s cabin door we were well under weigh, shouldering our way swiftly and sturdily through the still, wet night.

CHAPTER XX

WE DISCOVER TEDDY PARSONS IS LEFT BEHIND—I MAKE UP MY MIND—TO THE RESCUE!—UNMANLY CONDUCT OF THE OTHERS—I GO ALONE—DISGUISE—THE GARDE CHAMPÊTRE

"It's all over!" I cried to Lucy, as I stumbled in; "we've done it beautifully! We're all safe, without a scratch!"

And then, so overwrought was I with the long tension, I became quite hysterical.

I went off into a fit of laughter, and at last, with the silly, happy tears chasing one another like sheep down my face, I managed to tell her she was free now to go back to Wharton Park with her father and grandmother, that Bob Hines would have his swimming-bath and gymnasium, that the ho-ho-hospitals would all open their closed wards again, and Teddy Parsons breathe freely once more before his fierce old governor, the colonel, at Southport.

"It was my idea!" I cried, "and we've done it with the greatest ease—I knew we should!—and we're all safe; and oh, Lucy! do just come into the saloon and see how much we've got. It was my own idea, and the fools all said it was impossible, and just look how simple it's been, after all! Why, we must have carried off sixty thousand pounds, at least!"

Lucy seemed scarcely to understand what I was talking about; but she saw I was safe, and, feeling the yacht well under weigh, cared for very little else; so she held my hand and soothed and calmed me, and then followed with obedient laughter as I almost dragged her into the saloon.

There, neatly piled under the electric light on the table, lay the linen bags, for all the world like the letter-bags in a mail-train; and there was Brentin, with wet hair and tie all on one side, beginning to empty them and arrange notes and gold in separate heaps. The silver was a little deficient, for we had given the sailors orders more or less to ignore the five-franc pieces.

Of the gallant band, Hines and Forsyth were lying on the sofas with closed eyes, still slightly panting; my sister was looking on, leaning up against one of the pillars, where Miss Rybot, seated at the table, was unfolding the notes with her long, slim fingers, and arranging them in bundles according to their respective values. She was doing it with the greatest coolness, and, for some reason, a rather more haughty air of displeasure than usual.

"Well, Master Vincent," said Brentin, looking up at me with grim joy, "here we all are, and here is the boodle. Come and help count."

At that moment in came Masters. It appears he had fallen, getting down off the railway line, and muddied his trousers; he had been changing them, not caring to appear before his young lady with dirty knees.

Hines and Forsyth roused themselves, and, almost in silence, we sat down to count; not a sound but a step or two on deck overhead and the throb of the engines, the luxurious rustle of notes, the pleasing chink of gold.

Suddenly my sister said, "Where's Mr. Parsons?"

Miss Rybot murmured, "Two hundred and forty-seven thousand-franc notes."

I looked round the saloon. "Yes, by-the-way, where's Teddy?"

There was no answer, and Brentin stopped emptying the last bag. "In his cabin, probably," he said, carelessly.

"No, he's not," replied Masters, who shared it with him.

"He came in your boat," said Brentin, looking across at me, startled.

"Indeed, he didn't!"

There was dead silence while for a moment we looked in each other's frightened faces.

Then I got up and left the saloon. Outside I shouted for him; no answer.

I hurried on deck to find the captain; it was still raining hard, and the captain was in his shelter up on the bridge. The light from the binnacle struck up on the resolute face of Joyce at the wheel.

"Captain Evans!"

"Sir!"

"Did you see Mr. Parsons come on board?"

"Can't say I particularly noticed him, sir."

"Joyce, did you?"

"No, sir."

"He wasn't in our boat, was he?"

"No, sir."

"Who rowed the second boat?"

"Bramber and Meikle, sir."

I hurried away and at last found them in the galley with the cook, eating a surreptitious supper, with tin plates on their knees.

"Who came in the boat with you men?" I asked.

"Mr. Brentin, Mr. Masters, Mr. Hines, and Mr. Forsyth," said Bramber, with his mouth full.

"That's right!" said Meikle.

"You saw nothing of Mr. Parsons?"

"No, sir; we thought he was with you."

I stumbled down the companion and almost fell into the saloon. They had stopped counting and looked up at me anxiously. "Well?"

"He's not on board!"

"Sakes alive!" murmured Brentin. "That's awkward!—for Mr. Parsons," he considerately added.

My sister said "Good gracious, Vincent!" while with her silver pencil Miss Rybot began to draw poor Teddy's insignificant profile on the back of one of the thousand-franc notes.

I took a perturbed turn or two up and down the saloon.

"He can't have fallen overboard?" ventured Masters.

"How could he, if he didn't even come off in either of the boats?" some one replied.

There was another pause, and then I asked:

"How closely were you followed?"

"Why, not at all," said Brentin. "After we loosed off the guns they all ran back."

"Did anybody see Teddy after we got down the steps?"

Nobody answered. The fact was, I fear, we were all too busy looking after ourselves to look after any one else.

"He may have fallen crossing the line. Did anybody notice whether any one fell?"

Silence again. Then, with vague emphasis, Brentin said:

"Depend upon it, Mr. Parsons is ay gentleman of so much resource that, wherever he is, he may safely be left to extricate himself from embarrassment. Let us resoom the counting."

I looked at him reproachfully.

"Mr. Brentin, it was agreed we stood by each other, I believe?"

"You were the first to get ahead, sir," he replied, with what was meant for withering sarcasm, "and be off in the wrong boat."

"Because I understood we were all safe."

"So we were. So, no doubt, is Mr. Parsons."

"And if at this moment he is in the hands of the police?"

The base Brentin shrugged his shoulders.

"*Tong pee pour louee*," he said, in New York French. "Gentlemen, let us resoom the counting."

"No!" I cried, banging the table, "not till we have decided what is to be done."

Brentin frowned and looked across at me sourly. I couldn't have believed success would so utterly change a man; but so it often is.

"Good chap, Teddy Parsons," murmured Forsyth. "I'm sorry."

"I do not know, sir," scowled Brentin, "whether you propose to imperil the safety of five gentlemen, three elegant and refined ladies, and—"

"Was it, or was it not, understood we stood by each other?" I cried, impatiently. "See here, you fellows, you can't be seriously thinking of leaving that poor little snipe in the lurch like this?"

"Parsons never was any particular friend of mine," growled Hines.

"Besides, I expect he's all right," said Masters, evasively. "He knows people over at Mentone; he'll be off over there, you bet."

"Don't you excite yourself, old boy," murmured Forsyth. "Parsons is one of the cleverest chaps I know. He'll get out of it all right, you take your oath. Besides, we can scarcely turn back now."

"Turn back!" snarled Brentin. "This vessel is mine and under my orders. There will be no turning back, except over my dead body; and that's all there is to it! Come, gentlemen," he cried, impatiently, "resoom the counting."

And such was their incredible baseness that they actually began counting again, just as though poor Teddy Parsons had never been born. Only the ladies looked shocked, while Lucy kept her frightened eyes fixed on my face. As for me, my mind was soon made up.

"Well," I said, resolutely, "if you won't any of you come, I shall go back alone."

"What's the matter with walking on the waters?" sneered Brentin.

"In a few moments," I continued, "we shall be off Cap Martin. Mr. Brentin, you will be good enough to give orders to have me put ashore there."

"Aye, aye, sir!" he jeered.

"I shall make my way back to Monte Carlo alone—*alone!*" I cried, with pathetic emphasis, "and not rest till I have discovered what has become of our poor lost friend."

"As you please," said Brentin, sharply; "only if *you* are caught you mustn't expect any one of us to come to your rescue. It's simply sending good money after bad."

Poor Lucy began to cry as, before leaving the saloon, I turned to them and fired my parting shot. I forget now precisely what it was, but I know it was both dignified and touching; feeling, as I did, rather more sorry for myself than even for poor Teddy. But it had no effect whatever in rousing any of them to accompany me on my perilous journey.

Then I went back to my cabin to change my clothes, for I was still in my smoking-suit with the torn pocket, and, so attired, could scarcely venture ashore. Disguise of some sort was clearly imperative before trusting myself again on the scene of our so recent successful labors.

Now, most providentially, before we left London, Brentin and I had gone off one morning to Clarkson's, the wig-maker. It was quite possible, we had argued, we might have to fly, more or less closely pursued, and for that unpleasing eventuality had hired half a dozen wigs, among them two gray ones, for what are known, I believe, as "character old men." I had at the same time bought a pair of gray whiskers, and, with my old regimental theatricals make-up box, packed them away, along with a quiet, elderly suit. I was always intrusted with the old men's parts in our regimental theatricals, and invariably played them in a dress-coat, frilled shirt, and a bunch of seals with moiré antique ribbon, bending myself almost double and rapping with a crook stick in a manner so natural as to deceive even the men of my own company at the back of the hall. So that, unless I overacted, or a whisker came off, I felt pretty sure of not being recognized by comparative strangers.

The quiet elderly suit I rapidly dressed myself in, and with my mackintosh cape, an umbrella, and the make-up box under my arm, went back to the saloon.

I was so offended at their pusillanimity I would look at no one but Brentin, who, with glittering eye and long cigar, was jotting down the amounts of our capture on a piece of paper.

"You have given the necessary orders?" I asked him, coldly.

"Aye, aye, sir!" he sneered. "The yacht is now slowing down."

Lucy had gone to her cabin with my sister, in great distress, and Miss Rybot was sitting there with arms folded, rubbing her silver pencil between her lips.

“Good-bye, Mr. Blacker,” she said, “and good luck to you. I admire your sense of loyalty. You are the only *man* among the party!” she was good enough to add.

“Pop, pop!” jeered the irrepressible Brentin.

Arthur Masters turned pale, and from a generous fear of making him feel his inferiority by my presence, I bowed to them all in silence, and went up on deck.

By this time the yacht had stopped, and off the port-beam I could just distinguish the dark woods of Cap Martin looming. It was about half-past eleven, and still slightly raining, though, fortunately, quite warm.

Lucy came running up, and, sobbing, threw her arms round my neck. My sister kissed me affectionately, and said:

“We shall see you at Venice, Vincent dear; take care of yourself!”

And the next minute I was over the side and in the boat. I said never a word the whole time, being, I confess, deeply offended at the light way they all took my heroic resolution, and the assurance they showed in so readily believing (however flattering to my courage and address) it was all bound to be successful.

The men rowed me ashore in silence, bade me a respectful good-night, and I was soon clambering over the stones and up the rough bank. Soon I was in the comparative shelter of the woods, and there, finding the base of a fir-tree tolerably dry, I sat me down to think and wait for morning.

Faintly I heard midnight strike from Monte Carlo, and then, so absorbed in thought and conjecture I grew, I fell asleep. When I woke, it was just getting gray; so I rose, stretched my stiff self, and had a good look about me. I knew tolerably well whereabouts I was; for my sister, Miss Rybot, Masters, and I had one day been over Cap Martin to tea at the hotel, and walked back through the woods, past the Empress Eugenie’s villa, on to the Mentone road, and so home.

We had then noticed, not far from the villa, in the woods, a small sort of ancient decaying gamekeeper’s lodge, painted outside with arabesque in the Italian manner, and faint vanishing mottoes of conviviality and sport; and that I determined to make for, and see if I could there secure facilities for shaving off my mustache, at any rate. Then I proposed to retire into the woods again, and assume my character old man wig and whiskers, and so disguised make my way leisurely back into Monte Carlo, to try and find news of the luckless Teddy. Beyond that, I could devise no plan of any sort, determining to leave all to the hazard of the hour.

I wandered about a good time in the dawn, and at last struck the lodge, soon after seven, when it was growing tolerably light. It was a fine morning, fortunately, though very raw and cold. The lodge door was open, and I peeped in. Probably, in the last century, it had been a luncheon-house for the Grimaldis on their shooting or pleasure expeditions; now it was rapidly decaying, and looked like a neglected summerhouse. No one was to be seen, and so, the foot of a ladder showing to the upper room, I entered and climbed it.

It was a bedroom, and evidently only just left; the bed was tumbled, and there was the faint, fragrant odor of a pipe.

No time was to be lost, so I poured water into the basin (the owner had evidently not washed that morning) and got out my razors. I found a pair of scissors, and clipping myself as close as possible first and then screwing up my courage, for shaving in cold water is horribly painful, and lathering myself well, I set to work.

I hadn’t more than half done when I heard steps outside on the wet gravel; they came into the house, to the foot of the ladder; then they began slowly to climb. There was no help for it, I must go on and trust to luck; so on I went with my shaving, keeping an eye meantime in the glass on the door behind me, so that I might gain some impression of the owner before tackling and conciliating him.

Fortunately, when I was trying for the army, before I failed and went into the militia, I had been for six months with a coach at Dinan, in Brittany, and spoke French well enough for all vulgar purposes; so when the ordinary type of an old soldier, *garde champêtre*, head appeared at the head of the ladder, bristling with astonishment, I felt more at home with it than perhaps the ordinary British officer, who has only learned his French at Wren’s or Scoone’s, would have done.

“*Dîtes donc!*” said the amazed man; “*je ne vous gêne pas?*”

“*Du tout!*” I replied, “*entrez*.”

“*Mais, nom d’un chien!*” he cried, coming into the room. “*Qu’est ce que vous faites là?*”

“*Vous voyez, n’est ce pas? Je me rase.*”

“*Je le vois bien! et après?*”

“*Après? Je m’en vais.*”

There was a pause while the *garde champêtre* came alongside, and surveyed me with folded arms.

Tears were in my eyes, for the process was a torture; but I went on with it heroically and in silence.

At last, “*Vous êtes Américain?*” he asked.

“*Mais oui. Toute ma vie!*”

“*C’est bien. J’aime les Américains.*”

“*Merci! moi aussi!*”

The man laughed, and then he went on: “*Mais, dîtes donc! Pourquoi vous rasez-vous ici comme ça, dans ma chambre, ma propre chambre?*”

“*C’est que*—” I hesitatingly began, and then, with an inspired rush—“*voyez vous! Je suis marié, et je crois que ma femme me trompe.*”

“*Oh, la! la! Et après?*”

“*Après? Je vais me déguiser et la pincer. C’est dur, n’est ce pas?*”

“*Très dur!*” said the man, looking amused; “*mais les femmes sont toujours comme ça. Elle est Américaine?*”

"*Anglaise.*"

"*Je déteste les Anglais! Continuez, mon bon monsieur. Je vous laisse.*"

"*Merci! Dans cinq minutes je descendrai.*"

"*Ne vous pressez pas, et déguisez-vous bien,*" he said, and, leaving the room, went half-way down the ladder. Then he turned and put his head into the room again, resting his elbows on the floor.

"*Dîtes donc, mon bon monsieur,*" he said, evidently at some pains to check his mirth; "*avec qui croyez-vous que votre femme vous trompe?*"

"*Je ne sais pas au juste. Avec un de mes amis, je crois.*"

"*Le misérable!*" he cried, theatrically. "*Un Français, sans doute?*"

"*Oui, malheureusement.*"

"*Oh, la, la! Mais les amis sont comme ça. C'est très dur, tout de même. Courage! Je vais préparer le café. Au revoir.*"

With so sympathetic a *garde champêtre* I felt I was in luck, and might as well seize the opportunity for assuming my complete disguise, instead of taking to the woods; so I put on my wig and, with some spirit-gum, stuck on my gray whiskers, lined my face lightly, and, in five minutes, presented myself to the more than ever astonished *garde champêtre* as a respectable, well preserved, elderly gentleman of sixty.

"*Mais nom d'un chien!*" he cried; "*c'est parfait! Elle ne vous reconnaîtra pas; jamais de la vie!*"

We sat down and drank the coffee, the best friends in the world; and then, giving him a louis and the box of make-up and razors as a souvenir, I left him with a warm shake of the hand, and went off through the wood to strike the Mentone road back into Monte Carlo.

I hadn't gone twenty paces before he came running after me to say that if ever I wanted to disguise myself again I was to come to him and use his rooms, and that he would always keep the razors in order for the purpose.

"*Mais c'est dur, tout de même,*" he added, sympathetically, as I promised.

The last I saw of him, he turned and waved his hand. "*Adieu, mon vieux!*" he cried. "*Bonne chance!*"

CHAPTER XXI

IN MY DISGUISE I AM MISTAKEN FOR LORD B.—A CLUB ACQUAINTANCE—TEDDY AT THE LAW COURTS —MRS. WINGHAM—THE DEFENCE AND THE ACQUITTAL—WE BOLT

BEHOLD me, then, in sexagenarian disguise, trudging back into Monte Carlo, with my mackintosh and umbrella. It was barely nine o'clock in the morning when I started; and, soon after ten, there I was standing once more in front of the Casino buildings, out of which, but a few hours before, I had so triumphantly rushed.

Strange to say, there was no sign of anything extraordinary having occurred; there were the usual people sitting about reading the papers on the seats round the flower-beds, the usual attendants loafing on the steps, guarding the entrance. Over the building flapped, as ever, the dingy Monaco flag.

My first feeling was of intense annoyance and disgust that, notwithstanding our complete success, the nefarious business was apparently being carried on as usual. What on earth did it all mean? Were sixty thousand pounds as naught to them? Were they placidly going to put up with their loss, rather than advertise their misfortune? or, under this apparent calm, were there really depths of trouble and vengeance stirring—already rising—to ingulf poor Teddy, whom I never doubted from the first was captured, and now shortly about to appear before the Prince's judges away up at Monaco, bent in painful submission at the criminal bar!

I sat down for a few moments to consider what should be done, and look about me for some one to whom I could apply for trustworthy information: what was thought of us, and what steps the authorities proposed to take.

There was an old gentlemen, an Englishman, evidently, sitting on my seat; and, as one garrulous old person to another might, I proceeded to try him cautiously with a few questions. Did he know, could he tell me, at what hour the rooms opened?

He looked at me over his pince-nez, and said at twelve. Then he flipped his pince-nez off, smiled, and, giving me a friendly look, politely observed he believed he and I were members of the same distinguished club, the Mausolœum. He dared say I hadn't forgotten dining next him there in the autumn, and the interesting talk we had then had.

"Aye, aye, aye," I mumbled, in my fright, a mixture of Punch and Pantaloon.

He had seen me walking about before, he went on (what on earth did he mean by that, I wondered), and had meant to take the liberty of speaking to me. What I had said in the autumn had interested and impressed him very much, and he had often thought over it. Then he folded up his paper, and evidently began to lay himself out for a renewal of our supposed conversation, a prospect which much alarmed and disconcerted me.

I scarcely liked to exercise the complete vigor of my youth and make an immediate bolt; for I had doddered up to the seat and, like an aged pensioner, sat me down with a loud sigh of relief—rather overacting, in fact; so, if I were to keep up the character, I must at least dodder away again when I left. Yet, however complimentary to my make-up, it was, just at present, a distinct nuisance to find myself mistaken for somebody else, and likely to be detained over a conversation which, under no circumstances, could ever have had the faintest interest for me.

To prevent that, I cautiously began:

"My servant tells me there was a robbery, or something of that sort, in the rooms last night."

"Oh!" said my club comrade.

"Have you heard anything about it?"

"No, indeed."

"The Casino authorities keep a thing of that sort pretty close, I imagine," I cautiously ventured.

"They're quite right," the old gentleman replied. "Quite right!" Then, after a pause, he went on, "I suppose you never spoke to Markham on the subject, after all?"

"No, indeed, I didn't," I mumbled, making the best reply I could under the circumstances. "Fact is, I never saw him."

"Why, didn't he turn up?"

"I forget." And then I uneasily added, "You know what a feather-headed feller he is."

The old gentleman laughed and said, "Somebody ought to speak to him, though."

"Well, what's the matter with his wife?" I said, unconsciously, dropping into one of Brentin's phrases.

"That's more than I can tell you," the old gentleman replied. "She's looked like that for a long time now."

I was so rapidly getting tired of this footling talk, not to mention the fibs it entailed and the precious time being wasted, that, at any cost, I determined to put a stop to it; so I rose with an effort, and saying, vaguely, "Well, I've got to meet my wife; good-day to you! I dare say I shall see you again somewhere about," strolled off towards the Casino steps.

The old gentleman, who had evidently looked forward to a long conversation, answered me rather gruffly, "Good-day!"—while straight up to one of the attendants at the head of the steps I walked.

"Yes, *monsieur*," the man politely said, "the rooms are open for play at twelve."

"As usual?" I pointedly observed.

"Altogether as usual."

"Notwithstanding the robbery?"

"Oh, as for that," the man replied, shrugging his shoulders, "it was a very small affair. The miserable was caught and would be punished."

An Englishman, I understood.

Yes, an Englishman. No doubt at this moment he was being tried, and already safe in prison. "*Au revoir, monsieur! à votre service, monsieur!*"

My legs felt fully their assumed age as I turned and faltered down the steps. So all hope was over; poor Teddy was really caught, and the regiment would know him no more. Unless!—why, what could I do?—good gracious!—

I was so deep in my own troubled thoughts and plans, I scarcely noticed my supposed old club friend on the seat; should not have noticed him at all, in fact, had I not just at this moment, when I was calling a carriage to drive up to the "Monopôle," come plump on the other highly respectable elderly gentleman I evidently so closely resembled.

Face to face we met, and naturally stared at each other. Will it be believed we were absolutely exactly alike, down even to the cut and color of our clothes? For the first and only time in my life I saw myself at full length, myself as I should be at sixty (if I only took care of myself), sedate, healthy, a county magistrate, member of Brooke's, with my youngest boy just leaving Eton. I hurried into the carriage and told the man to drive up to the "Monopôle" as fast as he could go, just giving a look round at my friend on the seat as I got in. He had turned, and, with his hands on his knees, was staring after me, dumbfounded. My double had turned and was staring after me too.

To both those gentlemen, if they should ever chance to read this work, I offer my sincere apology; they will understand now the reason of my accidental resemblance, and, as between men of the world, will no doubt forgive it. I can assure them both it will not occur again; how can it, seeing that wig and whiskers are buried under an olive-tree on the Mentone road?

At the "Monopôle"—having, of course, no notion who I really was—they were very polite. No, Madame Wingham was not in; they couldn't say where she was; a letter had come for her early and she had gone out. Instinctively, I felt the letter was from Teddy, imploring succor.

I left the hotel at once and drove straight up to Monaco. At the cathedral I dismissed the carriage and walked on to the law courts. What to do I had no idea; watch the proceedings, at any rate, *incognito* from the back, and, at the worst, hear with my own sad ears how much poor Teddy got. Any thought of rescue was, of course, out of the question. What could a poor old person of sixty do against soldiers and gendarmes?

The criminal court of Monaco sits in a bare upper room, close to the cathedral. Outside, steep steps of the usual *Palais de Justice* inverted V-shape lead up to it, with, at their head, a bare flag-pole, like a barber's sign. Up the steps I walked, and with beating heart (for my own sake, I confess, as much as for poor Teddy's) entered the fatal, the lethal chamber. It was very full and stuffy. News of our victory and the capture of one of the band no doubt had spread, for the public part was crammed, tightly as sardines and garlic. Facing, under a crucifix, from over which the dingy green curtain was drawn, sat three judges; three real judges, in their bands and toques and ermine! Common white bedroom blinds scarcely kept the sun out, streaming in mistily on the members of the bar in beards and gowns, on the *greffier* busily writing, and the usher waiting to summon the luckless Parsons to the dock. Just at present the judges were bending the weight of their intellects on a couple of market-women charged with fighting; and there, tightly wedged against the partition, stood the forlorn Mrs. Wingham, a handkerchief in her black kid grasp, bending and talking tearfully to the barrister seated below, whom she apparently had engaged for the defence.

I made my way to her and pulled her sleeve.

"Come outside," I whispered; "it's I—hush!—Vincent Blacker."

She stared at me, and then at last followed obediently to the door. We stood outside at the head of the steps.

"They've got him, I suppose?" I asked.

"Oh, you cowards!" she gasped, "to run away and leave him."

"Never mind that now," I answered; "*I* have come back, at any rate. Let us consider what can be done. You've got some one to defend him?"

"But the man talks such horrible French, I can't understand a word he says," she moaned, "and he reeks of garlic. And where's my brother, James Thompson?"

"He's all right," I evasively replied. "Never mind him just now. We must really concentrate ourselves on doing something for poor Teddy."

"Oh, I dare say! Now you mind this, young man!" cried Mrs. Wingham, with sudden vindictiveness. "If he goes to prison you go, too! I won't 'ear of his going alone. I'll shout to the police! I'll 'ave you arrested! He sha'n't be the only one to suffer, poor young lamb!"

The hair under my wig stood up on end, and even my false whiskers stiffened. The old woman was quite capable of executing her threat, and for a moment I felt, not sixty, but a hundred.

Outwardly, however, I was calm.

"Desperate cases require desperate remedies," I judicially observed. "Take my arm and let us return to court. We'll adopt our own line of defence. Come along, ma'am, and for the present kindly remember I am your husband and my name is Wingham."

The vicious old woman held me so tightly, I knew that if Teddy went under and were condemned she meant me to go under, too. Together we wedged our way to the partition, just above our odoriferous barrister. I was bending to speak to him when suddenly a bell was rung and Teddy was immediately ushered, nay, thrust, in, between a couple of gendarmes.

Poor chap, he was almost unrecognizable, he had been so roughly handled. His smoking-suit was torn, and round his neck, in place of collar and tie, he had knotted a handkerchief, coster fashion; but what mostly disguised and disfigured him was his gashed and puffed face; for in falling down the steps he had fallen plump on a bunch of cactus, scoring him as though he had been mauled by an angry tigress. He never had been pretty, but now he looked exactly like the malefactor that, in the eye of the law, at any rate, I suppose he really was.

"Oh, just look at his face!" gasped Mrs. Wingham. "Oh, the poor creature!"

"Hush!" I whispered; "for goodness' sake keep calm. And kindly remember he's our nephew."

I judged it wisest to hear the evidence against him before considering the line we should take in his defence. I contented myself for the present with whispering to our counsel that the prisoner was our nephew, his arrest a complete mistake, and he himself as innocent of any attempt at robbery as the newly born.

Meantime, in French fashion, the President of the Court—a robust old man with a white beard and a red face, like a neatly trimmed Father Christmas—after reading the act of accusation, was the first to tackle and brow-beat our unfortunate friend. To do him justice, Teddy kept beautifully cool (he says now he recognized me and my wink through the disguise, and knew he was safe) and answered nothing through his puffed mouth but *Nong!* and *Jammy!* Every now and then the President, in the politest manner in the world, observed, "*Vous mentez, jeune homme!*" or "*C'est faux!*" while the judge on his right, a battered little man with blue glasses and his mouth all fallen in, ejaculated "*Quelle effronterie!*" or "*C'est abominable!*" at intervals.

As a matter of fact, the evidence against him (according to our English notions, at any rate) was far from strong. There were croupiers present ready to swear to having seen him in the rooms, charging down on the tables with a revolver; there were the men from the door to swear they had noticed him rush past; and there were the firemen who had found him crawling away behind the signal-box, down on the line, after we had got clear away. Very good. But the cactus had, for the present, so disfigured him, that an adroit cross-examination could not fail very much to shake them, and that, no doubt, the President felt; for, after wrangling with Teddy for some time, and receiving nothing but an eruption of *Nongs* and *Jammys* for his pains, he ill-temperedly cried identification would be useless and unfair with the accused's face in its present condition, and that, until the swelling disappeared, he should remand him; by which time, he sardonically added, he had no doubt the other malefactors would be before him in a row.

Teddy gave me a piteous glance, and, nerving myself, I nudged our barrister, whom all along I had been coaching, and up he got.

Now, most fortunately, when poor Teddy was caught, neither revolver nor spoil were found on him; spoil he had never had, and the revolver, after the final discharge, he had hurled over the embankment into the sea. And he had always told the same story: that he had truly enough been in the rooms, but had nothing whatever to do with the robbery, having been forced out in the disturbance, and run as the others had; running, in his alarm, he knew not where, until he fell down the steps, lost his senses, and, coming to, found himself in the hands of the police. He was a quiet, respectable young Englishman, he declared, come to Monte Carlo for his health, and staying with his aunt at the hotel "Monopôle," to whom (as I thought) he had early despatched a note, announcing himself as her nephew and in trouble, and imploring help.

And here we were to claim him, after so unpleasant an experience, Milor and Madame Ving-ham —so the barrister announced us!—persons of the highest consideration and wealth, constant visitors on the shores of the hospitable Riviera; in short, this, that, and the other, all couched in the finest language, and none of it in the least true. And then, in a final peroration, amid murmurs of sympathy, culminating in a burst of applause, the barrister threw up his fat hands, and invoked justice, mercy, and international law (not to mention the hospitality of old Greece and Rome), and, sitting down, wiped his forehead with the sleeve of his gown; while Madame Ving-ham judiciously lifted up her troubled voice, and wept louder than ever.

When the emotion had subsided, the President called me forward, and for the second time that morning my unlucky resemblance to another gentleman (a nobleman, by-the-way, as it turned out) was likely to get me into further trouble; for in me, Vincent Blacker, disguised as an old boy of sixty, the President imagined he recognized, just as my club friend had done an hour before, a distinguished guest he had met the previous evening at the Prince's table; with whom he had held an improving discussion as to the present unsatisfactory condition of the British House of Lords, and the best method of amending, without destroying it.

"*Comment, Milor!*" he cried, in astonishment, looking at me over his glasses; "*c'est votre Seigneurie?*"

Good Lord, I said to myself, here we are again—giving the old man a polite but alarmed bow and smile.

But the President knew me as Milor B., he ventured to observe (I really don't quite like to give the illustrious name), and here was our advocate announcing me as some one else!

I hastened to explain, with perspiration on my brow, that Ving-ham was my second title, and in an unfortunate affair of this kind—*Cour d'Assises*, in short—I did not care for my first to be publicly mixed up.

The President bowed and said that was well understood, and then he proceeded to put me a few exceedingly polite and fatuous questions about Teddy, who, as a contrite nephew cut to the heart at so unfortunately dragging an old and honored name through the purlieus of the criminal law, was acting his part to perfection.

Yes, monsieur was my nephew, of a character gentle and affectionate; of retiring habits and delicate health, a little *poitrinaire*, in fact (at which Teddy, comprehending, coughed with unnecessary violence), but all that was of obedient, tractable, and good. He had gone down to the Casino, while we, my wife and I—Madame Ving-ham still weeping—had gone to bed, believing he was in his room; and the next we had heard was early that morning, when we received a note from him announcing the unfortunate capture and mistake. *Monsieur le Président* would readily understand what of grief and desolation?—my affectionate uncle's voice, with a touch of an only nephew in it, trembled, and madame shook convulsively as, still grasping my arm tight, she moaned and sobbed.

That was more than enough. In a very few minutes, after a brief consultation among the judges, Teddy was released and dramatically embracing us in the body of the court—thereby nearly bringing off my left whisker—and I was paying our eloquent counsel. Before I left the yacht I had providentially provided myself with a bundle of notes from the heap of spoil on the table, and one of

them—for a thousand francs—I presented to the astonished and gratified barrister. I trembled to think how much more than ever for the next few days he would reek of his favorite *ail*.

Out went Mrs. Wingham, arm in arm with Teddy, and I followed, after declining the President's kind invitation to breakfast with him, on the score of my overwrought feelings.

Just as I was going down the steps a man I recognized as a croupier touched me respectfully on the arm, with a crafty, meridional smile. I stopped in some alarm, thinking it possible I was discovered. What did he want? Why, Milor no doubt remembered that lady whom Milor had commissioned the croupier to find out all about and let him know? Perfectly, I replied, with stiff and aristocratic upper lip. What had he discovered?

She was an Italian, one Madame Vagliano, and she lived at the Villa des Genets, above the Condamine. He was proceeding with more information, when I haughtily cut him short with "*C'est bien! assez! voici madame qui nous observe*," and handing him a note, which I afterwards discovered was unfortunately one of a thousand francs instead of, as I meant, a hundred, I hurried to the foot of the steps, where madame and Teddy were awaiting me. *Ce scélèrat de Lord B.!* I have really a good mind to give his illustrious name, after all.

We walked on a little way in silence, and then Mrs. Wingham said, with traces of tearfulness:

"What are you two villains going to do now?"

"Bolt!" I replied, laconically.

"And where's my poor brother James all this time?"

"He's all right, enjoying himself first-rate, sailing about somewhere in the *Saratoga*."

"What's the *Saratoga*?"

"A well-appointed steam-yacht, belonging to a friend of ours."

"You thieving wretches! You've been and decoyed him on board, you know you 'ave."

"Well, he's perfectly safe, wherever he is. Come along, Teddy, there's no time to be lost."

"But I can't go like this," cried Teddy. "I haven't even got a hat, and all my clothes are on the yacht."

We bought him a dreadful French straw-hat up in Monaco, and then we jumped into a carriage and drove down to the tailor's, next the "Grand Hotel." As we drove, I questioned Mrs. Wingham as to what was known and said in the town about our escapade.

"Why," said Mrs. Wingham, "people have been terribly frightened, and are beginning to leave the place."

"Good! And what line are the authorities taking?"

"They are denying it all, right and left, but they are determined to catch you, all the same."

"They can't do both!" I coldly replied. "They'd much better put up with their loss; we shall put the money to much better use than they could ever have done. If they are going to make themselves unpleasant over it, you may tell them from me we'll come back and do precisely the same thing next year."

"You impudent young feller!" cried the angry old woman, "you forget that one of the sharpest detectives in England is after you."

"He's taking a mighty circuitous route!"

"But he'll catch you, all the same, at last."

"Will he?" I answered, eying her with cold amusement. "Now look here, missus, if you say much more I'll communicate with Van Ginkel, and direct him to take the yacht across to Cuba and have James landed and shot there as a filibuster."

Whereupon the poor old soul fell to whimpering again, though at the same time she couldn't help laughing a little at my readiness.

Teddy was soon fitted out at the tailor's, and a sight he looked in what they called the *dernier cri* of a French travelling costume; more like a young man out of the *Petit Journal pour rire* than anything.

"Adieu, Madame Ving-ham!" I laughed, as we got outside. "Your nephew and I are going to get bicycles and be off down the Corniche, over the Italian frontier. Say good-bye to him, and be off home to Brixton yourself as soon as possible, or you may get into trouble with the police here for using a false title of nobility. Now, you did, you know! it's no use your denying it. Take my advice; the quieter you keep for the next few months the better."

She was so angry she wouldn't say good-bye to me, but she overwhelmed poor Parsons. And she implored him as soon as possible to give up my desperate bad company, which, sooner or later, could only bring him to ruin—I, if you please, who at so much risk had just rescued him!—and to write to her soon to Brixton, and come and see her directly he got back.

She stood watching us as we went off to the bicycle man's in the Arcade, near Ciro's, and kept on waving her handkerchief till we got into the gardens across the road and were lost to view.

"Now let this be a lesson to you, my son," I sagely observed, as we hurried along, "always to make yourself pleasant and polite to old ladies. But for Mrs. Wingham, you might have been dragging a cannon-ball at your ankle for years."

Teddy shuddered, and said:

"What a blessing I resembled her nephew!"

"And mine!" I added. "Don't forget me."

CHAPTER XXII

OUR FLIGHT TO VENICE—THENCE TO ATHENS—WE ALL MEET ON THE ACROPOLIS—REAPPEARANCE OF MR. BAILEY THOMPSON!—AGAIN WE MANAGE TO PUT HIM OFF THE SCENT

Of our flight down the Corniche and across the Italian frontier I do not propose to say much. Suffice it that, at a quiet spot before we reached Mentone, I found the opportunity to strip off my disguise and, for precaution's sake, bury both wig and whiskers at the root of an olive-tree; where no doubt they still remain, if any one cares to go and look for them. In well under the hour, so fast we travelled, we were over the Italian border, just beyond Mentone, and, after the usual difficulties with the *dogana* about our bicycles, were before very long safely seated in the Ventimiglia train for Turin. To avoid being further troubled with the machines, we presented them to a couple of porters, and, while waiting for the train, passed a highly amusing half-hour watching them trying to learn to ride.

Our point was Venice, and, travelling all night, on the afternoon of the next day (Sunday, January 19th) Teddy and I were glad to find ourselves in a gondola, flapping along to the "Grand Hotel," where we were all to meet.

But at the "Grand" there was a telegram awaiting me: "*Come Athens—Brentin.*" It had been sent from Messina the previous afternoon, and, disagreeable though it was, there was nothing for it but to obey.

We went off at once to Cook's offices in the Piazza to inquire about a steamer; but, being Sunday, of course found them closed. Very awkward! Surely, nowadays, when they open the museums, Mr. Cook might stretch a point and do the same with his offices?

What on earth were we to do? It was evident they didn't care about receiving us at the hotel; I was exceedingly dirty, with the remains of the spirit-gum on my cheeks and the lines of the old-age pencil alongside my nose; and poor Teddy's puffs and scars were all the more noticeable now they were just beginning to heal. We looked, in short, like a couple of broken-down sea-side entertainers, who had had a row at the last hall about returning the money. We had no luggage, not even a sponge-bag, and I had talked grandly about the yacht until I found the telegram, when I had to admit it wasn't coming; at which the manager had merely bowed with sour and silent politeness. "Then you don't stay here!" I read as plainly as possible in his watchful eye.

We went on down to the Piazzetta, to the harbor side, to see if we could by chance hear of a vessel sailing for Athens.

"Yes," grumbled Teddy, "and when we get to Athens we shall find another wire, with '*Come Timbuctoo!*' Let's cut it short and go home by rail. I don't feel safe in these foreign parts. Oh, how glad I shall be to get back to Southport again!"

"Strolling up and down Lord Street, eh? in those eternal breeches and gaiters."

"Well, why not? Come, let's be off. I don't know why we need follow them half over Europe."

"Certainly, let's be off," said I, "if you don't mind paying for the tickets."

"Why, you don't mean to say you haven't got enough money?"

It was true, I hadn't. What with the thousand francs for the defence, the thousand for the croupier who told me about Madame Vagliano (what the deuce did I care about Madame Vagliano!), the buying of the bicycles, the clothes for Teddy, the tickets, and one thing and another, I had only two or three hundred francs left; and Teddy had merely a couple of louis, having spent the rest in bribing the Monte Carlo police to carry his letter to Mrs. Wingham and put him in a better cell.

Nothing, I think, tries a man's nature more truly than travelling and the contretemps arising therefrom; nothing more surely discovers his selfishness, his meanness, his want of even temper. We were certainly rather in a fix, but scarcely to warrant Teddy's outburst of anger and ill-humor. If I was amused at it all and kept my equanimity, why couldn't he? But no! he kept on fuming and fretting to such a degree that I was within an ace of decoying him up a piccolo canal and beating him soundly about the head and ears, so much did he grate upon my nerves.

At last we did manage to secure passages in a dirty Italian boat, *Il Principe Umberto*, sailing that night down the coast to Ancona and Brindisi, and thence across the Adriatic, *viâ* Corfu, to Patras. It was rather a tight fit, financially speaking, for after paying for our berths and allowing something for food on board, we had only just about enough left for the tickets from Patras to Athens. If the yacht didn't turn up there, then we should be in a fix indeed.

We went back to the hotel, and, ordering dinner, spent the time till it was ready in the reading-room. There were no London papers, of course, of Saturday's date, but there were plenty of French and Italian. Most of them had a paragraph about us and our doings, very guardedly expressed. None of them went further than merely saying there had been an audacious attempt at robbery in the rooms at Monte Carlo on Friday night, and much excitement in consequence; but without exception they hastened to add that all connected with it were in the hands of the police, tranquillity reigned, and play was going on as usual. Teddy and I pointed each other out the paragraphs as we found them, and chuckled over them amazingly.

Over the voyage I draw a veil; enough that it was exceedingly rough and uncomfortable, and we were both very unwell, as somehow one always is if one has to go second class. My only consolation lay in occasionally seeing an extremely good-looking Italian stewardess, who looked in on us every now and then, and sympathetically said "*Male?*" I never answered her; I don't know a word of Italian, and I couldn't have said it if I had; but it was something occasionally to see her fine, serious, handsome face, shining in over our deathliness like a star.

At Corfu we managed to drag ourselves ashore for a couple of hours, and mooned about arm-in-arm, in unsteady rapture at the warmth and sunshine. At the hotel where we lunched we found the

English papers. One of them (that hebetated old ——, I think it was) had “Extraordinary Story from Monte Carlo” among its foreign intelligence—just a few lines, to say an attempt had been made by some Americans to raid the rooms, that it had been completely frustrated, so far as plunder was concerned, but the desperadoes had got clear away in a yacht known as the *Saratoga*. And that, so far as I could ever afterwards learn, was the only reference to our affair in the whole of the English press.

As for the *New York Guardian*, they declared the thieves were all English, many of them well-known in New York, where the season before they had masqueraded as peers and peers’ sons, and some of them nearly succeeded in marrying prominent and wealthy society young ladies. Really, when one happens to be a little behind the scenes, one is amazed at the pompous inaccuracy of much of the information in the newspapers. But, on the whole, I thought it wisest not to write and attempt to put them straight.

On the Wednesday morning, early, we reached Patras, and were in Athens soon after six. We drove up to the best hotel, but there was no news whatever of the yacht. We had been so unwell, for after leaving Corfu it again became fearfully rough, we looked more disreputable than ever. It was no time, however, to be scrupulous, and I carried matters with such a high hand, and was so dissatisfied and overbearing, we soon got rooms, dined, and went to bed. I have always noticed, by-the-way, that if you are rude and give yourself airs of importance, even without luggage, you can generally get what you want in the way of accommodation. Most people think you wouldn’t swagger or be insolent unless you were really somebody, and either get out of the way and let you take what you want, or give it you, bent double with obsequiousness. But, then, most people are fools. So Teddy and I got two of the best bedrooms, after totally refusing others, and slept in them with great comfort and soundness; though all the money we had between us was seven francs fifty.

Next morning, soon after breakfast, we went up to the Acropolis. From my school-days I knew it commanded a fine view, and hoped from thence soon to descry the *Amaranth*.

’Οιμοι! there wasn’t a sign of her. We could look right down into the harbor of the Piræus, three or four miles away, and the only occupants were a Greek man-of-war and a couple of trading brigs. To comfort Teddy, I pointed him out various famous islands—Salamis and Aegina, and so forth—telling him such stories from Greek history as I could remember, or partially invent. In the Acropolis itself, wandering among the splendid and touching ruins, there wasn’t a soul but a dirty man, with large patches on his knees, gathering snails.

“He follows the footsteps of Pericles, of Alcibiades, and of Solon,” I said, “and from their dim traces he gathers snails for soup. Such, my dear Teddy,” I added, tranquilly, “is all the history he knows. To him the Acropolis is nothing but a hunting-ground for snails.”

“You’re talking exactly like Mr. Barlow!” replied Teddy, with a dissatisfied snort.

In the afternoon we again set out for the Acropolis. At the bottom of the sacred ascent a couple of carriages were waiting.

“It can scarcely be they,” I said. “They would come round and try all the hotels first, surely.”

“Oh, a man like Brentin would do anything!” Teddy cried.

I looked into the first carriage, and soon recognized a little, rather old, cloak Lucy used to wear, with a high Medici collar. She never had much money for her clothes, poor child, and was apt to be a little behind the fashions.

“It’s really they, Teddy,” I said. “Come along and we’ll give them a fright. They deserve it.”

“They do, indeed!” shouted Teddy, scarlet with rage.

We peeped in cautiously at the entrance, and there they were. We could see them all crossing from the Parthenon towards the Erechtheum, headed by that toad Brentin. We let them get well inside the walls of the beautiful little temple, and then we went quickly across to the left towards them.

Just as we got up to the white marble walls, I pushed Teddy and said, “Hide.” Then I went on in alone. Brentin was just saying, “This is apparently the Erechtheum. There’s mighty little of it left; why don’t they put it straight, anyway?”

You should just have seen their faces when they turned and saw me. Lucy, who was looking very pale, ran tottering towards me with a little cry, and nearly fainted in my arms. My sister followed, and was soon on my other shoulder. Miss Rybot waved her parasol, Forsyth and Hines cheered, and Arthur Masters gave a loud *gone away*! All Brentin said was, with rather a forced smile, “Well, all right, eh? Here you are. You got my telegram?”

We sat down on the fallen blocks of marble, and everybody began talking at once. Where was Teddy, they asked, and why wasn’t he with me? Had he really been caught, or had he, after all, run straight away home in his fright?

As if trying to avoid a painful subject, “Why didn’t you come to Venice, as we arranged?” I asked.

“We heard the French corvette was somewhere up in those waters,” Brentin replied, “and thought it safer not. We should have come to look for you here *at* once, only we calculated you couldn’t possibly arrive till to-morrow. But what about Parsons? What’s the matter with your telling us all about Parsons?”

“Poor Teddy!” I sighed, and everybody looked shocked. I had scarcely made up my mind whether to say he was dead, or in prison for life, when Teddy himself suddenly fell in among us on his hands and knees. He looked so ghastly, with his white face and red cactus scars—to say nothing of his extraordinary way of entering—that the ladies began to scream, and Bob Hines fell over backward.

“Teddy!”

“Hush! Hush! Hush!” hissed Teddy. “Bailey Thompson!”

“Im-pawsible,” snarled Brentin. “He’s in Minorca.”

“I say it’s Bailey Thompson. I saw him from outside, just coming in.”

“Alone?”

“Yes. Keep quiet!”

We all huddled close together and kept as still as death.

“I couldn’t be mistaken,” Teddy whispered. “He’s got on the same clothes and carrying the shawl, and he was looking about him, just as he used at Monte Carlo.”

“You don’t say!” said Brentin, looking scared. “What the plague is he doing in Athens? We shall have all our trouble over again.” And then, thinking he was not very polite, he added, “And how are you? All right?”

“No thanks to you!” grunted Teddy, at which the unfeeling Brentin began to chuckle.

“Somebody’s scratched your face well for you,” he laughed. “Looks like marriage lines!”

We lay very still, hoping against hope Thompson wouldn’t think the Erechtheum worth a visit; but the fact was he had looked in the carriages outside and questioned the driver, and, from the cloaks and what the man had said, made up his mind it was our party. So, after peeping in at the Parthenon, he came straight across; we heard his footsteps, the divisional tread, closer and closer. Then he tumbled over a column, swore, and the next moment was inside surveying us, huddled together like a covey of partridges, with an expression I don’t find it at all easy to describe—it was such a mixture of everything.

Poor creature, he had evidently suffered! His face was drawn, his beard unshaved, and his forlorn eyes looked defiantly out from under a heavily lined brow. His mouth was tight and grim, and yet about the compressed lips there was an air of satisfaction, almost of unholy mirth. When he saw us, ran his glance over us and noted we were all there, netted for the fowler, flame leaped to his sombre eyes. There was dead silence while he stepped majestically, solemnly forward, threw his plaid shawl on a column, and unbuttoned his dusty frock-coat.

“And how are you?” said Brentin, coolly. “Come to see over the Acropolis?”

Thompson glared at him, and without replying sat down on his shawl.

“How did you get here? Had a good voyage? Sakes alive, man, what a hole in your boot!”

“Poor man!” whispered Lucy, “how fearfully tired and ill he looks.”

At so unexpected an expression of sympathy, the detective’s expression suddenly changed. Poor wretch, he was worn out, hungry, and depressed; humiliated and miserable, I suppose, at being so egregiously outwitted; for his lip trembled, and, putting his face in his dog-skin hands, he actually began to cry. I never felt so ashamed of myself, so sorry for a man, in my life.

“Cry, baby, cry!” taunted Brentin. “Serve you thundering well right—”

“Be quiet!” I sternly cried. Brentin scowled at me, while poor Thompson began to search with blinking eyes for his handkerchief.

Then I went on, with real feeling in my voice:

“We are sorry, Mr. Thompson, for the way we have treated you, but you must see there was no other course open to us. We were entirely frank with you, but you were never frank with us. We discovered your identity quite by accident, and took the advantage we thought our due of the discovery.”

“Oh, all right, sir, thank you!”

“At any rate,” struck in the irrepressible Brentin, with a wink at me, “you have the satisfaction of knowing you spoiled a fine piece of work, which will now, I guess, be consummated by other more imperfect hands than ours.”

“What!” said the detective, brightening. “You never even made the attempt?”

“What do you take us for?” cried the ingenious and evasive Brentin. “Make an attempt of that nature, with the sharpest detective in old England on our heels? No, sir!”

Thompson looked pleased, and then, with sly malice, observed:

“But, after all, gentlemen, you might have done it with perfect safety.”

“What!”

“With the most perfect safety, I assure you. I had not yet communicated with the Monte Carlo police.”

“That so? But afterwards?”

“Oh, afterwards, I should have pinched you all, of course!”

“There you are!” cried Brentin; “we knew that, mighty well. No, sir! There are no flies on us. You gave us a fright, Mr. Bailey Thompson, and we, I guess, have given you one. But no real damage has been done to either party. Let us cry quits. Your hand, sir!”

The simple fellow shook his hand obediently, and, polite as ever, bowed to the ladies. My sister he already knew. She smiled at him and said:

“But how on earth have you got here, Mr. Bailey Thompson? We all understood you were going to the Balearic Isles.”

“I know nothing of my original destination, madam,” the detective replied. “I only know that after steaming for some few hours in one direction, Mr. Van Ginkel suddenly bouted ship and went full speed in the other.”

“But why, I wonder?”

“Some matter, I understood from the captain, connected with his divorced wife.”

“The Princess Danleno,” said Brentin.

“Some such name. She had left Cannes and gone to San Remo, and Mr. Van Ginkel was anxious to see her and effect a reconciliation, so the captain told me. He is full of caprice, like all invalids, and on the caprice seizing him he simply bouted ship without a word. But first he had to get rid of me; so he carried me, full speed ahead, to the southernmost point of Greece—somewhere near Cape Colonna, I believe—and there he carted me ashore, gentlemen, like a sack of coals.”

The poor man’s lip began to tremble again, and he looked round our circle piteously for sympathy.

“Dear! dear!” murmured Brentin; “how like him! And never said a word the whole time, I dare say?”

“Not one! That was early on Monday morning. Since then I have been slowly making my way up the Morea with great difficulty and discomfort, mainly on foot, and sometimes getting a lift in a country wagon. At Nauplia I managed to secure a passage in a coasting steamer, which, after a

tempestuous voyage, has just landed me at the Piræus. There I saw your yacht, gentlemen, and knew, of course, you were in the neighborhood."

"How did you manage about the language in the Peloponnese?" asked Hines, curiously.

"Why, fortunately, I can draw a little," replied the detective, who was every moment recovering his spirits, "and anything I wanted I drew. But, often as I drew a beefsteak or a chop, gentlemen," he said, plaintively, "I never got it. Nothing but eggs and a sort of polenta, and once—only once—goat's flesh, when I drew a bedstead, in token that I wanted to sleep there. And the fleas, gentlemen, the fleas!" he cried. "There is a large Greek flea—"

"Never mind that just now," said Brentin, gravely. "There are elegant and refined ladies present. The essential is you are safe, and bear us all no malice. That is so, eh?"

"None in the world!" cried the good fellow. "But I shall be much obliged if you will give me directions how to get home from the Acropolis in Athens to Brixton. I have no money to speak of, and a large hole in my right boot."

"That will be all right, sir," said Brentin, rising, with his grand air. "Henceforth you are our guest. By-gones are by-gones, and we will look after you till you are safely landed at Charing Cross."

"Thence, by tram or 'bus, over Westminster Bridge," murmured Hines, as we all rose, shook ourselves, and prepared to descend.

"Well, all's well that ends well," cried Thompson. "But, all the same, I rather regret, for all our sakes, the Monte Carlo business was left untried."

"Some other day, sir," said Brentin; "some other day, when you are enjoying your well-earned retirement, and an officer not quite so plaguy sharp is in your place."

The pleased detective walked jauntily on in front with the rest, while Brentin, my sister, and I followed, Lucy clinging fondly to my arm.

"But what are you going to do with him?" I whispered. "It is ingenious to let him suppose the thing has not been done; but once he gets on board the yacht he's bound to discover all, and that he's been fooled again. Then it will be all up, indeed!"

"Some of you must take him home overland, on the pretence there isn't room for every one on the *Amaranth*."

"But he must find it all out directly he gets to England, mustn't he?" said Lucy, softly.

"I hope to goodness he won't come trooping over to Medworth Square," my sister observed. "I shall never hear the last of it from Frank. And, after all, I've done nothing, have I?"

"True, O queen!" muttered Brentin, knitting his brows. "But by the time he gets back the scent will be fairly cold. And the Casino authorities are taking the sensible course of ignoring the whole affair. That is so, isn't it? No doubt, you've seen the papers."

Yes, I said, I had, and that was their line.

"There you are, then! For the rest, we must simply trust our luck. It has stood by us pretty well so far. Oh, and, by-the-way, what about Mr. Parsons? How did you manage to get him out?"

I rapidly sketched my part in the affair, and made them all laugh amazingly as I told them of my disguise and its accidental resemblance to Lord B.

"Whether we are drunken men or fools," laughed Brentin, "I know not; but Providence has certainly looked after us so far in a way that I may fairly call the most favored nation clause."

"*Quoti moris minus est, eo minus est periculi!*" I quoted, somehow happening to remember the sentence from my old Latin grammar. "Which is the Latin, ladies, for 'Where there is the less fear, there is the less danger.' "

Lucy pressed my arm and smiled happily.

Just as we neared the carriages:

"By-the-way," I asked, "what did it all tote up to?"

"The boodle?"

"Yes."

"Just over one million four hundred and fifty thousand francs; roughly speaking, fifty-eight thousand pounds of your money."

"You'll be back in Wharton Park, dearest," I whispered, "before the swallow dares!"

She pressed my arm again and smiled more happily than ever.

"The only thing that troubles me," said my sister, "is how on earth I am to establish an *alibi* to Frank's satisfaction, in case there's a rumpus when we get back."

"*Alibis* are old-fashioned nowadays," I answered. "We shall have to think of something else for you than an *alibi*."

The unsuspicious Bailey Thompson was standing at one of the carriage doors in a dandified attitude, making himself agreeable to Miss Rybot.

As we drove away he again said—for after all he was human and meant to be malicious—"But I do really wonder you didn't do it, gentlemen, after all!"

"Don't torture us with remorse, Mr. Bailey Thompson, sir," Brentin cried; "the sense of neglected opportunity is hard to bear."

"Well, all I can say is, I never saw an easier bit of work in my life, and in my absence you were really perfectly safe. Those French police are such utter fools, and as likely as not the Casino people would have let you off. Come, now, confess! Don't you regret it?"

"Sir," said Brentin, loftily, "I regret nothing, and never did. All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds."

And the good detective couldn't understand why, a few moments later, Brentin was seized with a great roar of laughter. He explained it was from seeing "Κοῦκ" in Greek letters over Cook's offices; it looked so droll! We all laughed heartily, too, and so drove up in immense mirth and spirits to our hotel.

CHAPTER XXIII

WE ARRIVE SAFE IN LONDON AND GO TO MEDWORTH SQUARE—BACK AT "THE FRENCH HORN"—NEWS AT LAST OF THE *AMARANTH*—I INTERVIEW MR. CRAGE AND FIND HIM ILL

VERY little remains to tell; but that little is of importance. Of our journey home together (my sister, Lucy, Bailey Thompson, Parsons, and I, the others sailing on board the yacht) I need say nothing, for it was entirely pleasant and uneventful. Our luggage wasn't even robbed on the Italian lines; we felt the cold somewhat as we neared home, and that was all.

At Charing Cross Thompson was evidently well-known to the officials; he proclaimed us all his friends and above suspicion, so our portmanteaus were barely looked at; everybody touched their hats to him, and we felt quite royal in our immunities.

There we parted. Teddy jumped into a cab for Euston, to catch the night express for his dear Southport; my sister, Lucy, and I went off in a four-wheeler to Medworth Square; while the still unsuspicious Thompson remained on the platform, bowing and smiling. Once safely landed at Charing Cross, our duty to him was plainly at an end. No doubt he would immediately go off to Brixton, find his sister, Mrs. Wingham, and learn the truth; but what that might mean to us I really neither knew nor cared. We had so far so brilliantly succeeded that readers must not blame me if I continued obstinately optimistic, and believed, whatever trouble might still be in store for us, we should certainly somehow emerge from it scathless and joyous.

"I hope," my sister said, as we drove away, "he won't think it rude of me not asking him to come and call. After all, he's not quite of our world, and he would need such a deal of explaining, for Frank always insists on knowing exactly who everybody is."

"He won't think of coming of his own accord, I suppose?" whispered Lucy. "And, oh! I do so wish he wasn't a friend of Mr. Crage's."

"Lor' bless you!" I philosophically remarked, "it's even money we none of us ever see or hear of him again."

But we did, that day week exactly, when he turned up at "The French Horn," purple with ineffective rage, accompanied by his dazed French *confrère*, Monsieur Cochefort.

In Medworth Square all was as usual. The Thursday evening German band was playing the usual selection from that tiresome old "Mikado," and my sweet niece Mollie was soon tearing down the stairs to welcome us.

"She watch for you every night, ma'am," her Welsh nurse said; "and last night she go down-stairs her best, and blow up Mr. Blyth like anything for doing a door-bell ring exactly like yours, ma'am."

My brother-in-law was very glad to get his wife back, and, having been warned by letter, welcomed my dear Lucy with sufficient warmth. How could he help it? Everywhere she went she won all hearts. Brentin and Parsons both admired her desperately, and Bob Hines, my sister told me, paid her more attention on the yacht coming from Monte Carlo than he had ever been known to pay any one before.

Even Forsyth, who is one of the most *difficile* men I know (unless the young lady makes a dead set at him, when he thinks her lovely), even he said to me, "That's a real pretty girl, Vincent, and you're a very lucky man to get her;" while Miss Rybot once quite surprised me by the warmth of her congratulation. "She's so fresh and unaffected, Mr. Blacker," she said. "She's like a breeze that meets you at the end of a country lane when you come suddenly upon the sea." Which I thought both poetical and perfectly true—rather a rare combination nowadays.

The next morning Lucy and I were off to Liverpool Street for Nesshaven and "The French Horn." As we drove up, and I saw the familiar place once more, blinking in the soft February sunshine, just as we had left it, I could scarcely believe all I had gone through in the way of peril and adventure. Somehow, if one leaves a place for a time, and has experiences of moment in the interval, one expects those experiences to have had their effect elsewhere, too, even on inanimate objects.

I felt older, wiser, more developed, more of a man, and I was astonished to find the place quite unaltered and Mr. Thatcher looking just the same as he came running out in his dirty old blazer. His mother was at the window, gazing through the panes with the naïve curiosity of a child at new arrivals. She kissed Lucy, and said to me: "Well, here you are back safe, you bad young man. You've given us a rare fright, I can tell you"—and that was all.

That same evening, when the ladies were safely abed, I had a long talk with Mr. Thatcher in the bar parlor. After dear Lucy's escapade, we decided we might as well be married at once, without waiting for Easter; and that, with the help of a license, the following Thursday, February 6th, would be none too soon. For myself, apart from other considerations, I thought it clearly wisest to get married and clear out of the country, on a lengthy wedding-tour, as quick as we could; so that, in case of search being made for me, as the head and guiding spirit of the raid, I might, for some few months at any rate, be *non inventus*.

Next, I delicately approached the subject of the repurchase of Wharton Park. I told Mr. Thatcher we had been extraordinarily lucky at Monte Carlo, and that, by a combination of rare circumstances, I was the richer by £30,000 than when I started. He was shrewd enough to listen in silence and ask no sort of question as to what particular system I had pursued to enable me to return with so large a sum. In fact, I scarcely gave him time to ask questions, I was so rapid, hurrying forward only to the main point, whether Crage's offer were still open and we should still be able to get the old wretch out.

He told me that since Crage's last visit and offer to marry Lucy he had seen nothing of him, and, so far as he knew, the place was still to be had. We could, if I liked, go up to the house in a day or

two and make inquiries cautiously, or write Crage a letter making him a formal proposal.

To which I replied that, knowing something of human nature, I judged it best, when we made our offer, to be prepared with the actual sum in notes and gold to make it good; for, with a man like Crage, combined of malice and craft, he would most likely try to bluff and raise us unless he saw the very gold and notes before him, beyond which, not having any more to offer, we were not prepared to go.

"Very true," said Thatcher. "There's nothing like the ready to tempt a man, as I know very well. Why, when I was in business—"

"Then all we can do," I continued, cutting him short, "is to wait in patience till the boodle—"

"The what?" said Thatcher, taking the pipe out of his mouth.

"It's an American term—the money we have won, arrives. It's coming in the yacht, and should be here in a day or two now. Then we'll go up with it to the house, in a bag, and spread it out on the table—"

"And I shall be back in Wharton Park again!" cried Thatcher. "Gracious powers! Who would have thought it possible? And, of course, it will be settled on Lucy. Me for life, and then Lucy. How delighted my poor old mother will be!"

"Yes," I said, "and that your name may be perpetuated, I will add it to my own. Father-in-law, here's health and prosperity to those two fine old English families, the Thatcher-Blackers!"

So there was nothing we could do but wait in patience for the arrival of the *Amaranth*. It was tedious, anxious work, for though I never doubted all would be well, yet Bailey Thompson's portentous silence somewhat alarmed me; and as the days passed, and neither he nor the yacht gave any sign of their existence, my nerves began to get unstrung, and I grew worn and irritable.

Fortunately, as often happens in the early days of February, the weather was beautifully fine; so fine that the more flatulent class of newspapers were full of letters from country correspondents, who were finding hedge-sparrows' eggs and raspberries in their gardens, and the usual Lincolnshire parson broke into jubilant twitterings over his dish of green pease. Otherwise, I don't think I really could have borne it.

At last, late on the Tuesday evening, came a telegram from Brentin at Southampton—"*Safe, will arrive to-morrow*"—and I began to breathe a little easier. But not a word of any sort from Bailey Thompson, neither a reproach nor a threat; till I felt like that Damocles of Syracuse who, though seated on a throne, was yet immediately under a faintly suspended sword. For here was I, on a throne, indeed—the throne of dear Lucy's pure and constant affection—and yet!—at any moment!—

Dramatically enough, the sword fell on my very wedding morning—on its flat side, happily—giving me a shock, but no cut of any sort, as I am now briefly going to tell.

The next morning came another telegram from Brentin in London, to say he would arrive at six and beg he might be met. All was well, he wired, adding "*Any news Thompson?*"

I wired back to the "Victoria" there was none: "*bring boodle with you*;" and then I went off and found Thatcher.

For always I had had the fancy to pay old Crage out of the place and be married on the same day, and here was now my chance. We were to be married in Nesshaven Church, in the grounds of Wharton Park, at twelve; what was to prevent us, I said to Thatcher, from walking on up to the house first with £30,000, completing the purchase, and hasting to the wedding afterwards? Thence back to "The French Horn" for a light lunch, afterwards catch the half-past-two train for Liverpool Street, and so to Folkestone in the evening.

There was nothing to prevent it, said Thatcher, who for the last two days had gone about in a triumphant, bulging white waistcoat; only it would require rather delicate handling, all to be done successfully. Crage should be prepared, for instance, he thought; for, notwithstanding the sight of the money, the sight of dear Lucy in her happy wedding radiance might turn him sour, and he might after all refuse to complete. What was to prevent one of us, he said—meaning, of course, me—going up to the house and sounding the old man first? Then we should know exactly how we stood, and what chance there was of our money being accepted.

Now, for the last week nothing had been seen of the old man, and rumors had reached us, chiefly through the gardener, he was very ill. He hadn't been to church for more than a month, and at church he had always been a very regular attendant; not so much because he had any real religion in him as that he might aggravate the parson by catching him up loudly in the responses, and barking his way harshly through the hymns a good half-line behind the rest of the congregation. Indeed, the chief attraction, I fear, at Nesshaven Church was old Crage and his nauseous eccentricities, and people who had heard how he had once lighted up his pipe during the sermon and sat there sucking at it in the Wharton pew, came from miles round in the hope he would enliven the discourse by doing it again.

Nor had he been seen about the grounds, nor stumping down to the inn, as he mostly did once a week to insult the inmates; in short, the end that comes to us all—good, bad, and indifferent—was clearly coming now to him, and if business were ever to be done, it must be done speedily and at once.

So, before Brentin came, early on the Wednesday afternoon, I trudged alone up to the house. There wasn't a sign of life in it, and when I rang at the hall door I heard the heavy bell clanging away down the empty passages and cold servants' quarters as in the depths of an Egyptian tomb. I rang and rang, until at last I heard shuffling footsteps approach. From the other side of the door came stertorous breathing and wheezing, and the undoing of a chain; then a burglar's bell was taken off and fell with a jangle on the stone floor inside, and at last the door was pulled ajar.

Poor old Crage! He looked out at me with his wicked, frightened old face, pinched, haggard, unshaven, dirty; terror-struck, as though he feared, I were Death himself who had been knocking at the door. He was in his shirt and trousers and a frowzy old dressing-gown, and his bare, bony feet were thrust in worn leather slippers. As he breathed his throat rattled dismally, and his long hand, with the thick, muddy veins, shook so he couldn't fold the dressing-gown round his gaunt, corded,

bare throat.

“Hullo, young cockney!” he croaked; “what’s to do?”

“How are you, Mr. Crage?” I asked, shocked at the old man’s fallen, forlorn look.

“Very bad!” he whispered, his rheumy eyes blinking with watery self-pity.

“Is there anybody looking after you?”

“No—no—thieves! all thieves!—don’t want ’em.”

Then he made as if he would shut the door.

“I came up to see you on business,” I said; “about selling the house.”

“No business to-day,” he croaked. “Too ill. Come to-morrow—any time. Come to-morrow.” And with that he shut the door in my face.

I heard him shuffling away across the hall, kicking the fallen bell with a tinkle along the floor, and then, as I turned to go, I heard him fall and groan. I ran in hastily, and with great difficulty managed to get him on his feet again. He stood there for some few minutes, clutching me and rattling his throat; then, hanging on my arm, dragging me along with him, he paddled off down a short dark passage towards a half-open door, pushed it wide, and pulled me after him into the great empty drawing-room.

The blinds were down, and the fading February sun gleamed in on the bare worn carpet. In front of the fine fireplace, with a little dying wood-fire in it, stood an arm-chair, with a small table beside it. A candle and snuffers were on it, and a plate of stale bread-and-butter. On the high mantel-piece was a medicine bottle, full and corked.

He sank back into his chair, and lay there, breathing heavily, with his eyes closed.

“But is there nobody looking after you?” I asked, and he made some twitching movement with his fingers.

Just at that moment in flounced the gardener’s wife, drying her hands on her apron. She was a big, handsome, shameless-looking creature, with a naming eye and a hard, high color on her stiff cheeks.

“Now you’ve been moving yourself about again!” she cried, bending over him.

Crage opened his eyes and looked up at her maliciously.

“He came up on business,” he whispered.

“You’re a pretty man to do business, ain’t you?” she sneered.

“No, not to-day,” he mocked. “Too ill. All right to-morrow. Tell the genelman to come to-morrow, early. Quite well to-morrow.”

I turned to go, and Crage, raising himself in his chair, rasped out:

“Bring the money with you, young cockney, or no business. Mind that!”

The woman followed me to the door.

“Has he got a doctor?” I asked.

“Doctor Hall came once,” she said, “but he won’t do anything he tells him. He won’t take his medicine and he won’t go to bed. He says he’ll die if he goes to bed. He sleeps all night in that arm-chair in the drawing-room. If he don’t die soon, I shall; I know that very well. If you’ve got any business to do with him, you’d better come early in the morning. He can’t last much longer.”

And with that she closed the door on me, and I heard her putting up the chain again and the burglar’s bell as I went away down the weedy gravel path.

CHAPTER XXIV

ARRIVAL OF BRENTIN—MY WEDDING-DAY—WE GO TO WHARTON—BAILEY THOMPSON AND COCHEFORT FOLLOW US—WE FINALLY DEFEAT THEM BOTH

BRENTIN was in "The French Horn" by a quarter to seven, and, rather to my surprise, he came alone. I thought Hines or Masters would surely have come with him; but no, he said, except for Forsyth, they had all parted company at Southampton. Masters and Miss Rybot had gone to Sea View, where they were to be married almost immediately, and Hines had gone off to stay with a married sister at Bournemouth. Forsyth alone had travelled up to town with him, and then gone on straight to Colchester to take up his neglected regimental duties. So I wrote out a telegram to be sent first thing in the morning, begging him to come over and be my best man.

And the boodle? Brentin winked and, with his hands on his knees, began to laugh, like the priest in the *Bonne Histoire*.

"Some of it has melted, sir," he joyously cried. "Your friend Hines has got his, and Mr. Parsons, by this time, is toying with ay registered letter way up in Southport. I have handsomely recompensed Captain Evans and the crew; they have, no doubt, been tanking-up and painting Portsmouth red all the time. I have reimbursed myself for the yacht and other trifles, and there now remains the £30,000 for your young lady's ancestral home, and some £20,000 for the hospitals and so on. To-morrow, sir, we will draw up a list of the most deserving of them."

"You have the money with you?"

"Yes," he said; it was all safe in what he called his grip, or hand-bag, and quite at my service. I told him of my desire to complete the purchase immediately before the marriage was solemnized, and then we fell to talking of Bailey Thompson and his strange silence.

"Why, the man is piqued, sir," said Brentin; "that's what he is, piqued. Beyond saying that, I do not propose to give him ay second thought. He is mad piqued, and that's all there is to it!"

So I tried to feel completely at my ease, and managed to spend a very happy evening in the bar parlor, Lucy playing to us and Brentin occasionally bursting into raucous song. Now, when I think of him, I like best to remember him as he was that evening, forgetting his harder, commoner side, when he so outrageously proposed to desert poor Teddy; even refusing (as I forgot at the time to mention) to allow the cannon to be brought into play for his rescue by shelling the rooms. He was infinitely gay and amusing, only finishing up the evening, after dear Lucy's retirement, with a long and violent dispute with Mr. Thatcher on the vague subject of the immortality of the soul. Thatcher believed he had a soul and would live forever, in another, happier sphere; Brentin denied it, could see no sign of Thatcher's soul anywhere; so I left them trying to shout each other down, both speaking at once.

I retired to rest with many solemn, touching thoughts. The last night of bachelorhood gives rise to at least as much deep reflection as that of the young maiden's; more, in fact, so far as the bachelor himself is concerned. I thought over it all so long and deeply I at last got confused, and when I woke, the bright February sun was streaming in on my best clothes and the bells from Nesshaven Church were ringing.

All the morning those bells rang out their happy, irregular peal.

> "The village church beneath the trees,
> Where first our marriage vows were given,
> With merry peal shall swell the breeze,
> And point with slender spire to heaven!"

Only, to be exact, Nesshaven Church has no spire, but a sunk, old, bird-haunted, ivy-clad tower.

It was Thatcher's idea to set the bells going early and keep them at it all day; you see, they rang not only for the marriage of his only child, but for his return to their ancestral home; and, when they showed any sign of flagging, Thatcher listened with a pained expression, and cried, "Why, surely they're not going to stop yet! Run, Bobby, or Harriet, or George, my man!"—or whoever happened to be handy—"and tell 'em to keep 'em going, and give 'em this from me. Here, Vincent, my boy, have you got half-a-crown?"

By ten o'clock we were all dressed and ready, waiting only for Forsyth. Soon after ten he came, and the procession started. It was a lovely day again, mild and sunny, and, in true country-wedding fashion, we all set out to walk. Lucy, looking perfectly sweet in gray, was on her father's arm, and the old lady, in black silk, on mine; while Brentin, carrying his grip, with the boodle in it, and that good little chap, Forsyth, brought up the rear.

The old lady, who within the last three months seemed to me to have failed a good deal, mentally, at any rate, stepped out right well, hanging lightly on my arm. At first she thought we were going straight to the church, and couldn't understand why we left it on our right and went on up to the big house. Then she seemed to think it quite natural, and that the place was hers again, and began talking of her early days, when first she was married and came to Wharton as a bride. Once or twice, indeed, she called me "Francis," her husband's name, who died in 1850, and drew my attention to the scandalous, weedy state of the walks.

"And this is what we pay good wages for!" she cried. "These men must be spoken to about it, my dear, immediately."

The gardener's wife, who opened for us the hall door, was astonished at our numbers.

"Why, what a crowd of you!" she said.

The old lady passed her haughtily.

"Come, Tom!" she cried to Mr. Thatcher. "We'll go up-stairs and have tea in *my* room. Come,

Lucy!”

And up-stairs, up the bare stone staircase, they went, for, as I whispered to Thatcher, it was just as well the ladies should be out of the way while we did our business.

In the great empty drawing-room we found old Crage ready waiting for us. He had dressed himself up in rusty attorney black for the occasion, and the plain kitchen-table was neatly spread with bundles of documents, title-deeds, and so forth.

As the woman showed us in, she told me he had been up all night rummaging in his old tin boxes, talking and mumbling to himself. Now he seemed quite spry and well again. I could scarcely believe, as he sat there alert and attentive, he was the same stricken, shambling old hunks I had seen the previous afternoon, dragging himself about, senile and dying. Such is the power of the will and the business instinct, prolonged even to the verge of the grave!

Brentin, who, as usual, took everything into his own hands, adopted the simplest method of dealing with him. Crage received us in complete silence, and no one spoke a word, while Brentin opened his grip and took out the notes and two or three little bags of gold. The gold he emptied into heaps and piled them round the notes.

Then, “Thirty thousand pounds,” he said, with a smile—“thirty thousand pounds! Is it a deal?”

Crage sat bolt upright, with his hand curved over his ear.

“For the entire property?” he asked.

“For the entire property. Is it a deal? Thirty thousand pounds, neither less nor more.” And he emptied the grip and shook it, to show that not a penny more remained.

“It’s worth more in the open market,” said Crage, cautiously.

“Then take it to the open market. We have no time to haggle. My client is on his way to be married. Good-day.” And with that he began to scrape the notes and gold together again.

“Hold hard!” cried Crage. “Don’t hurry an old man.”

“We’ll give the old man three minutes,” said Brentin, coolly pulling out his watch.

We were all three of us grouped round the table, watching Crage, with our backs to the door. The woman stood at his elbow, and we could, in the complete silence, hear the heavy, swinging tick-tick of Brentin’s large old-fashioned watch.

“Half time!” cried Brentin, when suddenly we heard steps outside in the hall. I had just time to recognize Bailey Thompson’s even, divisional tread, when he pushed the door open and stepped in. He was dressed as usual, and behind him came a gentleman in a tight black frock-coat, an evident Frenchman, thin, dark, and wiry, with a withered face, like a preserved Bordeaux plum.

“One moment, if—you—please, gentlemen!” cried Bailey Thompson, as he stepped up to the table.

My heart gave a bound, and Forsyth started and said, “Ho!” but the unabashed Brentin merely politely replied, “One moment to *you*, sir. We will attend to you directly.—Time’s up, Mr. Crage! is it or is it not a deal?”

Bailey Thompson laughed. “Cool as ever, Mr. Brentin, I see,” he said. “But don’t you think this amusing farce of yours has gone on long enough? It has been successful so far, as I always thought it would be!”

“You’re mighty good!”

“We have no desire to be unduly hard on you.”

“You are mighty particular good!”

“The Casino authorities are, on the whole, willing to regard you as eccentric English gentlemen of position, who have played a very cruel practical joke on them.”

“That so?”

“That is so. This is their representative, Mossieu Cochefort.”

“*Enchantay!*” cried Brentin, with a bow.

“He is charged to say that, on the due return of the money you have sto—ahem!—carried off, and an undertaking from you in writing that you none of you ever visit the place again, on any pretence, they are willing to forego criminal proceedings, and no further questions will be asked.”

“Oh, come off it!” cried Brentin, laughing.

“Otherwise,” continued Bailey Thompson, with great gravity, “I must ask you, Mr. Blacker, and Mr. Forsyth here, to follow me to the cab in waiting at the door, and return with us to London as our prisoners.”

“In short, sir,” said Brentin, swelling with indignant importance, “you invite *us*, eccentric gentlemen of recognized position, to compound a felony!”

Thompson shrugged his shoulders, and Mossieu Cochefort looked puzzled.

“Be ashamed of yourself, sir!” Brentin cried, his voice ringing scornfully through the empty room. “Be ashamed of yourselves, you and Mossieu Cochefort, and give over talking through your hat! Mr. Crage, if you will write out a formal receipt we will look upon the affair as settled. The formal transfer can be effected later.”

“Aye, aye!” mumbled Crage, and, with his eyes on the money, began fumbling in the inside pocket of his rusty black coat for the receipt.

“Gentlemen!” cried Thompson, with affected earnestness, “I warn you! I very solemnly warn you —”

“Oh, come off it, Mr. Bailey Thompson, sir!” was Brentin’s emphatic and withering reply; “come off it, and shut your head. We have long had enough of you and your gas. For my part, my earnest advice to you and Mossieu Cochefort is that you kiss yourselves good-bye and go your several ways. And tell your amazing Casino Company from us that the only undertaking we will give them is not to come and do it again in the fall. To repeat a success is always dangerous; and next time, no doubt, you will all be better prepared.—Now, Mr. Crage, the receipt!”

“*Qu’est ce qu’il a dit?*” asked the puzzled Frenchman, as Thompson, fuming and fretting, dragged him off to the window to explain.

Meantime old Crage had produced his receipt, already written and signed, and, handing it over,

with trembling, eager fingers was beginning to count the notes.

"Ten fifties—ten thousands—ten twenties," he was mumbling, "nice clean notes—beautiful crisp notes—he won't get 'em back from me, if that's what he's after! No, no, not from Crage. Crage wasn't in Clement's Inn for forty years for nothing. Ten more fifties!—" So he went on mumbling to himself, and stuffing the notes away in a broken old pocket-book, while Brentin handed me over the receipt, and snapped his grip with a click.

"It's all right," he whispered. "We've bluffed 'em. Keep cool."

"Hadn't you better let me keep 'em for you!" whined the woman, bending over Crage's chair. "You'll only lose 'em. Give 'em me to take care of for you, there's a dearie!"

To which pathetic appeal the old man paid no sort of heed, but pushed the pocket-book into his inside breast-pocket, with many senile signs of satisfaction and joy.

"And now!" cried Brentin, in imperturbable high spirits, "the wedding-procession will reform, and proceed to the church for the tying of the sacred knot. Mr. Bailey Thompson—Mossieu Cochefort—we shall be glad if you will join us, and afterwards, at 'The French Horn,' to a slight but high-toned repast. Good-day, Mr. Crage; take care of yourself and your money. Let us hope that when the robins nest they will find you in your usual robust health. Mossieu Cochefort—Mr. Bailey Thompson—if you will kindly follow us—"

But a sudden access of fury seemed to have seized the usually calm little detective; he was stamping his feet, waving his arms, almost foaming at the mouth.

In execrable French, Stratford-atte-Bow-Street French, he began to swear aloud he would have nothing more to do with it, that he had done his best, that he had never yet had dealings with the French police but they hadn't muddled it; for his part, his work was finished, and he was going home.

"Here they are!" he cried, "three of them, all ready for you. Will you have them, or won't you? *Les voilar! Nong? Vous ne les voulay pas?* Then if you don't want them, why the ——" (dreadful bad word!) "did you bring me off down here?" he yelled, breaking into profane English.

"*Mais, voyons! voyons!*" murmured the startled and conciliatory Cochefort.

"Damn your *voyons*!" Bailey Thompson screamed. "If you don't want them, and won't take them, do the rest of it yourself, the best way you can. I wash my hands of it. Good-day, gentlemen, and thank your lucky stars for the imbecility of the French police!" and with that he rushed to the door, through the hall, and out into his cab. As he pulled the hall door open I heard the wedding-bells come surging in with a new burst of joy.

"*Mais, mon ami!*" cried Cochefort, as Thompson tore himself away, "*ne me laissez pas comme ça!*" and with much gesticulation prepared to follow.

But Brentin sagely stopped him. "*Restay, Mossieu Cochefort!*" he said, graciously; "*Restay avec nous. Tout va biang. Restay!*"

"*Mais, quel cochon!*" cried the angry Cochefort, stretching out his black kid hands, and shaking them in Bailey Thompson's direction. "*Ma parole d'honneur! a t'on jamais vu un pareil sacré cochon!*"

"*C'est vrai!*" said Brentin. "*Mais il est toujours comme ça. Vous savvy, il n'est pas gentilhomme. Nous sommes tous gentilhommes. Nous vous garderong et vous traiterong tray biang. Restay!*"

So Mossieu Cochefort allowed himself to be comforted, and restay'd. We took him with us to the church, and did him right well at lunch, and then, so forlorn and downcast the poor creature seemed, Lucy and I carried him off with us up to town, if only out of kindness, to put him on his way back to Monaco.

On the way up in the train he confessed to me his only instructions had been to try and get the money back, and that if he couldn't manage that, or part of it, he was directed not to think of embarrassing the authorities by taking us all in charge. I could conceive, he said, that the authorities didn't want to be made the laughing-stock of Europe by having to try us, nor to add to their already heavy expenses by keeping us in prison—nearly all quite young men—for the term of our natural lives. He hadn't been able fully to explain all this to Bailey Thompson: the man was such a lunatic, he said, and so obstinate: and besides, from the moment of his arrival Bailey Thompson had ridden the high horse over him, and proudly declaring he didn't require to be taught his duties by a foreigner, had immediately carried him off down to Nesshaven, scarcely allowing him once to open his mouth all the way.

At Liverpool Street he seemed more lost, poor wretch, than ever. He knew no single word of English, and looked at us so pathetically, as we stood on the platform together, our soft hearts were touched. So we made up our minds to carry him along with us to Folkestone, dine him at the "Pavilion," and afterwards see him safe on board the night-boat for Boulogne.

It was droll, all the same, this carrying a French detective about with us on our wedding-day; but the man was so truly grateful I have never regretted it. We gave him a good dinner at the hotel, and at ten o'clock walked him out on to the pier for his boat. He made me a little speech at parting, declaring I had treated him "*en vrai camarade*," and that if ever I wanted to come to Monte Carlo again I was to let him know and he would see I came to no harm. To Lucy he presented all his compliments and felicitations on securing the affection of "*un si galant homme!*" and then, with a twenty-pound note I slipped into his hand at parting, bowed himself away, and was soon lost to sight in the purlieus of the second cabin, whither he went prepared to be dreadfully sick, smooth and calm as the night was.

As Lucy and I strolled back to the hotel, arm-in-arm, we both were silent.

At last, just as we got back and heard the steamer's final clanging bell and despairing whistle, "I can't make out, really, whether you've all done right or wrong," she whispered, softly; "but this I know, dearest, you have been most extraordinarily lucky."

To which simple little speech I merely pressed her arm, by way of showing how thoroughly I agreed with her.

CONCLUSION

THIS is the true account of our raiding the tables at Monte Carlo, done the best way I could.

For the rest, I may just mention poor old Crage died before the end of the month, and by Easter Mr. Thatcher and his mother were safely installed in Wharton Park. Arthur Masters was married to Miss Rybot in April, Forsyth is to do the same to a widow (so he says) in September, Bob Hines is very flourishing with his new gymnasium and swimming-bath—just about finished now, as I write, at the end of June—and Parsons is, I believe, at Southport, parading Lord Street as usual in breeches and gaiters.

As for Brentin, I never saw him again, for by the time Lucy and I had returned from our honeymoon he was back in New York. But I heard from him the other day—a long, rambling letter, in which he told me he had sold the *Amaranth* to Van Ginkel, for his wife the Princess Danleno, whom he had remarried, and with whom, on separate vessels, he was sailing about the Greek Archipelago—probably in belated search for Bailey Thompson. He concluded by begging me to think of something "snappy" we could do together in the fall, ending finally by writing: "What's the matter with our going to Egypt and turning the Nile into the Red Sea? A communicative stranger, an Englishman, by his accent, assures me there is just one place where it can be done. Think it over, sonny, and if you decide to do it, count on me. Sincerely, JULIUS C. BRENTIN."

I would write more, only Lucy is calling to me from the hay-field, the other side of the ha-ha of Wharton, where I have come to finish this work in retirement.

> "Around my ivied porch shall cling
> Each fragrant flower that drinks the dew,
> And Lucy at her wheel shall sing
> In russet gown with 'kerchief blue."

As my dear Lucy says, I really am, and always have been, a most extraordinarily lucky man.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Some words are hyphenated by the author for emphasis.

Inconsistencies in punctuation have been maintained.

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